

THE DAILY RECORD

Fleet week to start War of 1812 celebration

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By Associated Press

Maryland tourism officials hope to draw more than 1 million people to the birthplace of the “Star-Spangled Banner” next summer as they open a multi-year bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812 with an international maritime festival.

The June festival along Baltimore’s harbor during a Naval fleet week celebration featuring tall ships and modern ships representing navies from around the world will coincide with the 200th anniversary of the United States’ first declaration of war. Organizers, who announced details Thursday, said they hope to have top representatives of the U.S. Navy and Britain’s Royal Navy on hand to mark the occasion.



“We expect the largest festival atmosphere Baltimore has ever seen,” said Jill Feinberg, a spokeswoman for [Star-Spangled 200](#).

Police estimated a tall ships visit in 2000 drew about 1.1 million people to the harbor over a week, and organizers are looking to that number as a goal, she said.

The event will be accompanied by arts projects including a giant mesh of spangles in the form of a flag that will fly from the Francis Scott Key Bridge outside the harbor and a new symphonic work. Maryland Public Television is producing a travelogue and accompanying coffee table book, and the U.S. Mint will sell gold and silver commemorative coins next year.

“I love celebrating Baltimore’s place in American history, and these next few years are going to give us a unique opportunity to do that,” Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake told the crowd at the announcement.

Gov. Martin O’Malley, who has been known to don period costume for Defenders Day celebrations, noted that the war taught the young nation many lessons, including the important role each city plays in its own defense and the defense of the homeland.

“The reason we carried the day, the reason we turned the tide of that war was because we had the good sense to understand that the greatest of freedom’s privileges is the privilege of being responsible for looking out for each other,” O’Malley said.

The Navy, which sees the war as central to the development of its culture, is taking a large role in the anniversary events in Baltimore.

“So many of our heroes come from the War of 1812,” said Capt. Patrick Burns, director of Navy commemorations.

After the Revolutionary War, the former colonies lost the protection of the world’s greatest navy, he said. With the new nation’s commerce at risk, its navy had to step up.

“We had to stand up for ourselves,” Burns said. “It was a small war, but a very significant one.”

The Navy and nonprofit Operation Sail are organizing ship visits around the country in 2012 to kick off the commemoration of the war, including fleet weeks in New Orleans; Norfolk, Va.; New York, Boston and Baltimore, which has never hosted a fleet week. For a week in June, Baltimore's harbor will host tall ships, gray hulls and an air show with the Navy's Blue Angels.

"Baltimore is shaping up to be one of the premiere sites of the event," Burns said. "You can't beat Fort McHenry, the 'Star-Spangled Banner' and the harbor."

Organizers hope to raise \$25 million to support events and programming and to help tourism sites around the state handle an increase in visitors, Feinberg said. The U.S. Mint will match up to \$8.5 million of the money raised, and the state has committed \$1 million to start-up costs, she said.

In preparation for the anniversary, the National Park Service recently completed a \$15 million, 17,000-square-foot center at Fort McHenry.

The events continue beyond next summer with an academic conference on peace in Annapolis in 2013, reenactments at battle sites around the Chesapeake Bay and the return of tall ships to Baltimore's harbor in September 2014 to mark the anniversary of the battle memorialized in the national anthem.