



David Hansen/Daily News photo

Tony Palermo, the new executive director for Fort Adams, stands Thursday at the historic fort on Newport's waterfront.

Fort Adams director has high hopes for site

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NEWPORT — When Tony Palermo lived at naval housing at Fort Adams as a Naval War College student 13 years ago, he could not have known he would someday be the man in charge of restoring the historic fort to its former splendor.

Palermo, 53, who retired in July after 30 years in the Marine Corps, was recently hired as the first full-time executive director of the Fort Adams Trust. The trust, which has been run by volunteers since its creation by the General Assembly about five years ago, will now have someone to direct efforts to rehabilitate the historic fort.

"I think we can put a very good program together," Palermo said. "My role is to take it to the next level. It's been done on a voluntary basis by dedicated people. But I'm the guy who's going to be thinking about Fort Adams every day of the week."

The hiring of a full-time director was made possible by the General Assembly, which gave the trust a \$75,000 grant to hire an executive director, an administrative assistant and several tour guides.

Sen. Teresa Paiva Weed, D-Newport, was the prime sponsor of the grant request. She said Palermo is the right person for the job.

"I really think he can make a significant difference," Weed said. "Having someone waking up every

morning and thinking about the fort, I think we will really be able to see the fort live up to its full potential."

In 1997 the trust got a grant from the Prince Foundation and used it to put together a master plan for the restoration of the fort. The plan is broken into three five-year phases, Palermo said. His first task will be to help raise \$1 million to match a \$1 million state grant which will be used to restore the fort to the state of grandeur it once had.

Palermo said Fort Adams has the potential to be a major tourist attraction. He wants to turn it into "a living historical museum," with guides in period costumes conducting tours.

Construction of the fort began in 1824, but wasn't completed until 1857. Troops began occupying the fort in 1834, and did so right up until 1950, Palermo said. During the Civil War the Naval Academy was housed there.

"I've had a life-long love of history," Palermo said. "Historical sites define us as a nation. They remind us where we came from and tell us where we've been and how much people have sacrificed in the course of our history."

Both Palermo and Weed believe the fort will one day soon be self-supporting. Until then Weed expects an annual grant from the General Assembly to maintain momentum.