

Province hands over historical homestead

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

After leasing the property from the province for 32 years, the Essex Region Conservation Authority gained full ownership of the John R. Park Homestead last week, just in time to celebrate the 165th anniversary of the landmark site this summer.

Ray Renaud, chair of ERCA's board of directors, joined Essex MPP Bruce Crozier in making the announcement to reporters, members of the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society, and homestead employees, who were dressed head to toe in 1850's rural garb.

"This is a gem in our community that shows our historical and agricultural heritage and welcomes visitors to our county," Crozier said. "And when you have local ownership, you have a greater interest in managing the site."

ERCA, which manages 17 conservation areas throughout the region, will now be eligible to access special grants from the provincial and federal governments to upgrade and maintain the site.

Plans for a new paint job and roof are already underway for the Greek Revival style homestead located on County Road 50 near



The chair of ERCA's board of directors, Ray Renaud, centre-left, stands with Essex MPP Bruce Crozier, centre-right, to announce that ERCA will be taking over ownership of the John R. Park Homestead after leasing the property from the province since 1975. The transfer of ownership allows ERCA access to the Ontario Trillium Foundation grants for the restoration of the 165-year-old homestead.

Colchester.

The museum self-generates about 50 per cent of its revenue every year, welcoming thousands of tourists and students to enjoy demonstrations of 19th century farm life that include blacksmithing and sawmilling. Annual events such as the Maple Syrup Festival, Blueberry Social

and Parade of Horses consistently draw scores of out-of-towners to the site.

"When you come out, you go back in time," said ERCA general manager Ken Schmidt. "You appreciate what our community was and what it is."

Schmidt began working for ERCA in 1975, the same year the province started

leasing out the 14.6-acre property.

"It was really a kind of interesting, exciting project," Schmidt said. "We were fortunate because a lot of the interior works were in pretty good shape."

At the time, ERCA removed a couple of walls, added two barns and another wing to the home.

Now, Schmidt says the homestead should be promoted as "one of the jewels of Canada's south coast."

The handing over of the property is part of a provincial initiative that will see more than 200 acres of natural heritage land donated to communities and organizations throughout Ontario.

Colchester North School celebrating golden anniversary

Since September, Colchester North Public School's parent council has been collecting old photos and other memorabilia in preparation for the facility's 50th anniversary celebration to be held April 28.

The group raided the archives of the Greater Essex County School Board's office and contacted alumni in an effort to create "memory rooms," where graduates can take a walk-through and relive their school days.

The event, held from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., will also include face painting, scrap-booking and a performance by the school's choir. Cookbooks compiled from recipes submitted by parents of the school's kids, will also be available for purchase.

With the help of volunteers, the Essex Region Conservation Authority will be planting trees at the site.

Leading up to the event, on April 27, an ensemble cast of students will present a dramatic performance of Buggy Malone. The show starts at 7 p.m.

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