THE GREAT WAR

COMMEMORATING VETS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR WHO WENT ON TO GREATNESS

MEMORIAL DESIGN TEAM BRINGS WWI TO LIFE

VETS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR WHO WENT ON TO GREATNESS
The U.S. World War One Centennial Commission awards a 25-year-old architect the honor of designing a World War I memorial after conducting an international contest. Joe Weishaar has organized a design team for the piece, which will be displayed in Washington, D.C.

BY THERESA SIMS
A 25-YEAR-OLD POST-GRADUATE STUDENT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS WILL SPEARHEAD THE DESIGN OF A NEW NATIONAL WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL TO BE BUILT IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

In January 2016, the U.S. World War One Centennial Commission selected architect Joe Weishaar to design the memorial after an open, international competition that yielded some 360 submissions from architects, students, artists and designers. The commission launched the design competition in May 2015. Three months later, a jury selected by the commission chose five finalists, including Weishaar, who made a formal submission to the commission.

Weishaar said his motivation for creating the memorial is that he feels the war itself essentially defined the 20th century for the United States and the world.

“To just let it pass by, forgotten, is a huge disservice to the men and women who fought and served in this war,” he said.

The Centennial Commission has been working closely with the design team since its selection to create the final prototype of the National WWI Memorial.

The memorial will honor the 4.7 million American men and women who served in uniform during the Great War (1917-1919) and will occupy areas in and around Washington, D.C.’s Pershing Park, located on the corner of 14th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW.

Construction will start on the $50 million memorial by November. The WWI Centennial Commission hopes to complete work on the memorial the following year to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the end of the war.

Shortly after being awarded the design opportunity, Weishaar recruited Sabin Howard and Phoebe McCormick Lickwar to assist. Howard is a notable American classical figurative sculptor based in New York City and a board member of the National Sculpture Society. Lickwar is a landscape architect and an assistant professor of landscape architecture at the University of Arkansas, Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design.

Weishaar said it is important to remember the 7 million American men and women who were involved in the war effort or joined the service during the war.

“To forget this war, to forget the lessons from this war, and the stories of this war or to forget these American veterans, is neglect that touches all American veterans and service members serving today,” Weishaar said.

Lickwar, who also worked on the National September 11 Memorial in New York City, agreed and noted the differences between the two memorials.

“The 9/11 Memorial (and Museum) is still a site of mourning and is located in a place where a great tragedy happened,” Lickwar said. “However, they both serve a commemorative and educational purpose that links future generations with past events.”

Even though the project is a national memorial in Washington, Sabin said there are some core ideas he would like the viewers to take away from their experience at the site.

“Our job is, from the beginning, to make something that’s exciting, that’s dramatic, that’s going to get people to think,” Sabin said. “This war changed the concept of who we are as a human race, of this humanity.”

As a figurative artist, Sabin said his plan is to create a wall comprised of figures, men, women and children who were affected by the war.

“Everybody can associate with it because when you look at figurative art,

About Joe Weishaar

Weishaar now owns and operates his own small consulting business. He also is completing architecture-licensing exams with the intent of beginning his own practice. Weishaar is an active-oil pastel painter, and his work has been displayed at multiple gallery exhibitions in Chicago.
it’s a representation of us,” he said. “It’s a representation of a human being.”

Sabin also said he, Weishaar and Lickwar want to create a sense of what the nation is culturally and who U.S. citizens are as human beings through the memorial.

“Even though it happened 100 years ago, and it’s called a forgotten war — to individuals who have family members who were WWI veterans — the war is still very much alive for them,” Sabin said.

Weishaar said if he could meet a WWI veteran today he would thank them for their service, though even that “doesn’t seem like enough.”

“I also would have to tell them, ‘You’re not going to be forgotten,’” Weishaar said. “I think many of the returning soldiers, maybe wanted to forget, which is why it became forgotten. We are trying to keep them alive in some way by bringing back their stories and by involving the families, the children and the grandchildren so they may remember the sacrifices made by their loved ones before them.”

Lickwar said it is a “tremendous honor” for the design team to recognize the service and sacrifice of World War I veterans.

“I was really struck when I learned about the underground rock quarries transformed into cities to shelter armies during the war,” Lickwar said. “Soldiers carved artwork and inscriptions in the rock, recording their names and addresses, their imagination and experiences. It is a strikingly beautiful record of human experience. It expressed to me a deep desire to be remembered.”

Note: The National WWI Memorial will cost approximately $50 million. For more information about the new memorial, go to ww1cc.org/memorial

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