



WAR OF 1812 BICENTENNIAL PLANNING UNDERWAY
New Group “St. Lawrence War of 1812 Bicentennial Alliance” Formed

BROCKVILLE: Community planning for the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 has recently begun in Eastern Ontario led by a new group known as the *St. Lawrence War of 1812 Bicentennial Alliance*.

The Alliance represents both sides of the St. Lawrence River and spans the region from Cornwall in the east to Adolphustown in the west. The newly formed Alliance Board has now adopted a mission statement and bylaws, identifying as one of its primary purposes to “encourage the effective facilitation of Bicentennial Celebrations for the War of 1812, working cooperatively with area attractions, partners, and municipal, provincial and federal government agencies.” Seasoned event specialist Jan Bonhomme has taken on the role of Executive Director, with funding for her position coming from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and a Job Creation Program (JCP) investment from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Ms. Bonhomme, who successfully coordinated the 2007 International Plowing Match & Country Festival in Crosby, is thrilled to take on this new heritage-tourism initiative.

The St. Lawrence Alliance Board is made up of 13 members, representing communities and tourism organizations throughout the region. In addition, to date the Alliance has attracted over 20 advisory committee volunteers representing heritage organizations, tourism destination marketing organizations, municipalities, museums, area attractions, and chambers of commerce. Senior officials from the Ontario Ministries of Tourism and Culture as well as Parks Canada are guiding efforts. In addition, the Alliance is actively liaising with their American counterparts, led by Kevin Keiff, regional head of New York State Parks.

The Alliance Board is being led by Chair Pat Macdonald and Vice-Chair Will Baird. Other Board members are: David Smith, Deb Hamilton, Bonnie Ruddock, Suzanne Dodge, Ann Weir, Brandt Zatterberg, David Paul, Mike Lalonde, Anne Marie Fortier, Rob Carnegie and Stephen Paul with Blair Harris and Kevin Fox serving in an advisory role. The Alliance has already set up several committees, including Community Development, Education, Communication/Events, and Legacy Projects. “We are anxious for volunteers to contribute, and hope that interested parties will come forward and join our efforts to promote heritage tourism and broaden the understanding of the historic importance of Eastern Ontario in the war,” said Ms. Macdonald. She indicated that the Alliance has plans to actively encourage community involvement by hosting meetings over the next several months, to further promote and develop 1812 celebrations in the region. The group’s web sites are www.celebrate1812.ca and www.celebrate1812.com.

“The War of 1812 has played a pivotal role in shaping Canada’s roots,” explained Ms. Macdonald. “Our identity as Canadians came out of this conflict where French Canadians, the British and native peoples fought together to preserve Canada. We aim to get Canadians excited about celebrating this rich history... and into Eastern Ontario to explore all of the communities along this rich heritage corridor.” She added that War of 1812 Bicentennial celebrations are an ideal way for Canadians to reflect on and celebrate our 200 years of peace and friendship with the United States.

Ms. Bonhomme has already started making presentations to local organizations and is available to meet with interested groups. “Our Board is very excited about promoting the bicentennial and the St. Lawrence region to thousands of new visitors, and we are anxious to get all interested parties involved in this community-wide effort to raise the profile of Eastern Ontario” enthused Ms. Bonhomme. She added that “the bicentennial celebrations will showcase Eastern Ontario, giving us the perfect opportunity to educate others about our region and create a lasting impact”. Signature special events being planned in Bath/Kingston in 2012, Morrisburg in 2013 and along the St. Lawrence River in 2014 will be one of the tools that the alliance will use to promote Eastern Ontario as an international travel destination.

It is anticipated that area communities will pursue a range of initiatives including special events, educational projects, and lasting legacy projects. There are already plans underway for re-enactments, music performances, plays, international seminars and a number of signature events and infrastructure improvements to attract thousands of visitors to the St.

Lawrence region. The Alliance has a photographer out taking photos in the area and has plans for a regional map showcasing special events and historic battles.

Alliance board member David Smith, an avid War of 1812 re-enactor from Bath explains that the bicentennial provides an exciting opportunity for communities to become involved. “With the support of the St. Lawrence Alliance, our volunteers in Bath are already planning a spectacular naval and land re-enactment of the Escape of the Royal George spanning the Bath and Kingston waterfronts.”

A group in Gananoque is working towards the construction of a blockhouse in time for the start of the bicentennial in 2012, while there will be many other activities taking place around the region at sites like Fort Wellington in Prescott, with recent funding announced by Parks Canada. Fort Henry in Kingston, Upper Canada Village along with Crysler’s Farm in Morrisburg will also be getting new visitor’s centres, thanks to \$23 million recently announced by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism for these and other improvements.

Key to drawing attention to the St. Lawrence region this summer will be the planned “Grand Tactical” re-enactment scheduled for July 11-12 at Crysler’s Farm in Morrisburg, the site of the pivotal battle that prevented the invasion of Montreal in 1813. The Friends of Crysler’s Farm are honoured to have been chosen to host the 2009 War of 1812 Grand Tactical, the largest war of 1812 re-enactment in North America. The Grand Tactical, organized by the Crown Forces in North America and U.S. re-enacting umbrella groups, alternates each year between sites in Canada and the United States to encourage wider participation in 1812 living history and to highlight the different regions in which the war was fought. This is the first time that the Grand Tactical has been offered in Eastern Ontario and hundreds of re-enactors have already signed up to participate for what promises to be a massive event featuring both military and civilian history of the day. Visitors are expected from a wide area, and area campgrounds and hotels are already preparing for the demand. Full details are available at: <http://1812grandtactical.tripod.com/> or www.cryslersfarm.com.

The "armies" will be accompanied by civilians portraying the camp life of those who accompanied armies of the period while they were on the march. The tented camps of both armies, crafters, artisans and sutlers will combine to bring the largest-ever display of living history to an area that is no stranger to the heritage of this country. .

The Ministry of Tourism is leading provincial bicentennial celebration planning efforts and has designated six Ontario War of 1812 regions to work together to coordinate activities and projects that will leave a lasting legacy and enhance tourism visitation and economic impact in each region. Ms. Bonhomme and Ms. Macdonald recently attended provincial planning meetings in Niagara, and the St. Lawrence Alliance is participating in weekly conference calls on bicentennial planning with the five other provincial groups.

“The St. Lawrence Alliance will be working closely with the other five regions to draw a higher profile to Ontario, commemorate the War’s anniversary, and celebrate the rich heritage of our area,” said Ms. Bonhomme. In addition to the St. Lawrence Region, the other Ontario 1812 regions include: Niagara; Toronto; Sault Ste. Marie; Windsor/Chatham; and South Georgian Bay. For more information on the St. Lawrence War of 1812 Bicentennial Alliance or to become involved please contact Jan Bonhomme at 613-272-3200 or email info@celebrate1812.com