Hall of Fame closer to reality

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ABBEVILLE — The Louisiana Military Hall of Fame and Museum took another step forward on Friday, despite rainy weather that turned the day soggy.

"This is a long time coming, and we're not going to let a little rain slow us down," said Secretary of State Jay Dardenne, whose office will oversee the development of the project. "This isn't the beginning. It's not its infancy. It certainly is a kicking-off point."

Phase I of the endeavor will include a 100-foot-by-300-feet metal building adjacent to the taxiway apron at the Abbeville Airport. The building will provide an area to restore military aircraft, tanks, trucks, weapons and other military hardware. It will also serve as a climate-controlled storage area.

Phase II, located across the street from Phase I, will be a Pentagon-shaped structure housing The Hall of Fame. It will be designed so that four additional galleries can be added as required.

The area around Phase II will serve as an outdoor display.

Many items have already been collected for the museum, including a pair of vintage PV2 Harpoon aircraft on the airport grounds.

"This has been several years in the making, so to have a groundbreaking today is very exciting," Abbeville Mayor Mark Piazza said, before continued rain altered those plans. "This rain is not the last bump we'll have to cross.

"The concept is to honor veterans through the Hall of Fame, and that's something that's really needed."

Dardenne noted Louisiana's large per capita contributions to the nation's military through history, contributors like VFW Post 4158 Commander Lindy Duplantis.

"It means everything for the veterans," Duplantis said. "They talked to us while they were planning this. That's why I'm here. This has brought us close together as a community, and all the veterans organizations get along well. That wasn't always the case."

"We're here to recognize every veteran in every war from the state of Louisiana," said Gen. Bob LeBlanc a member of the museum's board of directors. "We want a grandson, or great grandson, to be able to come here, and the veteran's military record will be here."

"It's been gratifying to see the coming together of the community," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Lane Carson, like LeBlanc a board member. "That's why it's going to be a success. That makes it that much more fun."

LeBlanc noted the assistance of District 26 Sen. Nick Gautreaux, D-Abbeville, for his support of the program, but Gautreaux quickly shifted the focus back to many of the veterans in the audience.

"You are the ones who fought the wars," Gautreaux said. "We would not have Louisiana without you. We appreciate your service to your country."

"Projects like this don't just happen," Dardenne said.

"They start from the ground up, with a few people working very hard. We hope to make this thing a reality in the near future."