



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. 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 14 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 has already set up several committees, including Community Development, Education, 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 site is 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 1812 Bicentennial celebrations are an ideal way for Canadians to reflect on and celebrate our 200 years of 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 development of the Joel Stone 1812 Heritage Park 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 Chrysler’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.

The Ministry of Tourism is leading provincial bicentennial 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.

“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