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FEATURED TOP STORY

# New visitor center highlights Battlefield Park



Dr. Russ Bellico, left, presents a replica of Fort George, which was constructed in 1759 during the French and Indian War, alongside John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance Board of Trustees, in the new Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center.

[Jay Mullen](#)

**LAKE GEORGE —** Creating the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center was not a new concept.

It had been advocated for and talked about for over 120 years.

In 1996, Dr. Russell Bellico, a historian who has authored three books about the military and nautical history of Lake George and Lake Champlain, took part in a panel discussion in Lake George.

His topic to discuss was that there should be a visitor center in Battlefield Park. While Lake George has Fort William Henry and the park itself, Bellico noted that other military sites, such as Fort Ticonderoga, had attractions like a visitor center or museum highlighting their significance.

“This was the most significant military site in the Lake Champlain and Lake George valley that was undeveloped in terms of historic exhibits,” Bellico said. “Almost everybody had a visitor center or museum.”

The visitor center officially opened on May 15 and will have a dual purpose.

It will serve as your typical visitor center for tourists, but it will also serve as a museum showcasing the importance of Battlefield Park through the years.

Dr. Lyn Karig Hohmann, former president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, played an integral part in securing grant funding for the artifacts and panels in the exhibit, according to Bellico.

John DiNuzzo, current president of the alliance, said that Bellico was instrumental in getting the center built. DiNuzzo said that Bellico either donated or secured several of the artifacts on display in the museum.

“Russ was the ‘brainfather’ for this, someone who has the ‘brainchild,’” DiNuzzo said of Bellico.

The museum at the visitor center showcases Battlefield Park throughout the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War.

Panels describing significant events at Battlefield Park throughout the years are displayed on the walls of the exhibit. Bellico wrote the information that is displayed, and Hohmann secured the funding for the panels from the Saratoga Springs-based Alfred Z. Solomon Charitable Trust.



The ruins of Fort George can be seen adjacent to the new visitor center in Battlefield Park. The visitor center and surrounding Battlefield Park could see additions to the current exhibits, including the reinterment of over 40 Continental Army soldiers near the four soldiers that are currently buried in the park who were killed during the first phase of the Battle of Lake George on Sept. 8, 1755.

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The exhibit starts from the beginning with the Battle of Lake George, the only substantial victory for the British Army in 1755.

Fort George, one of the forts that was erected at the site, was constructed by the British in 1759. According to one of the panels in the museum, Major General Jeffery Amherst, who was the commander in chief of the British Army in 1759, oversaw construction of the fort.

The visitor center currently has replicas of the forts at Battlefield Park and ships that were used on Lake George. There are also videos playing from the nonprofit organization Bateaux Below, which works to preserve shipwreck sites in Lake George.



One of the many panels that can be found along the walls of the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center. This panel provides historical context about the Battle of Lake George during the French and Indian War. All of the information written on the panels was done by Dr. Russ Bellico.

Provided photo

Bellico was a part of the preservation of the Land Tortoise, a floating gun battery used during the French and Indian War. He was the underwater photographer for Bateaux Below.

One of the artifacts that was uncovered during the preservation effort was a gunport lid from the Land Tortoise. It was donated to the visitor center by the New York State Museum.

Not only will the visitor center showcase the military history of the park, but it will also aim to highlight the Indigenous peoples who lived on the land in the years prior.

“We are going to have those artifacts here. We were just short on money at the time for another (display) case,” Bellico said.

The visitor center will also serve as connective tissue for guided tours that are offered of Battlefield Park. Bellico and DiNuzzo said that there are plans for a walkway to be put in at the entrance of the visitor center leading into the park.

There are also plans to bring in more artifacts and exhibitions to the museum, allowing a rotation over time to provide different experiences for visitors.

Battlefield Park has four unknown soldiers from the French and Indian War buried on site. The soldiers were American colonists serving on behalf of Britain in the war, and were reinterred after being uncovered south of Lake George during a road construction project in the 1930s.



An oil painting of Fort George during the summer of 1759, painted by Ernest Hass, is hanging at the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center.

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Dr. Russ Bellico shows off a gunport lid that was dislodged from the Land Tortoise, a military transport boat during the French and Indian War. The lid was recovered by Bateaux Below Inc. and was donated by the New York State Museum.

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DiNuzzo said the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance is anticipating more than 40 Continental Army soldiers from the Revolutionary War to be reinterred in the park as well.

“I think that the reinternment will generate some sprucing up, let’s say, including smoothing out the walkways and building more,” DiNuzzo said.

Bellico said that the book, “The Last of the Mohicans,” by James Fenimore Cooper brought a lot of fame to the Lake George area.

In the 19th century, tourists came to Lake George and visited the remnants of Fort William Henry. They also came to Battlefield Park to see what remained of Fort George.

Bellico said that back then, people had a “real idea” of American history. Today there is more competition in getting the attention of tourists.

“Today we have to explain it more,” he said. “There’s much more competition with theme parks. You can go down to Disney World and places like that. For young people, things like the visitor center help people realize that something actually happened here. It’s not just a picnic place.”



The Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center officially opened with a ceremony on May 25.

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### Hours of operation

The Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center is currently open three days of the week. John DiNuzzo, Battlefield Park Alliance Board of Trustees president, said that starting July 1 the visitor center will be open five days a week through Labor Day. The visitor center is currently open:

- Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.