



Everything New Orleans

National World War II Museum's restoration pavilion gives a window on the work

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By **John Pope, The Times-Picayune**

Based on the premise that everyone likes to peek behind the scenes, the **National World War II Museum** this weekend will dedicate a massive building where passers-by can watch restorers prepare jeeps, tanks, boats, ambulances and other World War II artifacts for display in the museum across Magazine Street.



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Photos by Eliot Kamenitz, The Times-Picayune

The Kushner Restoration Pavilion is the newest addition to the National World War II Museum complex and will be dedicated on Saturday. It will allow passers-by to watch artifacts being restored.

The glass-and-steel structure, the John E. Kushner Restoration Pavilion, has 14,000 square feet that will be used for tasks such as welding, painting, woodworking and making replacements for World War II-era parts that no longer exist.

It will be dedicated Saturday at 10 a.m. Free tours of the work spaces will follow. After Saturday, though, tours of the building probably won't resume until July, said Tom Czekanski, the museum's director of collections and exhibits.

Until then, rubberneckers will have to be content with gazing into the pavilion's

dominant feature, a 118-by-45-foot room that wraps around the intersection of Magazine Street and Andrew Higgins Drive. Its giant storm-resistant glass panels, which almost touch the 32-foot-high ceiling, can be removed to accommodate large objects being moved in or out.

Case in point: the PT boat now undergoing restoration.

Built at Higgins Shipyards' City Park plant, the boat known as PT 305 is 78 feet long and 20 feet wide. It has been stripped down to its mahogany hull as part of a painstaking reconstruction that has been under way at another site for many months.

Spectators will be able to watch the work for quite some time, Czekanski said, because it will take two more

years and probably wind up costing about \$2 million.

The Higgins team could turn out a PT boat in four to six months during World War II, “but we don’t have a cast of thousands,” museum spokeswoman Kacey Hill said.

PT 305 served in the Mediterranean Sea during World War II and then was sold as surplus. It was used for sightseeing tours in New York City’s harbor and later for hauling oyster shells to beds in Chesapeake Bay.

A PT boat collector bought the vessel and sold it to the museum for \$75,000 in 2007, Czekanski said.



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This PT 305 is being restored at the Kushner Restoration Pavilion at the National World War II Museum complex.

Before construction of the Restoration Pavilion, Czekanski and his colleagues worked on the museum’s collection of artifacts in nearby warehouses that since have been torn down or face demolition to make way for the museum’s expansion.

Architects for the pavilion — and for all other structures in the \$300 million expansion — are Voorsanger Architects of New York City and Mathes Brierre of New Orleans.

This building cost about \$3 million, which includes a \$2 million grant from the federal Economic Development Authority.



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The one-story structure has been built where a warehouse once stood. Although the pavilion has gotten a new skin, a storm-resistant roof and those giant glass walls, the older building’s steel structure was retained, as were the floor of reinforced concrete and a crane found in the building, which used to be a heavy-machine shop.

The new building is named for John Kushner, a New Orleans real estate broker, member of the museum’s board and collector of World War II memorabilia who died in 2005.

Kushner used his real estate acumen to help the museum acquire property for its future expansion, said Bob Farnsworth, the museum’s senior vice president for capital expansion.

One piece of property was a Constance Street lot that backed up to the warehouse the Kushner pavilion has replaced. The museum got the warehouse site, Farnsworth said, because its owner let the museum board know he was willing to swap it for the adjoining lot.

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