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Groundbreaking held for Colonial soldiers memorial plaza in Lake George



By Thom Randall

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Participating in the Sept. 18 Lake George Memorial Plaza groundbreaking ceremony were (left to right): Lake George Planning Director Dan Barusch, Lake George Town Supervisor Vinnie Crocitto, Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President John DiNuzzo, and Battlefield Park Alliance Treasurer Rosemarie Earl.

LAKE GEORGE VILLAGE | Local municipal officials joined area historical organization leaders in a groundbreaking ceremony Sept. 18 on land beside Fort George Road to celebrate the beginning of work to construct a memorial plaza for Colonial soldiers of the mid-1700s who died in combat or due to smallpox.

The remains of these Revolutionary War-era soldiers and their family members, many of which were unearthened adjacent to Courtland Street and elsewhere in Lake George, are to be reinterred in the memorial plaza to be built on the southeast side of Fort George Road, several hundred feet southwest of Beach Road.

The development, for which site preparation has begun, is to be titled “Repose of the Fallen.”

The project was first envisioned many years ago when four unknown soldiers were unearthened nearby, and development of a memorial plaza became a formal initiative when the remains of 44 Continental Army soldiers were unearthened in 2019 as excavation began for a new apartment complex on Courtland Street. Since then, more human remains have been unearthened in the vicinity.

The Courtland Street remains were recovered over the ensuing 15 months when archeologists sifted through the soil at the site. The excavation effort was overseen by New York State Museum archeological officials and the state Department of Environmental Conservation’s historic preservation office.

Since then, other Revolutionary War-era soldiers’ remains were unearthened incidentally — under a sidewalk along Mohican Street in late 2023, and underneath the same street in September 2024.

The site for the memorial plaza is located across Fort George Road from the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitors Center.

Lake George Planning Director Dan Barusch said at the groundbreaking that the plaza’s site preparation had recently begun as the plot of land was staked out and a tree was felled.

Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President John DiNuzzo said the memorial plaza site is where a smallpox hospital was located in the summer of 1776.

The plaza is near a monument to unknown American soldiers who were fighting in the 1755 Battle of Lake George, whose remains were unearthened in the 1930s and subsequently reburied nearby in Battlefield Park.

Some space at the memorial plaza is to be reserved for remains unearthened in the future as well as human remains that had been on display at the Fort William Henry Museum, the remains from Lake George that have been held by the Lake George Historical Association, and human remains curated by the New York State Museum officials. The latter remains are to be delivered to Lake George in a ceremonial procession next year.

In the future, the plaza development will likely host remains of soldiers involved in the French and Indian War.

The plaza is to host monuments memorializing the soldiers according to the wars and conflicts in which they served.

The plaza is to be bankrolled with \$520,000 drawn from the \$10 million state Downtown Revitalization Initiative grant awarded to Lake George Village in 2023. This money is augmented by about \$120,000 donated by individuals, with additional contributions expected in the upcoming months.

Barusch said the excavation for the memorial plaza's construction will not be very deep, as soldiers' remains are likely buried at the site three feet or so underground.

The memorial plaza is to contain columbaria and granite memorials, informational signage, an interactive kiosk, a central obelisk monument, and benches.

Its construction is expected to be completed by May 1, 2026, and a public ceremony is to be held on May 22 with political dignitaries attending. Gov. Kathy Hochul, U.S. senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, and U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik are to be invited to the ceremony. State Sen. Dan Stec and state Assemblyman Matt Simpson will likely attend.

Lake George Town Supervisor Vinnie Crocitto said the plaza development was a landmark project for both the town and village of Lake George.

“It means so much to bury these early patriots and soldiers in a final resting spot in a respectful way, he said, praising DiNuzzo and Barusch for their work in bringing the project to reality. Barusch lauded Sen. Schumer for suggesting that the state's DRI initiative might fund the project..

Barusch offered his thoughts about the pending historic landmark.

“This memorial plaza will be a ‘game-changer’ nationally for heritage tourism, and I think it will bring more attention to this beautiful park,” he said. “This is such an important place that a lot of people pass by, but once they come here — and visit the Battlefield Park Visitors Center — they will really have a new understanding and respect for it.”