

Sun-Sentinel

{ Local }

October 4, 2010

Navy destroyer to be commissioned at Port Everglades

By Robert Nolin
SUN SENTINEL

The Navy's newest guided missile destroyer, the USS Jason Dunham, will be commissioned on Nov. 13 in Port Everglades, the centerpiece of 10 days of events celebrating the Navy and its sailors.

The new vessel was named after a Marine and posthumous Medal of Honor recipient who sacrificed his life during combat in Iraq so his comrades could live.

The 510-foot-long vessel and its 380-member crew will be formally inducted into the Navy during an hour-and-a-half-long ceremony featuring top military brass, state politicians and possibly the governor. There will be flag raisings and speeches before an expected crowd of at least 5,000.

"What it means for our community is the opportunity to pay tribute to a young person who served in a war environment during our lifetime," said Chuck Black, event chairman.



Dunham

"It's quite an honor for us, and it will have an economic impact on the community."

Dunham, a corporal from upstate New York, threw his helmet and his body on top of a live grenade during a fire-fight in Karabilah in April 2004. His action saved the lives of two fellow Marines. Dunham died eight days later at age 22. A piece of his helmet is enshrined in the mast of the warship.

Dunham was the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor in the Iraq war and the first Marine to be so honored since the Vietnam War.

"A true American hero," said Black. The commissioning is open to the public, but those who wish to attend must submit names and addresses to the Navy via the website www.jason-dunhamuss.com by Oct. 15.

"We're expecting somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000," Black said,

estimating a third of that number will be from out of town.

The last Navy ship to be commissioned at Port Everglades, the USS Bainbridge in 2005, drew several thousand spectators. Two other vessels were commissioned at the port, the USS Cole in 1996 and the USS Gridley in 2000. All were guided missile destroyers.

The traditional smashing of a champagne bottle on the USS Jason Dunham's bow occurred in August 2009 during the ship's christening at Bath, Maine, where it was built.

There will be days of events resembling Fort Lauderdale's annual Fleet Week, starting from when the ship arrives on Nov. 5 until its departure Nov. 15. Black said the crew opted for the Port Everglades location over other choices. Event organizers also lobbied the Navy to have the commissioning there.



U.S. NAVY/COURTESY

The USS Jason Dunham will be the fourth guided missile destroyer commissioned at Port Everglades since 1996. The warship will be at the port for 10 days in November.