

Fort Miles armed for artillery park/facilities project

By Glenn Rolfe
Sussex County Post

LEWES — Several shovels of sandy soil on Feb. 20 set in motion plans for an artillery park and a new facilities building at historic Fort Miles.

Representatives of the Fort Miles Historical Association and Delaware State Parks took part in the groundbreaking for the \$640,000 project that will showcase Fort Miles' World War II history.

Seven big guns from the fort's WWII collection will be featured in the artillery park.

Most famous is one of the 16-inch gun barrels from the battleship USS Missouri on which the Japanese formally signed their unconditional surrender Sept. 2, 1945, in Tokyo Bay.

Dr. Gary D. Wray, president of Fort Miles Historical Association, told state officials, board members and guests that the outdoor artillery exhibit continues the transformation of the fort that overlooks the shoreline at Cape Henlopen State Park.

"We want to build the best World War II museum in a World War II facility," he said. "We're getting the word out about what we're doing at Fort Miles. It's so exciting to see dirt being moved."

Dr. Wray noted that FMHA's volunteers contributed 13,500 hours last year, the equivalent of six full-time employees.



Representatives of the Fort Miles Historical Association and Delaware State Parks take part in the Feb. 20 groundbreaking for a \$640,000 project that will showcase Fort Miles' World War II history.

Special to the Sussex County Post

David Small, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control secretary, also lauded the fort's volunteers.

"This is really reminiscent of the spirit that generation brought to bear on this country and the world during World War II," Sec. Small said. "They kept vigilant guard over this part of the world. We're keeping that memory alive. To the volunteers: Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Dr. Wray told the crowd that World War II veterans visiting the fort "put their hands" on the 16-inch gun barrel as a link to their past.

"That's our connection to World War II," he said.

Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation Director Ray Bivens also thanked volunteers for their work restoring Battery 519, the fort's underground bunker and for completing other restoration projects.

"I look forward to seeing what future holds. A great museum is a great destination," he said. "This is not just

about history but also about tourism."

Sec. Small presented Dr. Wray with a check for \$230,000. It is a grant from the Longwood Foundation to help pay for the artillery park and a bathroom facility that will be built on the site.

Dr. Wray said the actual grant received from Longwood was \$245,000. Remaining monies will be for landscaping around the building, which will be done by the Fort Miles "Bunker Busters" in the spring. The building will be located beside the fort's Orientation Building and across the road from the new "Mess Hall" built by the FMHA Bunker Busters.

"The building is actually modular and we are shooting for it to be delivered and installed this spring and, hopefully, before our big April 30 (Delaware Goes to War) event," Dr. Wray said.

Dr. Wray pointed out that state law now permits private citizens to donate money to specific projects and allows them to sponsor exhibits. He suggested sponsorship of a concrete pad for a gun in

the artillery park.

Dr. Wray invited the crowd back in four months.

"This is a 120-day project," he said. "We'll hold the ribbon cutting for the gun park in 120 days."

Delaware Goes to War April 30

Fort Miles will host the 12th annual Delaware Goes to War: Victory in Europe Saturday, April 30, starting at 10 a.m. On May 8, 1945, the allies declared victory in Europe in WWII.

The living history event will feature firing demonstrations, WWII re-enactors, what garrison life was like at Fort Miles, guest speakers and the recreation of the surrender of German submarine U-858.

The Battery 519 museum will be open for \$3 per person. For more information call 645-6852.

News Editor Glenn Rolfe can be reached at grolve@newszap.com.

newszap.com

Sussex Co. Post 3/23/16

AVAILABLE ONLINE

SUSSEX
2016 Profile

20th Anniversary