

# D-Day Museum in New Orleans plans expansion

New Orleans CityBusiness, Aug 22, 2005 by Deon Roberts

Step aside, Smithsonian Institution.

By this time next year, construction on the new 70,000-square-foot, \$280-million expansion of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans will have begun.

Once completed by 2011, the total space at the D-Day Museum will dwarf the Smithsonian's 20,000-square-foot National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., which dedicates 5,000 square feet to World War II exhibits.

I would think that this is one of the biggest projects in the city outside of the (Ernest N. Morial) Convention Center (Phase IV expansion) going on right now, said D-Day Museum President and CEO Gordon H. Nick Mueller.

Even though the D-Day Museum, which Congress dubbed the National World War II Museum in September 2003, will offer more World War II exhibit space than the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian officials aren't begrudging the expansion.

I think you're going to get a huge amount of history pilgrims, if you will, to New Orleans, said Marc Pachter, director of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and a board member of the D-Day Museum.

By next summer, a 300-seat multisensory theater - the first building in the new expansion - is expected to be under construction, said Ed Mathes, chairman of Mathes Brierre Architects, the New Orleans firm working under lead architect Voorsanger & Associates Architects of New York. No contractor has been selected yet but bids will go out around April 2006 once theater drawings are complete, Mathes said.

Attendance doubles

The new attractions are expected to help boost D-Day Museum attendance from roughly 300,000 a year to between 700,000 and 800,000 a year after the expansion triples the size of the museum, said Cindy McCurdy, director of marketing and administration for the D-Day Museum Foundation.

The expansion, which will add exhibits explaining what was happening in multiple countries during the war, is being built in phases on a campus consisting of two city blocks directly across Andrew Higgins Drive from the existing museum. Five to six new buildings and a new hotel and garage are planned.

University of New Orleans Chancellor Timothy Ryan's analysis projected construction spending of \$112.5 million will create 2,791 new jobs during the expansion. Income from temporary construction jobs would pump \$70.92 million into the New Orleans economy, Ryan wrote in a February 2003 study.

Mathes said the construction budget is closer to \$86 million, not including a hotel component.

Bartholomew Voorsanger, head of Voorsanger & Associates, said local contractors will be able to handle the construction.

You have some of the best welders in the world where you are due to the offshore oil industry, he said.

Smithsonian-style layout

McCurdy compared the layout of the buildings to the way the Smithsonian's museums are scattered on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., although it will be nowhere near the scale of the Smithsonian's complex of a dozen or so museums. Buildings in the D- Day Museum expansion will be connected by enclosed glass walkways and a futuristic-looking steel canopy will stretch across the campus.

Part of the expansion includes the roughly \$4.2 million, four- story Discovery Hall, which is under construction behind the existing museum and is not part of the new campus. Construction on the kindergarten through 12th-grade education center began in February and should be done by year's end.

The theater is the next phase of construction followed by a building to house a United Services Organization-type entertainment venue and a restaurant, Mueller said.

Down the road, a \$50 million component is planned consisting of a hotel with an attached parking garage and an education/conference center, he said.

Exactly when buildings will be built hinges on when the funds roll in, Mueller said. Every year for the next six years, \$20 million in private funds have to be raised, he said. So far, approximately \$20 million has been raised in private funds and approximately \$30 million in state and federal funds.

A national board of trustees is helping raise money.

The response both locally and around the country has been very encouraging, Mueller said. The United States has a war right now. It's not like the great stock market days of the late 1990s. We're trying to be realistic about that.

Museum boom

National experts say the D-Day Museum projects reflect a national trend of museum expansions.

There has been a great expansion of existing museums, (but) not as many new ones, said Ed Able, president and CEO of the American Association of Museums in Washington, D.C.

Approximately 12,000 American museums now attract 850 million visitors a year compared with 456 million visitors in 1989, Able said. American museums have become overcrowded, and expansions are the result of the need for more space to exhibit collections, he said.

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