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New technology provides greater access to Essex

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

When Mathieu Lemay moved to Essex from Thunder Bay last year, he first wanted to make sure his new home was close to a few of the town's amenities.

Having a school nearby for his child to attend was important, as was a park to play in.

Now, as the town's geographical information systems technician, Lemay is making it easier for people thinking about moving to the area to research local points of interest.

Since March, Lemay and network systems manager Jack Barron have been improving the interactive web-based mapping service that offers information about local wineries, schools, parks and conservation areas.

Using global positioning system technology, the Essex site enables residents to view and retrieve information on many things the town has to offer. Phone numbers, addresses and even web links to businesses and services can be accessed at the click of a button.

The newest addition to the site is an expansive

inventory of some local cemeteries.

A downloadable photo of every headstone and information about certain plots can be found for four cemeteries — Colchester Memorial, Erie, Iler Settlement Baptist and British Methodist Episcopal.

Searching for a family name will also find the location of a relative's plot within a cemetery.

The process took about two months to complete, between gathering the information, taking the photographs and working with the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society in collecting older data.

Lemay said the program is a way of preserving history and making research more accessible.

He also said it can be handy for people looking to plan a day trip around the municipality.

Another feature allows a family to create a destination map, identify a route and special locations, give it a title and print it out.

Lemay and Barron said the free service is something that many people don't know exists.



Our Station - Our Town
 by Dan Satsky
 Our elegant stone railway station made our town a transportation and shipping centre when it was built in 1887. It was here that a car load of nitroglycerine exploded in 1907, killing two men and shattering the town.

A computer screenshot taken from the Town of Essex public mapping website displays a photo and information about one of the local murals. Information about different points of interest in the municipality can be found throughout the site, including conservation areas, cemeteries and wineries.

"A lot of municipalities are going web-based and it helps to make the public more self-sufficient," Barron said.

The venture has been a joint effort with surrounding municipalities, where knowledge sharing between GIS staff helps expand and improve each site.

"The possibilities are endless," Barron said.

To access the mapping site, visit www.townofessex.on.ca/gis.htm

Essex Chili Fest heats up

The 2007 Essex Chili Fest is coming to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 201 on March 11 from noon to 4 p.m.

Last year's event raised \$1,200 for the Essex Minor Hockey Association and organizers are hoping to exceed that total this year. All proceeds from the event will be going toward the Essex Fire and Rescue Service and the Essex OPP Cop Camp.

Members of the public are invited to submit their

own batch of chili, as are restaurants and emergency services. Prizes will be awarded in the three separate divisions.

First prize is a \$100 gift certificate for Gilligan's Restaurant.

To submit a batch of chili, call Brian or Vicki Pepper at 519-727-0906.

Submissions must be received no later than Feb. 28.

Tickets will be sold at the door for \$6 per person or \$20 per family.

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