



Architect John Ronan, shown Wednesday in Chicago, has been selected to design the Fallen Journalists Memorial slated to rise at the National Mall in Washington. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

# Chicago architect awarded commission to build memorial

By Robert Channick  
Chicago Tribune

A national memorial to fallen journalists conceived in the wake of the deadly June 2018 mass shooting at the newsroom of the *Capital Gazette* in Maryland will have a strong Chicago connection.

The Fallen Journalists Memorial Foundation announced Wednesday that Chicago-based John Ronan Architects will design the memorial slated to rise at the National Mall in Washington, the culmination of a nearly year-long selection process.

The design concept was chosen from more than 50 proposals, besting four finalists with its vision of transparency and light as the core tenets of a free press.

"We were inspired by his unique and compelling design concept, which calls for the use of transparent materials to convey themes of clarity and light to reinforce the importance of the work of journalists, photojournalists and a free press," David Dreier, chairman of the Fallen Journalists Memorial Foundation, said in a news release.

John Ronan's award-winning Chicago work includes the modernist Poetry Foundation building in River North, the colorful Gary Comer Youth Center in the Grand Crossing neighborhood and the Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where Ronan is a professor

of architecture.

Headed by architecture critic Paul Goldberger, the 10-member selection committee also included former Chicago Tribune architecture critic Blair Kamin.

The memorial will feature layers of transparent elements that will appear different from all three sides of the one-third acre triangular site, which will be located in view of the U.S. Capitol. Funded entirely by private donations, the project is estimated to cost \$50 million, with a target completion date of late 2028.

"The design attempts to cast the visitor in the role of investigative journalist," Ronan said. "So visitors will navigate through these layered glass elements to reach a place of remembrance at the heart of the site that honors those journalists who have sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of truth."

Ronan, 60, said he was inspired to convey the importance of a free press amid the shifting landscape of journalism in the digital age. He developed the transparency theme by working with ice cubes, progressing to glass for the more permanent material that will be used in the memorial, which is still in the concept design phase.

The final design will likely be unveiled later this year.

"The jury was really impressed with his incisive understanding of journalism and the way he translated that into three-dimensional form, with his emphasis on transparency, clarity and putting the visitor in the

role of an investigative journalist," Kamin said. "It's really a brilliant concept and I look forward to when the foundation shares the complete design with the public."

On June 28, 2018, a lone gunman took the lives of five *Capital Gazette* employees inside the Annapolis newsroom in one of the deadliest attacks on journalists in American history. The gunman, Jarrod W. Ramos, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five consecutive life terms in 2021.

The nonprofit foundation was launched on the one-year anniversary of the newsroom shooting by Dreier, a former congressman and then-chairman of Chicago-based Tribune Publishing, which owned the *Capital Gazette* at the time.

The foundation was authorized by Congress in December 2020 to build a memorial to fallen journalists on federal land in Washington.

Dreier stepped down as Tribune Publishing chairman in February 2020 — three months after hedge fund Alden Global Capital became the company's largest shareholder. Alden purchased the Tribune Publishing chain in May 2021 for \$633 million. In January, Alden sold the Baltimore Sun Media Group, including its flagship newspaper and the *Capital Gazette*, to David Smith, executive chairman of Maryland-based Sinclair Broadcast Group, for an undisclosed price.

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