

Foundation reveals plans for National Armor and Cavalry Museum

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By CHUCK WILLIAMS

It has been known for more than two years that an armor museum will be built near the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center at Patriot Park.

On Tuesday, details of the \$75 million National Armor and Cavalry Museum were revealed during a news conference at the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

The new museum, which will be just across the Parade Field from the Infantry Museum, will be constructed with a combination of public and private funds.

It will take five to seven years to complete, retired Maj. Gen. George H. Harmeyer said. Construction on the first phase is scheduled to begin in about a year.

Harmeyer is chairman of the National Armor and Cavalry Heritage Foundation, which will raise the private money needed to turn an Army-built storage facility into a “world-class museum.”

“Our job is to help the Chief of Armor preserve and protect the heritage and history of the cavalry,” Harmeyer said.

The newly formed National Armor and Cavalry Heritage Foundation is akin to the National Infantry Foundation, which owns and operates its museum. But the setup of the Armor and Cavalry Museum will be fundamentally different from the existing Infantry Museum, which is not on Fort Benning property. The Armor and Cavalry Museum will be on U.S. Army land.

“Our job is to make it look and function like a museum,” Harmeyer said. “Unlike the National Infantry Museum, which is owned and operated by the foundation, ours will be Army-owned, partially built by the Army and supported by the foundation.”

There is \$33 million for a facility to store the armor and cavalry artifacts in the Base Realignment and Closure provision that brings the Armor School from Fort Knox to Fort Benning. But the money could be at risk because of military budgetary considerations.

The foundation has a fundraising goal of \$42 million to augment the federal money.

“The foundation is prepared to raise the full \$75 million to complete the project in the event the federal money is not available,” said Chris Golden, the foundation’s chief financial officer.

Harmeyer said his foundation, which recently received its 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, has studied the National Infantry Foundation and its lessons learned in building the \$100 million Infantry museum.

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Harmeyer said his foundation felt no pressure to compete with the National Infantry Foundation and its museum. But he did say that Infantry Foundation chairman retired Maj. Gen. Jerry White has set the bar high.

“General White has set the standard,” Harmeyer said. “We will not accept anything that detracts from the National Infantry Museum and that sacred parade field.”

The National Infantry Foundation is still in fundrasing mode almost nine months after the museum opened. The foundation has \$10 million remaining to raise, White said.

“God bless ’em,” White said. “We will share everything we can with them.”

One of Harmeyer’s goals Tuesday was to gain “a foothold” into Columbus as the museum moves from Kentucky.

During the announcement, Harmeyer couldn’t resist a little jab at the infantry, pointing out the armor museum will be on a “flat-top hill.”

“As it should be, the armor museum will be on a hill overlooking the infantry,” Harmeyer said.

Everybody laughed.

White was later told of the comment and couldn’t resist a little good-natured, two-star general trash talking.

“That’s not true,” White said. “It is a ridge line. They will be on the other side of the ridge line. The first thing you will see when you drive through the gate is the Infantry Museum. The armor guys will be back there somewhere hiding.”

Columbus banker John Mitchell, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce’s Military Affairs Committee, put the return of the Armor School in a historical perspective, pointing out the “Tank School” was located at Fort Benning in the 1930s, prior to moving to Fort Knox. He also pointed out that Gen. George Patton, for whom the Fort Knox museum was named, also had strong ties to Fort Benning.

Patton’s old headquarters is in the World War II village, which will be between the two museums.

“The proper greeting should be ‘Welcome home,’” Mitchell said.

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