

SANDS POINT

Navy Simulation Museum to mark anniversary on Veterans Day

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Beyond the historic castles, the natural forests and the beach at Sands Point Preserve, the Navy Simulation Museum sits as a tribute to the U.S. Navy's history on Long Island.

The museum will celebrate its one-year anniversary Tuesday, which is Veterans Day, by offering free admission for everyone from 12 to 4 p.m. Hank Okraski, the museum's volunteer curator, said in an interview Sunday that he is excited for Long Islanders to step inside and see "the strides we've made in such a short time."

"If I was a puppy, I'd be wagging my tail," Okraski said.

The museum tells the history of the Navy's Special Devices Division, which operated at what is now the preserve from 1946 until 1967. Its exhibits are in the preserve's Castle Gould mansion, in a room that once served as a classroom for Navy personnel.

After Okraski retired from his career with the Naval Training Device Center, which included a three-year stint at the preserve, he reached out to



Jeremiah Bosgang, executive director of Sands Point Preserve Conservancy, demonstrates the simulator.

Jeremiah Bosgang, executive director of the Sands Point Preserve Conservancy. He noticed the preserve's website had hardly any information about its military legacy: In 1946, Luis de Florez, a rear admiral in the Navy, moved his Special Devices Division to the preserve.

Okraski convinced Bosgang there was enough history to

build a museum and got to work. He sourced Navy documents, photographs, training devices and more. The centerpiece of the museum is a simulator donated by the Navy that includes a full-motion system, three screens and a cockpit.

"The kids just love it," Okraski said. "So do some of the very elderly veterans.

They come in and fly the simulator, too."

The museum also features information about the history of simulation in the Navy, Florez and an authentic Link Trainer, an early simulator built almost 100 years ago.

"It was that series of simulators that the military used in World War II, and gave us a

tremendous edge over the enemy in combat," Okraski said.

Owen Costello, a Port Washington resident, Air Force veteran and former member of the conservancy's board, said in an interview that Veterans Day is an important opportunity to "thank the veterans for taking time out of their life to serve their country."

"All veterans, whether you were stateside or you served overseas, you gave up your time," Costello, a member of VFW Post 1819 in Port Washington, said.

Bosgang said in an emailed statement that the museum was created "not just as a monument to the role our grounds played in our nation's history, but as a contemporary source of learning and engagement for future generations."

"It's especially rewarding to see veterans visit and enjoy the museum," Bosgang said. "Without veterans, there would be no Sands Point Preserve Navy Simulation Museum in the first place."

Entry to the museum is typically limited to Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 4:30 p.m., with tickets costing \$5.

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