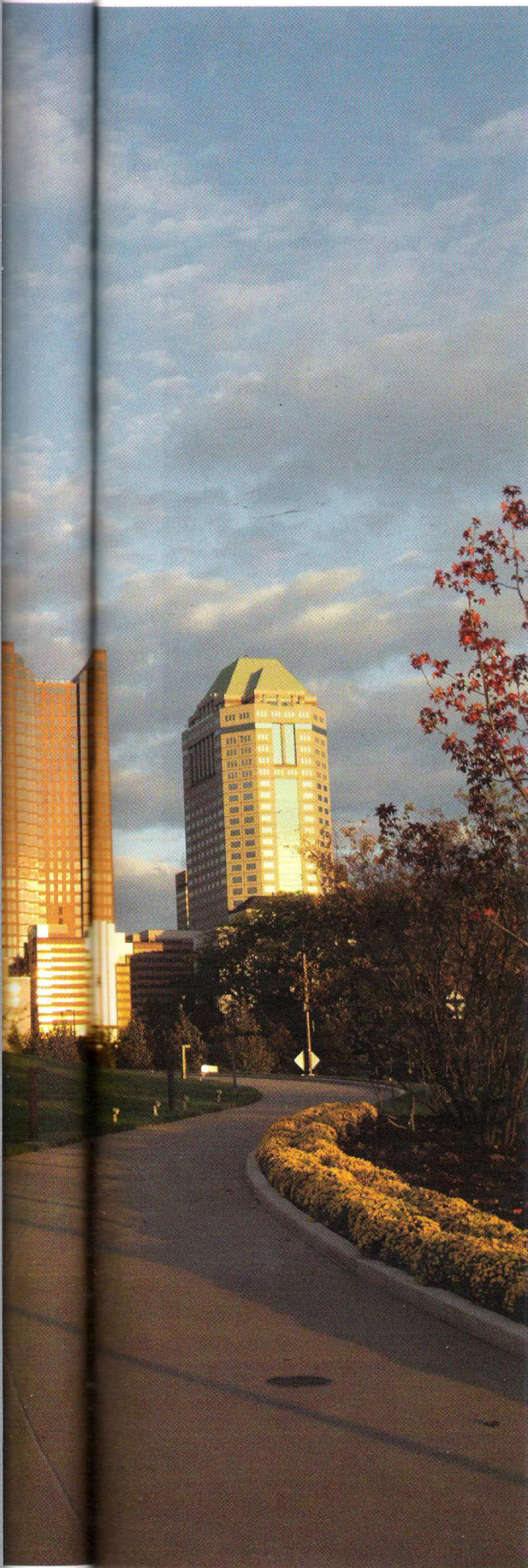


Stories of Service

The acclaimed new National Veterans Memorial and Museum offers an intimate look at the lives of men and women in uniform.

BY CHRIS GAITTEN | PHOTOS BY TIM JOHNSON



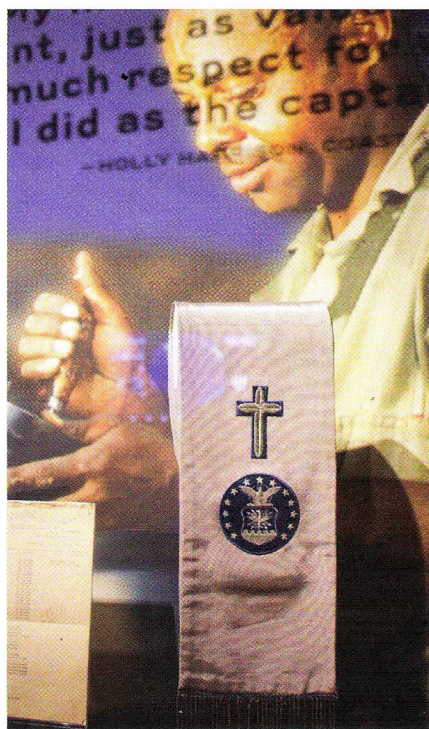
When people talk about the old Vets Memorial, they tell stories of going to see The Kinks, Jimi Hendrix, Rush, Bob Dylan. What they don't talk about: veterans. The new National Veterans Memorial and Museum suffers no such muddled focus.

