

Press Release

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Hollywood Star, Jimmy Caan, to Back Old Guard Monument Effort

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The campaign to raise private sector funds to complete the Old Guard Monument, planned for installation on the grounds of the unit's headquarters at Ft. Myer Virginia, "went Hollywood" last week when Monument Committee Executive Director, Jim Laufenburg, and Old Guard Association President, Montie Wagner, a former member of the prestigious Army unit, met with a "tinsel town" mainstay, James Caan. The meeting was to discuss a fund raising effort within the entertainment industry. Laufenburg, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, is a former Regimental Commander of the 3rd United States Infantry (The Old Guard), while Caan once played an Old Guard Sergeant in his starring role in the Francis Ford Coppola film, "Gardens of Stone."

The meeting, called at the invitation of Caan at his home in Beverly Hills, was to update the actor on recent progress in the monument's development and to discuss ways to bring this exciting project to the attention of members of the film industry. Caan believes that many in this community have great respect for the service and traditions of the Old Guard and would wish to support the completion of a monument to the unit's personnel, past present and future. The Old Guard's primary mission is honoring our nation's fallen warriors at Arlington National Cemetery and representing the U.S. Army at Presidential ceremonies. A special unit of the Old Guard stands perpetual vigil at the cemetery's revered Tomb of the Unknown.

In an informal and cordial get-together, Laufenburg briefed Caan on the progress of the monument's development since it was conceived as an idea after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon Building, where the Old Guard played a role in providing security at the devastated site and helped in the removal of the dead and injured from the building's smoldering interior. Since then, a larger-than-life sized sculpture has been designed and is waiting in clay at the artist's St. Louis studio for eventual casting in bronze at the Crucible Foundry in Norman, Oklahoma. The work, created by sculptress B.J. Mungenast, depicts Old Guard soldiers in ceremonial, historical and combat ready poses. According to Col. Laufenburg, Mr. Caan was "very impressed with the artistic qualities of the work."

Caan reviewed photos of the proposed plaza surrounding the monument, located in a prominent parcel at Ft. Myer, one adjacent to the storied parade grounds. The plan projects a park-like setting, with formal gateways directing the visitor onto graceful pathways proceeding to the pedestal and sculpture. The plaza design is an artistic collaboration between Bratti Associates, Alexandria stone masons, and Washington, D.C. landscape designer Alex Zaras.

Of the ninety-minute meeting, Laufenburg reports that “Jimmy Caan expressed satisfaction with all aspects of the project and offered to support it. He plans to host an event for film industry notables to introduce them to the project and provide them the opportunity to support it financially.” Publicity materials were left with Caan to help in the effort. Also discussed was James Caan attending the annual reunion of the Old Guard Association to be held at Ft. Myer in September. At that time it is hoped that he will have the opportunity to inspect the monument site and meet with Old Guard soldiers who admire his portrayal of one of their own in the 1987 film, which was actually filmed in and around the cemetery and fort where they still perform their daily duties.

James Caan is best know for his roles as Brian Piccolo in the movie “Brian’s Song,” as well as his portrayal of Sonny Corleone in the classic 1972 Coppola film, “The Godfather.” He has been a busy actor in the decades between his first roles on the New York stage in the 1950s and his most recent starring role in the long-running TV series, “Las Vegas,” in which he portrayed the leading role of Ed Deline, a casino President. During his long and successful career he has shared the screen with such luminaries as Olivia de Havilland, John Wayne, Marlin Brando, Al Pacino and Robert Duvall. Currently, he is busy forming a production company that will make sophisticated films for an older audience that he feels is being ignored by Hollywood. Appropriately the Company is named “Boomer Films.”

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