

Project:

Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial Tower

Location:

William R. Gaines Jr. Veterans Memorial Park, Charlotte County, Florida

Architect:

Karl Bernhard, AIA, NCARB

Sweet Sparkman Architecture and Interiors

Builder:

Willis Smith Construction

Engineering:

Snell Engineering Consultants

Crawford Williams Engineering

Herston Engineering

Project Size:

Three Stories, 45 ft. apex 6,800 sq. ft.

HONORING PEACEKEEPERS: A TOWER WITH A VIEW OF FREEDOM

In 1983, Michael Gaines was a typical 14-year-old. He looked up to his older brother, who joined the Marine Corps a little over two years earlier. William "Bill" R. Gaines Jr., a resident of Charlotte County, Florida, was part of a multinational peacekeeping force deployed to Beirut, Lebanon, to provide aid and relief for the Lebanese Civil War. Tragically, on Oct. 23, a suicide bomber destroyed a barracks building, leading to the bloodiest day in the American military since lowa Jima. In total, 241 U.S. Marines, Sailors and Soldiers, as well as 58 French Service Members and six civilians were killed.

Michael was profoundly changed by his brother's death. His brother's sacrifice became the driving force behind his desire to join the military himself when he turned 17. Following his military service and work on Capitol Hill, Michael became inspired to share the importance of military veterans and first responders in our country. His family's mission has been to construct a memorial to share the relevant history of the Peacekeepers in Beirut, along with how their sacrifice mirrors those of first responders throughout our communities.

Through Michael and his team's effort, the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners formally dedicated the former Sunrise Park to the William R. Gaines Jr. Veterans Memorial Park on Feb. 23, 2019. Since, the site has been transformed into a community hub, where families can come together, honor service members and even stoke inspiration for future generations. It has many amenities, including playgrounds, a kayak launch, tennis courts, pavilions and more, and will soon be the site of the Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial Tower.

The Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial Tower will stand at 45 feet in the park's center and include three stories of interactive educational displays for visitors to read and reflect on as they climb upward. The tower will be a symbol designed to honor those who died in Beirut. To tell the story of the Peacekeepers' involvement in the region, it will also provide a timeline of significant historical events from 1982-1984.





The structure also embodies a "tower with a view of freedom." Visitors standing on the apex of the structure will be able to take in vistas of the park itself, surrounding communities and the Charlotte Harbor. As guests look out and observe the view, they are invited to remember the sacrifices of those who fought to secure and preserve our freedom.

Design Challenges

When designing the tower, Sweet Sparkman Architecture and Interiors faced three specific challenges. The Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial could not be considered a success, unless it fulfilled three specific design demands:

- 1. The memorial must honor veterans and first responders, especially the those who died in the 1983 Beirut bombing.
- 2. The memorial must enhance visitors' experience to what was once known as Sunrise Park.
- **3.** The design must be seamless. The memorial should invite park visitors based on its aesthetics, yet also present a design which memorializes the military members who died in the Beirut bombing.





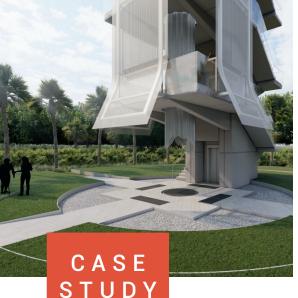


Oct. 23, 1983. Beirut, Lebanon.

On Sunday at 6:22 a.m., a terrorist drives a Mercedes truck into the 1st Battalion 8th Marines Landing Team [BLT] HQ building near the Beirut International Airport [BIA]. Inside, hundreds are about to wake up to another day conducting their peacekeeping operations. While the outlying Line companies were engaged in different responsibilities and mission, the Marines, Soldiers and Sailors of the BLT's day usually consisted of providing humanitarian aid, running rescue missions, staffing medical relief operations, and assisting the forces of the Multinational Peacekeeping Coalition's intent on returning power to the local government.

