

American Indian museum moving along in Washington

The Smithsonian Institution presented the concept design for the National Museum of the American Indian to the Commission of Fine Arts May 16. This is the first public viewing of the design of the National Museum of the American Indian, which is scheduled to open on the National Mall in 2002.

In 1993, the Smithsonian Institution selected the architectural firm of GBQC Architects, Philadelphia, with associated architects Douglas Cardinal Architects Ltd. (DCAL) of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, to design the new museum.

The Commission of Fine Arts advises the U.S. government on matters pertaining to the arts; and particularly, guides the architectural development of Washington, D.C.

The National Museum of the Ameri-

can Indian was signed into law (P.L. 101-185) in 1989. This legislation also authorized two other facilities: the George Gustav Heye Center, now open in New York City, and the Cultural Resources Center, to be built in Suitland, Md.

The total area of the building will be approximately 250,000 square ft., distributed over six floors. The ground floor will contain the entry area, a 300-seat theater, a 400-seat cafeteria, a museum shop and a multi-use space. It will be named "the Potomac."

The Potomac will be a circular space, to be seen as the heart and soul of the National Museum of the American Indian's Mall museum because it will be experienced at the beginning and the end of an individual's visit.

Potomac, meaning where-the-goods-

are-brought-in, comes from the languages of tribes of this region and signifies a gathering space and marketplace. The Potomac will be a multipurpose space in which Native American culture will be celebrated and shared through all forms of artistic expression. Within the Potomac, there is the possibility of dance, music, performance, art installations, and other expressions of Native American culture.

The four-story space acknowledges the four cardinal directions important to many Native cultures and is figuratively grounded in the Earth and open to the sky. The shallow dome above the Potomac — an architectural reference to other domed buildings on the Mall — will allow presentations of Native cosmology. The Potomac serves as an important ori-

entation device, allowing visitors to comprehend the building's spaces and its may levels as they enter.

Douglas Cardinal (Blackfoot) serves as the Mall museum's principal designer. Cardinal has extensive experience in working with Native communities and is perhaps best known for his design of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec.

The pre-design and concept design phases of the project have been completed and the schematic design phase is just beginning. The construction of the museum is scheduled to begin in 1998 with an estimated construction time of three years. Following a year of exhibit installation and the moving of staff and equipment, the facility is scheduled to open to the public in 2002.