The museum is dedicated to telling the personal stories of veterans from all U.S. military branches and conflicts, says Amy Taylor, chief operating officer of the Columbus Downtown Development Corp., which oversaw its construction. It was brought to life by the vision of the late John Glenn, a Marine pilot before he became a world-famous astronaut and senator, and the \$40.6 million donation of Les and Abigail Wexner. The 53,000-square-foot build-

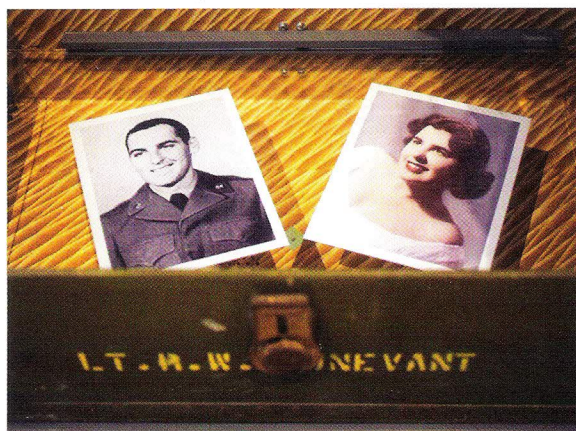
ing and adjacent 2.5-acre Memorial Grove cost \$75 million, and another \$7 million was raised for startup and operating expenses.

Long before its public unveiling on Oct. 27, the museum garnered national attention from the likes of *Architectural Digest*, which named it among the most anticipated buildings scheduled to be completed worldwide in 2018. It's compact and almost modest in size—in terms of square footage, two would easily fit inside the old Vets—yet striking in design. The exterior looks like the tip of a concrete auger that has spiraled upward through the crust of the Scioto Peninsula. The lawn curling across the rooftop emulates the riverfront greenways below.

▼ A Vietnam War-era chaplain's stole



▲ This hat tree is part of an interactive display urging visitors to "try out for boot camp." The display also includes helmets and backpacks loaded with gear.



◀ In one thematic alcove, three suitcases hold photos and audio recordings of veterans and family members telling their stories of service. This suitcase features Wallace Levin, left, recalling the time he went to bed in uniform before shipping off to Korea. "We slept in each other's arms in the dark," Levin said of that long-ago night he spent with his wife, Arlene, right.



◀ Twenty-two portraits hang from the ceiling just inside the front door. On one side, the banners show photos of veterans while in the military, and the other side has recent images of them in civilian life. All 50 state flags hang from the far wall.

On a wall inside the front door, NVMM's four pillars are embossed in gold letters: honor, connect, inspire, educate. The interior is spacious and streamlined; no maze of exhibits to navigate, no barrage of sensory input. Taylor says it's not an artifact museum, though there are about 150 on display—they exist only to enhance the personal narratives.

The bulk of those stories are told in the northern corridor, where a timeline of U.S. military history stretches along an interior wall. Fourteen thematic alcoves, which Taylor refers to as "slices of veteran service," complement the timeline. They feature memorabilia, letters, photos, interactive touchscreens, video clips and personal effects. The alcoves carry visitors through the veteran experience in three phases: the decision to serve and leaving home; military service, including deployment, jobs and combat; and coming home—the transition from soldier to civilian and honoring the fallen.

The latter theme is carried upward to the Remembrance Gallery on the second floor. "Taps" plays sporadically over the sound system, and a wall of windows looks out onto the rooftop pavilion, which can host coming-home ceremonies or other private events. Strips of colored film on the window panels represent campaign ribbons from the Revolutionary War to present day. An "infinity flag"—a folded U.S. flag on a podium set between parallel mirrors—signifies more than 2 million soldiers who have given the ultimate sacrifice, Taylor says.

"We are grateful and better off that someone is willing to sign the blank check on their life," she continues, "and of course we, as a society, are less because they are no longer with us." ♦

▶ Les Wexner speaks during the grand opening of the National Veterans Memorial and Museum on Oct. 27.

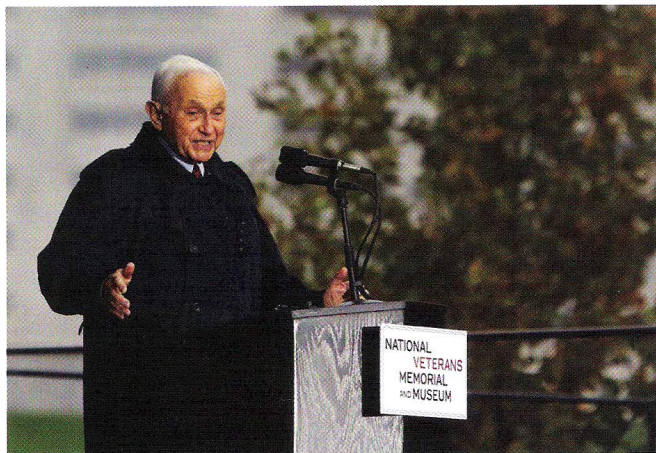


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▲ Directly north of the building, the 2.5-acre Memorial Grove is a quiet stand of 251 trees, including American Elm, American Beech and Ohio Buckeye. Three small waterfalls pour from a 325-foot-long stone wall.



▲ A set of thematic alcoves describes the decision to serve and leave home. The nearest one offers a glimpse of boot camp.



▲ Veteran Bob Pries left this reel-to-reel player at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington, D.C., in honor of the soldiers from his company who were killed in Vietnam in 1970. It still holds an album they listened to at the time, "Stand!" by Sly and the Family Stone.