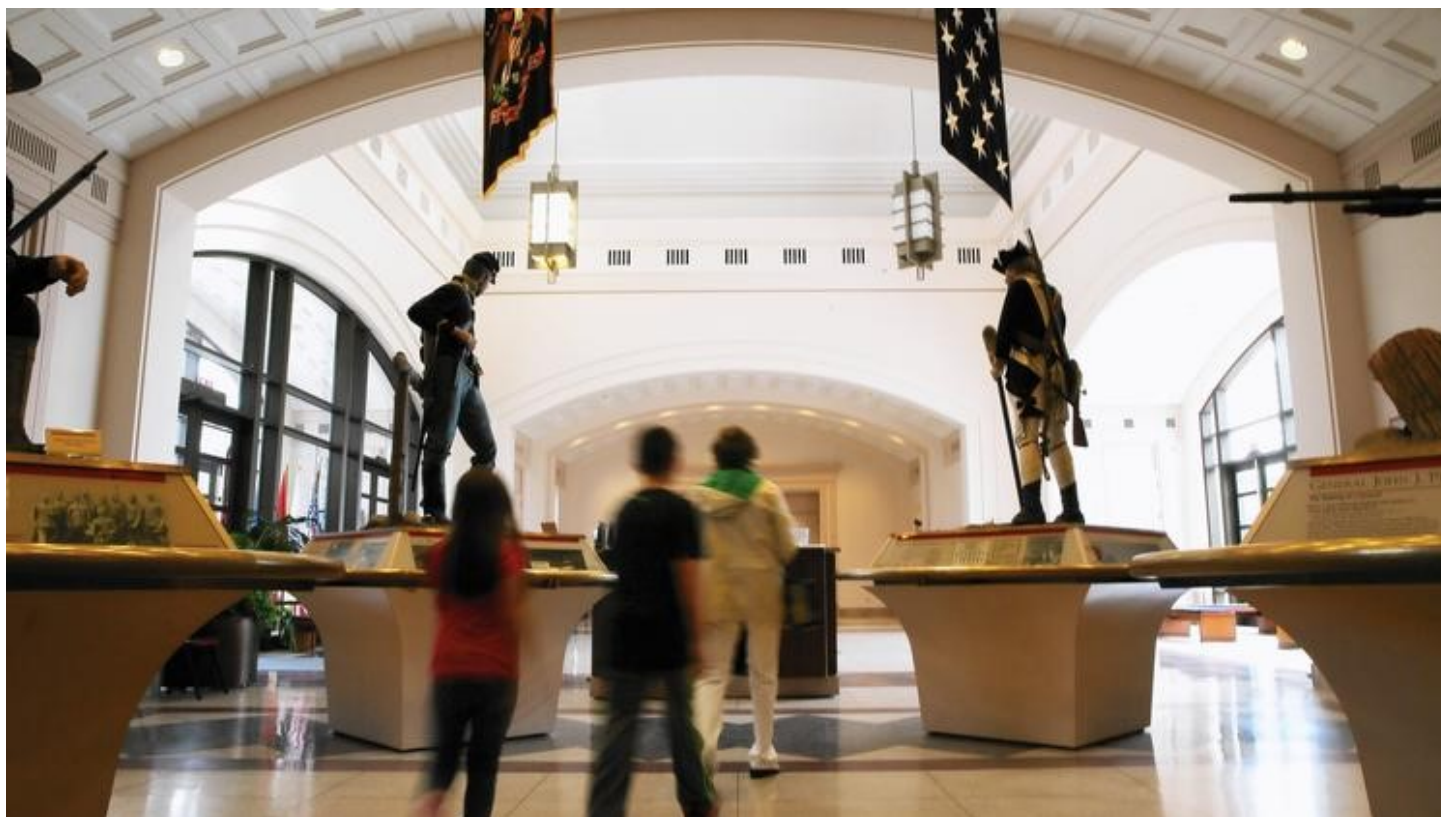


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Wheaton's Cantigny museum to close in fall for \$7 million renovation



A new section devoted to the 1st Infantry's work since the end of the Vietnam War will be added and all parts of the Cantigny museum with the goal of creating an "immersive" experience. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

By **Alex Keown**
Naperville Sun

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A planned renovation of the 1st Infantry Division Museum at Cantigny Park in Wheaton will provide a more complete history of the military organization, developing a new permanent exhibit focused on the infantry's mission since the end of the Vietnam War.

The renovation, with a price tag of about \$7 million, is scheduled to begin in November and continue through mid-2017.

The current museum, which opened in 1992, tells the story of the division's history through the end of Vietnam, but the division has continued to serve through the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. That was an issue Paul Herbert, the museum's executive director, has been working to rectify since he came to the museum in 2005.

"The question has been, how do we present these more contemporary stories since Vietnam," Herbert said.

The goal of the new exhibit will be to provide an immersive experience for visitors so they can understand what a soldier experiences.

A.J. Goehle, director of strategy and design at Luci Creative, the team tapped by the museum to design the new exhibits, said the stories of the 1st Division soldiers will become the primary focus of the renovation. Visitors will be given a view into the mindset of the troops and learn not only about what they did, but what it was like for the individual soldier.

"We want visitors to understand why soldiers are sent to so many places and why they do so many different things," Herbert said. "We want visitors to feel empathy for the things a soldier has to go through."

The renovation will begin the day after Veterans Day, when the museum closes for the winter. The museum's key first-person narrative of the D-Day invasion will receive an upgrade and some areas expanding on how the United States became embroiled in World War II will receive makeovers.

But the real work will be done in a new section showcasing the division's more recent work. An area currently used as open exhibition space will be used to tell the story of the division since Vietnam and will focus on the five main mission types it has undertaken.

Those are deterrence, the division's efforts against the expansion of communism during the Cold War; military assistance, which includes training and humanitarian efforts; peace operations, such as the five years the division spent in the Balkans working to prevent genocide; battle, including what the division experienced in Operation Desert Storm; and counter insurgency.

In the new exhibit, the soldier's stories will be told using graphics, artifacts, video, photographs, text cards and more, Goehle said.

"We're looking at bringing in an interactive experience that will put the visitor in the mind of a soldier," he said. "They'll be able to make decisions like a soldier would and learn about the consequences."

In addition to the new permanent exhibit taking up the open space, the museum's lobby will also see some as-yet unspecified changes. It's likely that graphics depicting the modern volunteer army of professional soldiers will be added, said Gaylin Piper, the museum's director of media.

The renovation will take some cues from other military museums on how to achieve the goal of immersive exhibits. In January, Goehle and her team spent time at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans to see what techniques that facility is using. Taking what they learned there, Goehle said the new exhibit will build upon the 1st Division Museum's "brand of exhibits putting people in the footsteps of our soldiers."

Herbert said the demographics of museum visitors has been changing over the years, especially with

veterans from the first two world wars dying off. More and more military visitors and their families have served since Vietnam, but their stories are not currently being told, he said. The museum has about 170,000 visitors annually and Herbert said he wants to make sure each visitor develops a keen understanding of the history of the 1st Infantry Division.

The museum's 2017 reopening will coincide with a celebration being planned to celebrate the 1st Infantry Division's 100th anniversary. Herbert said he anticipates a number of veterans will be on hand to dedicate the renovated museum and hopes there will be a "nice representation" of active duty members of the 1st Division as well.

Alex Keown is a freelance reporter for the Naperville Sun.

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