

Former cabinet minister chief museum fundraiser

By **BRAD REAUME**
The Champion

Former Ontario Minister of Agriculture Jack Riddell has been named co-chair of the fundraising committee for a group hoping to resurrect the Ontario Agriculture Museum.

Mr. Riddell, who represented the riding of Huron-Bruce, was minister in the Liberal government under David Peterson from 1985-1989. He is currently president of the Ontario Institute of Agrolgists and lives on a farm in Hay, Ontario, between Exeter and Grand Bend.

"We are in the process of establishing the full committee, getting names of people with fundraising experience, making contacts," Mr. Riddell said. "We haven't established any plan of attack because we want to wait until the business plan and budget are established."

A group of people interested in maintaining the museum have formed Country Heritage Experience Incorporated, a legal banner under which they will pursue a business plan to operate the site.

According to Lori Jamieson, public relations co-chair, the group is poised to take over operations of the Milton museum on April 1, 1997 the day after provincial government funding runs out.

"We want to preserve the integrity of the site, archives, and Hall of Fame in a manner that is fiscally responsible and will ensure the museum's long-term future," she said. The group is studying theme parks and museums to see how they manage to remain operational. The challenge is making the assets self-sustaining.

According to Mr. Riddell the business plan should be in place by the end of August. He estimated the fundraising committee will be attempting to secure about \$1 million.

"We will approach urban business concerns in our fundraising efforts as well as agri-business and private individuals," said Mr. Riddell. "A lot of urban people recognize their roots are in rural areas."

Ms Jamieson said there is a steady stream of money coming in from donations to the project. Other public fundraising efforts already in place include a fall festival on Saturday, September 14 and an auction slated for Saturday, October 12.

Tickets to the fall festival are \$35, with a \$20 going as a direct donation to the museum. An appropriate tax receipt will be issued. Tickets can be purchased by calling 1-888-835-5002.

The auction slated for Saturday, October 12 features only items donated by their owners for sale to benefit the museum. Ms Jamieson said some people think parts of the museum's collection are going on the auction block, but that is not true.

In fact, an auction catalogue will be published detailing the ownership of each significant piece up for bids. The auction will take place at Brian's Auction Centre in Puslinch and will feature items new and antiques with a rural heritage flavour.

The auction is being sponsored by the Tri-County Heritage Club of Ilderton, a village north of London, and the Bruce County Heritage Association.

"We should be ever mindful of our roots," said Mr. Riddell. The museum is one place urban people, especially children, can get a glimpse of our rural heritage."

15—The Canadian Champion, Friday, August 2, 1996

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