

The Washington Post

Wartime Museum to open in Prince William County in 2014

By Jennifer Buske
Sunday, April 25, 2010; PW03

People will get a chance to feel what it was like to hunker in the trenches during World War I or don medical gear and serve as a military nurse when the Wartime Museum comes to Prince William County in 2014.

"When you think of a museum, you think of a building where you read displays and see artifacts," said Allan D. Cors, chairman of the museum's board of trustees. "We will have that, but we are also going to give you a chance to actually experience what those who served experienced."

The \$50 million museum, in the works for nearly a decade, is set to open Veterans Day 2014 on a 70-acre plot donated by the Hylton family just off Interstate 95 and Dale Boulevard. The museum is expected to draw about 300,000 people annually and have an economic impact of \$10 million to \$25 million a year.

"It is fitting that the Wartime Museum will be located in Prince William County, where the military has played a significant role in our community's history," said Corey A. Stewart (R-At Large), chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, after plans for the museum were announced this month. "Our community has always been proud that many soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen have called Prince William home. . . . This museum will honor our veterans from all services."

The mission of the Wartime Museum is to honor, educate and inspire through interactive displays and docents who will explain their experience on the battlefield and the home front, museum officials said. The museum will recognize all branches of the military and cover every major battle from World War I on.

"I think the museum has a unique opportunity to make [the wars] more real and more understandable, so people can appreciate what other citizens have done and are doing on our behalf," said Craig Stewart, president and chief executive of the museum. "We want to inspire visitors . . . and tell the story about ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

What will make the museum unusual, Stewart said, is that it will be largely outdoors, featuring reenactments in which the public can partake, as well as a proposed obstacle course and heliport. Cors is also donating numerous military vehicles.

Cors, a Prince William resident, began collecting military vehicles almost 30 years ago, storing his collection of roughly 90 tanks, trucks and jeeps on his "tank farm" in the county. Cors said he became interested in military history after reading newspapers as a child during World War II. Collecting vehicles, he said, was then a way to experience history by touching, driving and

smelling them. Although Cors invites people once a year to view his collection and hear from a veteran, he said he wanted to donate the vehicles and open a museum so people could have the same experience year round.

"When Mr. Cors' collection of tanks go on display once a year . . . you can see the impact it has on the general population," said John D. Jenkins (D-Neabsco), a county supervisor and Vietnam War veteran. "I think a wartime museum is a great idea, and I wanted to do something like this because of my own service. I wanted to leave some memories for my grandchildren."

Cors said the plan is to run some of the vehicles at the museum, giving people a chance to hear them and possibly go for a ride. Although still in the planning phases, other ideas for the museum include a laser shooting range, a helicopter simulation in which people can feel the vibration and the wind produced when it lands on the field and replicas of battlefront scenes, such as the jungles in World War II that people can wander through.

Cors said museum officials will work closely with the designer Gallagher & Associates -- which worked on the International Spy Museum in the District -- to determine the best way to integrate artifacts, inside and outside displays and people to best tell the story of war.

"We have so much land, which is a blessing," Cors said, adding that the museum will be laid out by war era. "We are limited only by our imagination."

Although museum officials looked at counties up and down I-95 to host the museum, they said, Prince William was the best fit with the generous land donation, the cooperation from county officials and the proximity of Cors's collection. The museum will also fit in with the National Museum of the Marine Corps to its south, a proposed army museum on its way at Fort Belvoir and the Civil War battlefields in Manassas. It will brand the county, Corey Stewart said, as a corridor of military history.

Because the museum is a nonprofit operation, officials said, they will need to charge an entry fee, probably around \$10. Craig Stewart said museum officials are raising funds to get the doors open and need an additional \$40 million to complete the full project.

"We are extremely proud that the Wartime Museum will be located in Prince William County and in Virginia, the heart of American history and patriotism," Craig Stewart said. "We look forward to the day when we will open the doors . . . to veterans, schoolchildren, families and visitors from all walks of life."