

Grafton to Unveil Plans for \$6M Veterans Memorial and Museum

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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GRAFTON - On Oct. 11, 2023, the City of Grafton will unveil plans for their veterans memorial and museum, which Mayor Michael Morrow said will result in major growth for the region.

The memorial will be located near the current Grafton Visitor Center at 950 E. Main Street, and the center itself will “be transformed into something wonderful,” Morrow explained. At 10 a.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 11, 2023, community members are invited to a ceremony at the Visitor Center to learn about the project and view the designs.

“They’re very excited and they’re also very humbled, because this will quickly take on not only national but international ,” Morrow said. “They’re also realizing that it’s going to mean growth for the region. Grafton is going to change. I briefed the Jersey County Board in Jerseyville about three weeks ago, and at the end of the briefing they said, ‘Oh my gosh, we’re going to have to build new hotels.’ There will be no other project like this size and scope in the world. This will be the first.”

The memorial will depict a scene from World War II. Morrow, a retired U.S. Army Corps colonel, worked with commissioners to design 15 life-size statues of soldiers climbing the bluffs near the Visitors Center. This is modeled after Point du Hoc, a cliff about four miles from Omaha Beach that the U.S. Army Provisional Rangers scaled and ultimately captured on D-Day, though they suffered heavy losses.

The proposed memorial has already attracted attention around the world. The U.S. military is aware of the plans, and a foundry in North Carolina has been selected to create the statues. Edwardsville [architect Jamie Henderson](#) will be present on Oct. 11 to share his designs with the audience.

“It’s really taken off and people have really been supportive of it,” Morrow added. “We’re kicking off our capital campaign Wednesday, but we don’t anticipate any issues because everybody’s chomping at the bit to donate.”

The plan took shape in December 2022 when Grafton’s City Council appointed a board of commissioners to develop a veterans memorial in honor of the town’s veterans, who make up 17% of Grafton’s population. Grafton has the highest number of veterans per capita in Illinois.

The \$6 million project will include the memorial itself and the Visitor Center’s transformation into a museum with information about WWII. The commissioners have registered a nonprofit under the name National Memorial of Military Ascent (NMMA), which will oversee the memorial and museum.

Looking ahead, Morrow hopes to set up a virtual connection between Omaha Beach and Grafton for June 6, 2024, the 80th anniversary of D-Day. He estimated the project will take about four years to complete.

Morrow said several Grafton residents have already approached him about donating their family’s WWII artifacts to the museum, and some local businesses have set up collection boxes to encourage their customers to donate toward the memorial fund. To him, this community spirit is the most exciting part of the project.

“It’s everybody. All of these commissioners, all of the citizens, the city council, they’ve all had their fingers on it and they’ve all had their input,” he said. “It’s a grassroots movement coming forward. It’s not just something pushed down from Washington D.C. We’re doing this here, at the grassroots level.”

You can learn more about the plans and see watercolor paintings depicting the memorial on Oct. 11. The ceremony kicks off at 10 a.m. at the Grafton Visitor Center. Morrow encourages people to arrive early and park at Raging Rivers. A shuttle courtesy of Aerie’s Resort and Winery will transport people to the Visitor Center. After the ceremony, everyone is invited to The Loading Dock for lunch.