

## City gets \$881K for Benning's gateway project

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Columbus has acquired \$881,168 in additional federal stimulus funds to ensure construction of an impressive gateway into Fort Benning at Interstate 185 and Victory Drive.

"It's going to be very welcoming to visitors to Fort Benning and back to Columbus," said Rick Jones, director of the city's Planning Department. "It's really going to designate that entrance way more as the gateway into Fort Benning."

The additional money will increase the project's budget to \$6.8 million, all from stimulus funds. There is no money from the city's general fund being spent on the project. Money will go toward installation of utilities and landscaping some 56 acres at the interchange.

A week ago, Columbus Council approved an agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation to receive the additional funds. "We are hopeful now that we can get that project under way," Jones said.

Businessman John Flournoy has been the driving force behind the landscaping project, raising money through the Gateways Foundation with a goal to landscape 26 key intersections. His first project was 19 years ago at Victory Drive and Traffic Circle and Macon Road at I-185, but he always wanted something special for Fort Benning since I-185 was built.

"You've got soldiers coming and going on their fourth and fifth tours of Afghanistan or Iraq and you got base realignment," Flournoy said. "Fort Benning is going to be the largest, most powerful base in the world not just the United States, without a doubt. When they built the expressway they should have done more about an elegant entrance but they didn't. Whoever they are, they didn't do it. We are doing it now."

Flanking the four corners of the Victory Drive Bridge will be four 50-foot high monuments. On each of the monuments, a 12-foot high bronze statue will rest, representing the Trooper on the Plains, the Follow Me Soldier and two American eagles.

The north face of the bridge will boast in big letters Fort Benning and on the south side Columbus. Also on the north side of the bridge are 20 water fountains shooting water 20-feet high into the air. Behind them are 20 50-foot flag poles, all illuminated.

Flournoy hopes the project will get under way as soon as contract documents are completed. He would like to see the gateway project completed in late spring by the time U.S. Army Armor Center and School moves to Fort Benning from Fort Knox, Ky.

Flournoy said it's taken four years and three Fort Benning commanders to get the project together. "It's been quite a struggle," he said. "I'm relieved."

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