

Eisenhower memorial will honor 34th president in nation's capital

By McClatchy-Tribune News Service

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WASHINGTON -- He was a two-term president and World War II commander who has buildings, schools, an aircraft carrier, a highway tunnel and even a mountain named after him.

Now, President Dwight David Eisenhower, or Ike, will have what only six other occupants of the Oval Office seem to share: a national memorial in the nation's capital.

The Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission unveiled a design Thursday to honor the 34th president that by 2015 would recast a congested block of the federal bureaucracy in downtown Washington into a striking historical streetscape of columns etched with words, sculpture, trees and water.

Central to the tableau would be three grand tapestries -- 65 feet high -- crafted from woven stainless steel that would depict pivotal moments in Eisenhower's career.

"Like many people who were around at the time, we were unaware of the great contributions to our country that this man has made," Frank Gehry, a world-renowned architect who designed the memorial, said at a news conference on Capitol Hill.

The site for the project, whose early cost estimate is between \$90 million and \$110 million, is a four-acre plot along Independence Avenue, across the street from National Air and Space Museum. The funds would be come from public and private dollars.

Unlike the well-known presidential memorials for Washington and Lincoln set amid green, open spaces, the Eisenhower design would be nestled among federal agencies that all came into being during his presidency: the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services -- which originally were combined as Health, Education and Welfare -- the federal Aviation Administration, and the Voice of America.

"I was trying to find a way to tell a story," the architect said.

Gehry was chosen out of 44 competitors. He said that he rarely enters architectural competitions, but he went after the project because during the 1950s when Eisenhower was in the White House, the budding architect served in the Third Army, which had been Eisenhower's outfit.

Eisenhower's grandchildren, David Eisenhower, and his sister, Anne Eisenhower, said they initially thought the busy urban setting would require considerable imagination to transform it into a proper memorial for their grandfather, who died in 1969.



"I think Mr. Gehry is a genius," Anne Eisenhower said. "When I saw the site, I thought nothing can be done with this. He has done absolutely brilliantly. It's very complex."

Gehry has designed projects around the world. Among his best known are the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, where his firm, Gehry Partners, is based.

His design was the preferred choice of the Eisenhower memorial commission, a 12-member bipartisan panel created by Congress in 1999, composed of four senators, four members of the House of Representatives and four private citizens.

The project must now run the gantlet of architectural oversight panels that all memorials and other construction projects in the federal city often must negotiate.

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