

July 7, 2006

Think Outside the Books: Major New Museums In Virginia Blow the Dust Off History

Media Only

Richard Lewis
Public Relations Manager

TEL (804) 545-5574
EML rlewis@virginia.org

Virginia Tourism Corporation
901 East Byrd Street
Richmond, VA 23219-4048 USA

TEL (804) 545-5500
FAX (804) 545-5501
www.virginia.org (consumer)
www.vatc.org (industry)

RICHMOND, Va. – Virginia, already home to some of the most dynamic modern museum experiences in America, welcomes more than \$214 million in major new museum facilities this summer and throughout the coming months. More than 335,000 square feet of contemporary exhibit space will house a new wave of immersive, interactive galleries, multi-media experiences and treasured artifacts. Visitors will encounter dinosaurs, experience life in a Civil War gunboat, come face-to-face with 19-year-old George Washington and discover unforgettable new doorways into science and history.

Leading the way into *America's 400th Anniversary: Jamestown 2007* is the new Archaearium at Historic Jamestowne. Opened in May and located at the original site of the 1607 Jamestown colony, the first permanent English settlement in the New World, the Archaearium proves that the science of archaeology is far from boring. Visitors look into the faces of Jamestown colonists through forensic facial reconstructions from the skulls of three early settlers – or look out on the site of the original James Fort through virtual viewers and see exactly where objects were found and what the fort looked like.

The Virginia Natural History Museum, with more than two million objects in its collection, opens its new \$28 million, 90,000-square-foot facility in September in Martinsville. A skeleton of the ferocious predatory dinosaur *Allosaurus* will greet visitors entering the Great Hall of this Smithsonian affiliate. Lifelike chirps and roars will surround visitors in the nature galleries while special windows will allow views into active laboratories where researchers will be at work.

In October the world will discover for the first time who George Washington really was when the ribbon is cut on Mount Vernon's Ford Orientation Center and Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center. To many, Washington seems but a mythical figure on dollar bill or a painted canvas, but the new museum will reintroduce a flesh-and-blood human who seems even more remarkable in real life than in legend.

NEWS

Twenty-three galleries and theater spaces will present rare artifacts, a major movie and short films produced by the History Channel that will take visitors far beyond tales of chopping down a cherry tree or throwing a dollar coin across the Rappahannock River. Of special interest are life-size models created by a forensic anthropologist that depict Washington at three significant stages of his life. Most of the 66,700-square-foot complex will be underground, preserving Mount Vernon's natural viewsheds. Total cost of the project will reach \$95 million.

The United States Civil War Center in Richmond unveils its 10,000-square-foot permanent exhibit, *In the Cause of Liberty*, in October. The Center explores the causes, course and legacy of the pivotal conflict from three perspectives: Union, Confederate, African American. Designed with the help of American historians, the exhibit weaves together experiences for all the senses and gives a fresh look at the Civil War.

Looming above the treetops near Quantico is the 210-foot tilted mast and glass atrium of the National Museum of the Marine Corps and Heritage Center, scheduled for opening in November. Designed as a lasting tribute to all Marines, the architecture of the 100,000-square-foot museum invokes the image of the famous flag-raising at Iwo Jima – and the actual flag raised over Mount Suribachi will be among the trove of artifacts inside. Visitors will be immersed in Marine action, testing their rifle skills with an M-16 and experiencing the intensity of boot camp as suspended vintage and modern warplanes seem ready to soar into combat.

The USS Monitor Center will open in Newport News on March 9, 2007, exactly 145 years after the “Battle of the Ironclads” between the Monitor and the CSS Virginia took place in nearby Hampton Roads. The \$30 million museum will tell the story of those two famous warships and their epic battle, the first in history between armored vessels. Visitors will be invited into recreated historical settings to see what life was really like for the sailors who lived and fought in the Monitor. Central to the museum will be the original turret of the Monitor and other artifacts salvaged from the sunken ship and undergoing restoration. The Conservation Facility will offer a close-up view of the ongoing process of stabilizing and protecting these iron treasures that have been immersed in sea water since the Civil War.

Virginia's status as a home of unparalleled museum experiences for travelers of all ages is reinforced by these and other new museums soon to come. For more information on all there is to see and do in Virginia, visit www.Virginia.org or call 1-800-932-5827 for a free Virginia Travel Guide.

#