Guards were not able to stop the truck, which barreled toward the BLT. When it detonated, the explosion and subsequent building collapse claimed the lives of 241 service members, of which 220 were Marines. Scores more were injured. It was the bloodiest day for the USMC since the battle of Iwo Jima, and the largest non nuclear explosion since WWII. Minutes later, a second bomber struck the nine story Drakkar building, where the French contingent was stationed. There were 58 casualties. Six civilians also lost their lives.

After the blasts, service members, local EMS, the LAF and other personnel began the daunting task of digging through the wreckage in search of the survivors and the fallen.







"I believe in our mission here, I believe we belong here; this is a matter of principle, not politics or money or even lives. It's the principle of freedom, of peace for the majority. If we stay and achieve the freedom and I die in the process, I feel that I would have died for a good reason."

- William R Gaines Jr.

The Design

"The peacekeepers in Beirut, they weren't — it wasn't a military mission. It was basically what our first responders do for us: protect and provide a safe place for us to live and work. And that's what the Marines were doing in Beirut. So that's the combination of the park being for veterans and first responders."

- Michael Gaines

"There's a theme to the whole park," explained his brother Michael Gaines, who was a major force in getting the project off the ground.

The park includes fields and areas where children can play and enjoy the outdoors. There are placards to explain the history and context for the memorial. But the centerpiece is the Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial tower, designed by Sweet Sparkman. The three-story tower is designed to recognize those who served in Beirut and continue to serve in the armed forces and as first responders.

To help them understand his brother's heroic character, Michael Gaines met with the architects for the tower. He let designers read his brother's letters to convey what it was like serving in Beirut before the bombing. In one of his letters, Bill Gaines even wrote that if he were to die in service, his life would have been spent to a noble cause. Decades later, it's a bittersweet sentiment. Michael Gaines explained that his family didn't fully realize how much danger his brother was in. However, he has taken his brother's selfless service as inspiration for a memorial to honor all veterans and first responders. As a result, Karl Bernhard, AIA, NCARB, the architect for the tower, was able to design an incredible asset to the park, which also represents so much more.

Located on a small peninsula jutting out into Charlotte Harbor, Florida, the memorial tower is proposed to be nestled within 40 acres of a Veterans Memorial Park. The combination of the Peacekeeper's story, Michael's vision and the site inspired the design concepts.

Visitors who climb to the top can enjoy stunning views of Charlotte Harbor. As they look out, they are reminded that the military looks out for them.

The tower structure pulls proportions and massing from the Barracks structure and Spyglass Marine post, at the site of the bombing. It includes three elevated levels and a mass concrete exoskeleton. A key goal in the design was to bring those who experience the memorial to a place of remembrance and elevated awareness, through history-informed architecture.





Within the structure, 241 rods form a piece of installation artwork that plays with darkness and light, and reminds visitors of the 241 Marines, sailors, soldiers, and civilians who died in the Beirut bombing. Looking up, the rods form an oculus. This shape was intended to provide a bridge from the earth to the heavens, light shining through even the darkest of moments, bringing into full light the sacrifices of the peacekeepers.

The monument has earned the support of the Beirut Veterans of America, who provided valuable insight during the design phase.

About Sweet Sparkman

Sweet Sparkman Architecture and Interiors is a multi-disciplinary architecture, planning, and interiors firm specializing in community-oriented projects and high-end residential. Established in 2002, the award-winning firm has based its success on actively listening to clients' goals and careful analysis of every parameter of the project, including financial, physical, social, and environmental. Based in Sarasota, Florida, Sweet Sparkman's international team of bold, inventive, and curious designers propels collective creativity and inspires big ideas.

For more information, visit sweetsparkman.com or call 941.952.0084.



For more information regarding Gaines Park and Community Center's location and facilities visit https://www.wpb.org/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/79/154



Contribute to the construction of the Beirut Peacekeepers Memorial Tower by donating to the Charlotte Community Foundation: https://charlottecf.org/