Military Hall of Fame plans take shape

DeBlanc, three others scheduled for induction at Nov. 15 ceremony

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ST. MARTINVILLE — Barbara DeBlanc Romero has no doubt what her father, Medal of Honor recipient Jefferson DeBlanc, would think about his upcoming inclusion in the Louisiana Military Hall of Fame and Museum.

“He’d be so proud and happy, for himself and for all the veterans,” Romero said. “I can just see Dad smiling.”

Romero, her brother, Frank DeBlanc, and his wife, Margaret, were briefed recently about induction ceremonies planned for Nov. 15 at the Chris Crusta Airport in Abbeville.

“You’re going to be proud of this building,” Johnny Raymond, vice president of the museum board and events chairman, told the family. “You’ll be pleased to have your daddy be a part.”

Jefferson DeBlanc (Marine

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Barbara Romero, daughter of Medal of Honor recipient Jefferson DeBlanc, listens during a preparatory meeting to discuss plans for the Nov. 15 opening of the Louisiana Military Museum in Abbeville.

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— Paula Finley, executive director

Corps), Homer L. Wise (U.S. Army), Howard Gilmore (Navy) and Steven Bennett (Air Force) will be inducted into the Hall of Fame on Nov. 15 in phase one of the museum project.

Louisiana has had 11 Medal of Honor winners, all deceased. Others will be inducted in later ceremonies, likely on Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

"Phase one will have a 30- by 30-foot octagon shape, with walls 10 feet high," Executive Director Paula Finley said. "The Hall of Fame will be inside those walls."

"There will be oral histories and promotions for phase two. Inside that will be a 15- by 15-foot theater, seating 20 to 25, for films that will be edited to eight to 15 minutes for presentations."

The Nov. 15 program, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., will be part of a day-long festival at the site of the museum on the airport grounds.

Also at the meeting last Wednesday, architect Randy Rivera of Lafayette presented his vision of the permanent phase two hall of fame and museum.

"It’s always important to us to consider location, context and content," Rivera said. "We look for stories and how to tell those stories."

Rivera said the spark for his swooping, futuristic design was the vapor trail left by airplanes taking off from aircraft carriers. He described the design as "a runway, like a Band-Aid going up and over to form the roof for the museum."

Hall of Fame members will be memorialized in 5-by 10-foot glass monuments in an outdoor reflecting pool, with their likenesses and information etched in silver.

"This is beautiful," Romero said when shown the dramatic design. "I can’t believe this."

Once ground is broken on the museum, Rivera estimates it will take 24 months to complete construction.

"We got the money allocated for the project in 2006," Finley said. "Sen. Nick Gautreaux got the bill passed. Then, in this last legislative session, Sen. Mike Michot was able to get us an additional $150,000."

Once phase one is complete, the secretary of state’s office will cover up to $100,000 for operation of the museum. The state Legislature has granted a total of $350,000.

"It’s all going at an exceedingly rapid pace," Finley said. "Once we’re open, we can apply for federal grants and foundation grants. So, it will accelerate after Nov. 15. We’re hopeful, if we can get private and legislative support, to start phase two by 2010."

"We want to honor every veteran from Louisiana as far back as we can go."

Jefferson DeBlanc wuld like that.