



Wreckers Descend On Fort McHenry ... Visitor Center

New Facility Will Have Grand Opening In March

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BALTIMORE -- The Rangers at [Fort McHenry](#) are saying out with the old and in with the new. The old visitors center was destroyed on Monday, and a \$15 million, 17,000-square-foot building will take its place, according to 11 News reporter Kim Dacey.

"The old one opened in 1964 and by 1968, the National Park Service was reporting it was undersized," said Fort McHenry superintendent Gay Vietzke. "It was built to accommodate a maximum of 250,000 people annually, and Fort McHenry welcomes more than 650,000 annually."

Once the debris is hauled away from Monday's scene, the park service will re-landscape the area.

To replace the old building, a new one is just about 100 yards away, Dacey reported. And it's already open and partially operational.

"Our basic visitor services are here," Vietzke said. "So when you come to Fort McHenry there are restrooms, there are water fountains, the gift shop has moved, and certainly our Rangers are here to welcome and provide orientation."

What aren't up and running yet are the new exhibits that wouldn't fit in the old visitor's center. They include artifacts and a more detailed history of Francis Scott Key and the War of 1812, told in part through a newly-produced movie.

"Thanks to Hollywood, they're actually able to -- through computer graphics -- put the British fleet back into the Baltimore harbor and tell the story of the bombardment of the Fort and the writing of the national anthem," Vietzke said.

A grand opening for the new visitors center is scheduled for March 3 -- 80 years to the day that the Star Spangled Banner officially became the national anthem.

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