



U.S.

A Prominent Location to Remember Veterans Who Were Wounded

By ELENA SCHNEIDER AUG. 22, 2014

WASHINGTON — On a patch of land in the shadow of the Capitol’s dome, a new memorial for soldiers will, for the first time here, honor the living as well as the dead. It is unusual in another way, too: It is the only monument in Washington dedicated solely to those who have been disabled in the nation’s wars.

The 2.4-acre memorial honors “not only the four million who are alive today, but the millions that have gone before us and those, unfortunately, who will come after us,” said Arthur H. Wilson, who was one of the leaders in the effort to build the landmark, the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

“These people have sacrificed and served, but they still live with their disabilities, and it’s a lifelong struggle,” said Mr. Wilson, who served in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

The memorial’s opening, scheduled for Oct. 5, is timely, with controversies still playing out at the Department of Veterans Affairs over the shoddy medical treatment of Americans who have served their country. Officials behind the memorial effort said they hope it will be a permanent reminder of the government’s responsibility to its service members.

Its location just southwest of the Capitol is no coincidence. “Right up there is where appropriations are introduced and passed,” said Rick Fenstermacher, the chief executive of the Disabled Veterans’ Life

Memorial Foundation. The memorial sits between a busy Metro rail stop and congressional staff buildings.

“You won’t be able to pass by here without having something resonate,” Mr. Fenstermacher said.

The site has special meaning for Capt. Dawn Halfaker, who lost her right arm in 2004 when Iraqi insurgents attacked her Army vehicle during a routine patrol. Her image is etched into one of the glass walls, but she is not optimistic that the memorial will inspire any political or policy changes at the Department of Veteran Affairs.

“It is less than a mile from the headquarters of Veterans Affairs, but I don’t see that making a difference because the agency hasn’t shown that they are putting veterans first,” she said. “But it is a sign that the public recognizes the sacrifices we have made.”

The memorial includes 12-foot granite walls inscribed with quotations from George Washington and Dwight D. Eisenhower, who were both generals as well as presidents, and a star-shaped fountain representing the five branches of the military, with a flame at the center.

Ginkgo trees dot the site, chosen because they date “back to the early Jurassic era, so they’re survivors, too,” said Doug Hayes, senior associate at Michael Vergason Landscape Architects, which won the design competition for the memorial in 2003.

Captain Halfaker’s image on the glass shows her receiving a medal from a fellow soldier.

“I think that as a veteran of a recent war, injured while on patrol, and being a female officer, my story really represents all the elements of this generation, like women in leadership roles, women on the front lines,” she said. Captain Halfaker is the chairwoman of the Wounded Warrior Project, which is dedicated to helping the men and women who have been wounded in recent wars.

Her one complaint is the memorial’s name. “I don’t like the term ‘disabled’ because I don’t think of myself that way, but I get what they’re trying to do,” she said.

The push for the memorial began in 1997, when Lois Pope, a Florida philanthropist, approached Jesse Brown, then the secretary of Veterans Affairs, with the idea. Lawmakers took up the cause a year later and President Bill Clinton signed the law approving the memorial in 2000.

The \$80 million project was also almost entirely financed with private contributions, and construction began last fall.

The memorial plan largely avoided the bruising debates that have dogged and sometimes delayed similar projects.

Some veterans questioned why the individual names of wounded could not be included in the monument. Mr. Wilson said that without a complete database, it was not possible. “If you can’t name them all,” he said, “then you can’t name any.”

A version of this article appears in print on August 23, 2014, on page A13 of the New York edition with the headline: A Prominent Location to Remember Veterans Who Were Wounded.

© 2014 The New York Times Company