

Military museum planned in stages to cut costs

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A group planning a military museum at Fort Carson has scaled back its plans, cutting the cost of the Mountain Post Historical Center by two thirds to \$6 million.

Backers say they hope the lower price tag, which comes through building the museum in stages, will bring more donors to the project. The museum will be outside Fort Carson's main gate and open to the public.

The piece that's going up first will be the most recognizable part of the structure — a glass-walled 12,800-square-foot exhibit space that

looks out on Cheyenne Mountain.

"It will be gorgeous," said retired Army Lt. Gen. Ed Soriano, who is heading the museum project.

The public will get an early look at what the museum has to offer this summer when the Army opens a building near the museum site that will display part of what the full historical center will offer.

While the Army is backing the museum effort, budget cuts have taken a big chunk of cash — nearly \$10 million — that would have gone into the larger museum plan.

So Mountain Post Historical Center boosters decided that parts of the planned museum, including a museum support facility and other expansions, will wait.

Soriano said even the scaled back plan will give the public something unlike other area museums.

The facility will chronicle the history of the military in Colorado, including the World War II building boom that saw Fort Carson rise in just months on land donated to the Army by the city of Colorado Springs.

Other exhibits will show the history of the post's largest unit, the 4th Infantry Division, from its origins in World War I to the valor of its soldiers on D-Day, in Vietnam and in Iraq.

Every unit that has served at Fort Carson will have a piece of its history on display.

All that history, Soriano said, will help school children better understand their country and will help new soldiers understand the bravery and sacrifice of others.

The new plan may be smaller in scope, but it is drawing big financial backers. Last fall, TriWest Healthcare Alliance, which handles medical insurance for active duty troops and retirees, offered \$250,000. Local restaurants and veteran's groups have backed the project and the El Pomar Foundation has provided cash, staff and an office.

Museum backers, though, must come up with \$5.6 million for the project. If the money comes through, the plan is to begin construction in 2013 and open in 2014.

Soriano said Colorado Springs has a long history of giving cash to military causes. The difference with the

museum, he said, is it will stand as a permanent monument to the region's wartime contributions.

"It's about legacies," said Soriano, who commanded Fort Carson in the late 1990s.

"It's about longterm enduring ways to show what these troops and their families were all about."

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