Honouring the Chief

A tribute to a great warrior and lasting Canadian hero stands along on a winding road in rural Ontario. Its face is marred by signs of neglect, a few incidences of vandalism, and it serves as a poignant reminder of heritage sites that have fallen by the wayside.

The current Tecumseh monument is situated on Longwoods Rd just east of Thamesville. The dedicated volunteers working for the Tecumseh re-development project, spearheaded by Friends of the Tecumseh Monument, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the legacy of the monument will be transformed into a site worthy of its namesake.

Situated on the edge of the site of the Battle of the Thames where Shawnee Chief Tecumseh was killed in battle, the proposed area will be transformed from the two small and easily missed monuments standing there today to an open air museum which will encompass the whole eight-acre site, and which will interpret the story of the Battle of the Thames and its aftermath, from the perspective of all its participants and witnesses.

The park plans to host a boat-shaped river lookout, historical interpretation panels, a new monument to Tecumseh, as well as another to all the participants. There will also be space for quiet reflection on the sacrifices made in the course of the War of 1812 and the following 200 years of peace between nations.

The re-development is expected to cost approximately $4.2 million.

"We are in full fundraising mode," says Lisa Gilbert, chair of Friends of Tecumseh Monument. "We hope to see donors come forward who have a real passion for the legacy of Chief Tecumseh, for the invaluable participation of First Nations in the War of 1812, and for keeping our local history vibrant for years to come."

The committee's fundraising platform ranges from as little as $10 up to $100,000 and donors can receive a myriad of benefits, ranging from tax receipts and certificates of appreciation, to a wall of sponsors at the monument site itself.

For more information on how to become a part of this project, visit the committee's newly launched website, at tecumsehmonument.ca

1812 APP AVAILABLE

"There’s an app for that" has become almost common prose amongst tech savvy consumers that drive today’s popular culture. But it doesn’t just apply to present-day popular culture. Longstanding local history is also benefiting from technology.

The region’s rich War of 1812 history has been virtually transformed with the help of a group of history buffs – and technology literate – students of the University of Western Ontario’s Master of Arts program in Public History. They have developed a smart phone app for the war.

"Digital media is the here and now for teaching and learning about the past," says Dr. Michael Dove, acting director of the school’s department of history. "The smart phone app will make The War of 1812 accessible to audiences like never before. It offers something for everyone, from the casual tourist to the specialist historian."

Dove, who has acted as a faculty supervisor for the project, shows great pride in not only the quality of his students’ work but also the way that this project has strengthened the bond between the local community and historical research.

"This is a remarkable opportunity for our students and for our MA Public History program at Western," he says. "Students have been able to practice history outside of the classroom and thereby realize the aims of public history, that is: educating community collaboration, civic engagement, and reciprocal learning. Such close working relationship between the university and the extraordinary War of 1812 heritage community of individuals and institutions in place across the southwest region of Ontario provides a valuable model for future partnerships."

The app follows “Route 1812” and “The Tecumseh Parkway,” historic driving routes throughout southwest Ontario that show you the sites, stories and sounds of the War of 1812. Mined from an extensive array of archival materials, this smart phone app combines thorough research and spectacular images, such as the captivating paintings by Windsor artist Peter Rendlis-Boucher, to give people an in-depth sense of this chapter of the War.

Not only enhances our understanding of those more well-known 1812 sites and events, such as Amherstburg and The Battle of the Thames, but also sheds much light on lesser-known stories from the war such as the legendary heroine of London’s Reservoir Hill, Mrs. McNamara, the so-called "Laura Secord of London."

The app has also benefited from its connection to the development of the Tecumseh Parkway, currently running through the Chatham-Kent region and focusing on Chatham’s historical 1812 connection. The parkway has recently received several grants, including one from the Heritage Canada 1812 Fund and also the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the development of Peace Gardens along the parkway, which will be planted and maintained by the Kent Military Re-Enactment Society.

The app will be launched early summer 2012 and marks the official kick-off of the region’s 1812 events.

The War of 1812 app is free and can be searched or downloaded from QR codes on interpretive signage along the route.

Artists renderings show the proposed new eight-acre site of the Tecumseh Parkway, a $4.2-million project to be located near the site where the great Shawnee Chief Tecumseh was killed in The Battle of the Thames. Photos courtesy Municipality of Chatham-Kent.