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## Quonset honors its Fighting SeaBee history

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As we make progress at the Quonset Business Park, with new retail, businesses, and recreation opportunities advancing steadily, we are also mindful of Quonset's unique history. The Quonset Development Corporation has great respect and pride for Quonset's former life as two Navy bases, and we are excited about new movement toward an educational and commemorative Quonset attraction that will help preserve history for those who lived it, and educate newer generations on an important past. This heritage of valiant service and patriotism is marked in several ways at the Business Park, most recently with new developments that honor the Seabees.

The new Seabee Museum, to be located at the Quonset Gateway, reached a major milestone recently - earning a matching grant of \$50,000 in recognition of its own fundraising efforts. The developer of the mixed-use Quonset Gateway retail area, the New Boston Fund, presented the Seabees with the matching donation toward construction. The financial gift, presented in July, represented a significant step toward the goal of building a new modern museum building that is climate-controlled for improved preservation capabilities.

The exhibited items inside the new museum will include historical documents, a growing collection of vintage paraphernalia and equipment, and photographs commemorating the Fighting Seabees and the former Navy Bases at Quonset Point and Davisville. Currently, many of these items are on display in one of the refurbished Quonset huts that have also been brought to the area as a memento of the Navy past.

This summer the Seabees also held a dedication ceremony for a new memorial at the outdoor commemorative park. The memorial to the Fallen Seabees of the Gulf Wars is centered on a 50-foot flagpole and an L-shaped concrete wall displays a plaque for each of the 18 Seabees killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The memorial was dedicated on July 31, with more than 200 people in attendance. In addition, the Memorial Park features the famous "Gate Seabee," which stood at the entrance of the base for more than 40 years, the Seabee-built Chapel in the Pines, 7 refurbished vintage Quonset huts and relocated to the site, and the repainted Fighting Bee statue.

Thousands of veterans have passed through the former U.S. Navy Base in North Kingstown, and it's appropriate that The Seabee Museum honor those heroes in the very place they served and trained. The new 7,680 s/f museum, which's arched steel design mimics an authentic Quonset hut, has been commissioned from Powerbuilt Steel Buildings, Inc., of Virginia Beach.

The idea of preserving these historical artifacts in a museum came from a group of retired Navy Seabees, members of Seabee Island X-1 Davisville, who approached the state after the Navy deactivated the base in the late 1990s and transferred the land to the state of Rhode Island.

The Museum and Memorial Park is run by and for veterans, but meant for a wide audience base - veterans, their families, and the general public. With the new 2.5-mile shared-use bike path now open at Quonset, the Seabee Museum will gain greater visibility and exposure to pedestrians and

bikers using the path, which runs right by the landmark. Soon there will be a small ramp that connects the path to the museum and memorial.

Although the new building is not yet up and running, interested visitors can currently see 18 display cases of memorabilia that dates from WWII right up through the current Gulf War. There is also a small store on site to purchase Seabee paraphernalia, and some walking trails on the property. Eventually the Seabees envision specialized school field trips and curriculum to continue reaching out to the community to keep the memory of Quonset's great history alive.

The ongoing synergy between the new Seabee development and the Business Park is designed to provide a complementary setting that welcomes new and expanding businesses while continuing to pay a tribute to Quonset's rich past.

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