

How is the USS Kidd museum faring without its main attraction?

By Dillon Lowe



The [USS Kidd Veterans Museum](#) has weathered a steeper decline in attendance than expected since its namesake destroyer left Baton Rouge for repairs more than two years ago.

Museum officials anticipated attendance would fall about 80% without the USS Kidd docked along the downtown riverfront. Instead, attendance is down roughly 93%, according to Elijah Otto, the museum's business manager.

That decline has cut into more than just ticket sales. The museum has also lost revenue from overnight stays aboard the ship and event rentals.

“Our drop in revenue was higher than we expected it to be,” Otto tells *Daily Report*.

The USS Kidd, a World War II-era Fletcher-class destroyer and National Historic Landmark, departed Baton Rouge in 2024 for repairs in Houma. The repairs were initially expected to take eight months, but the vessel needed more work than anticipated.

The ship is now ready to come home to Baton Rouge but low river levels are preventing it from doing so. The Mississippi must reach 33 feet for the vessel to safely return, and the river peaked at 29 feet this year. Officials don’t expect it to climb any higher after July.

The USS Kidd Veterans Museum is a nonfunded state agency, meaning it relies primarily on revenue it generates itself. It does receive an annual city-parish grant that helps cover basic costs of operation like heating, ventilation and air conditioning, but Otto says that grant money declined following the incorporation of St. George.

While the museum typically doesn’t receive state funding, the state has provided it with \$425,000 to cover its operating expenses through May 2027.

“The state has graciously stepped in to help cover our operating costs so we can remain open while the ship is away,” Otto says.

The financial strain has also led the museum to reduce staffing. Otto describes affected employees as “on retainer” rather than laid off, as the museum plans to bring the already-trained workers back once the ship returns.

The museum is now exploring whether the ship could temporarily open elsewhere while it waits for suitable river conditions, though Otto says that idea is in a primitive stage.

In the meantime, the shoreside museum remains open daily with reduced admission. Among its still-available attractions are the Louisiana Veterans Hall of Honor, displays highlighting Louisiana’s military history and a walk-through exhibit inspired by pirate William Kidd’s ship, the Adventure Galley. The museum also [continues to accept donations](#).

“A lot of people think just because the ship’s gone there’s nothing to do here,” Otto says. “But we have an entire museum building exploring Louisiana’s military heritage.”

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