

## **REGIONAL TOURISM IS GOING PLACES – AND BRUCE, GREY AND SIMCOE IS AT THE FOREFRONT**

**COLLINGWOOD: August 9, 2011** – Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7) has just unveiled the fruits of almost a year’s intensive work that has included the compilation of research, the creation of a tourism-focused image bank, and strategic plans, and is eager to get the word out that Region 7 – Bruce, Grey and Simcoe – is not only the place to visit, but that tourism in the region is going places.

“Since RTO7 got off the ground a year ago an incredible amount of planning and work has taken place to get us to today,” says RTO7 Chair Paul Crysler of Paisley. “We’re excited to make this content available to the region’s tourism organizations and owner-operators.”

RTO7 is a not-for-profit organization created as part of the Ontario government’s regional tourism initiative. Its mandate is to build and support competitive and sustainable tourism in Tourism Region 7, which encompasses Bruce, Grey and Simcoe Counties.

Last year the Ministry of Tourism and Culture created a total of 13 regions in a dramatic makeover of tourism management and funding that was designed to encourage collaboration and industry leadership. The province is funding the 13 RTOs to the tune of \$40 million annually.

According to the organization, tourism is big business. Each year the three counties that comprise Region 7 attract over 9 million visitors, who in 2008 alone spent an estimated \$1.1 billion on everything from food to accommodation to transportation. Tourism accounts for some 27,000 full-time jobs that derive billions more in economic outputs.

RTO7 Director of Marketing Bill Sullivan says that because tourism in the region is dominated by small businesses that operate independently or in small clusters, those statistics surprise even seasoned observers.

The organization has created an online repository of high quality camera-ready photos and video footage that area tourism organizations and owner-operators can access and use, free of charge, for marketing and promotional purposes. All organizations have to do is register and agree to usage and copyright terms.

In addition to imagery, the group is making the large body of research and studies it has amassed over the past year available to tourism stakeholders to support their own planning and needs.

The data were amassed during the organization's first, "transition" year, which ended June 30<sup>th</sup>. The projects, which included destination development planning and studies into waterways, green/sustainable tourism, signage and wayfinding, and winter tourism, accounted for the bulk of the \$2,015,000 the province allocated to RTO7 in 2010/11.

Region 7 tourism stakeholders will be able to access the content through the organization's web site at [www.rto7.ca](http://www.rto7.ca) as of Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Marketing and Partnership Priorities for 2011/12**

RTO7 is currently working with its second year's business plan and a further funding allocation of \$2 million. Fully half that money will be spent on marketing designed to attract consumers to the region, says Sullivan.

"We're launching a fall-themed marketing campaign in a matter of weeks, which will be followed by a winter campaign that will take us through to next March," explains Sullivan. "Both programs will feature market-ready experiences and attractions that showcase what our data show drives the majority of visitors to our region."

The group also intends to develop a consumer-oriented brand to support future marketing efforts. The organization says this will involve extensive research and consultation to ensure the region has an identity that resonates with both the tourism industry and consumers.

Executive Director Jeffrey Schmidt says the other key focus for RTO7 is partnership with the region's tourism organizations and stakeholders. He says that while considerable confusion has surrounded the province's implementation of its regional approach, two things are very clear. The first, he says, is the expectation of made-in-the-region strategies and solutions.

"The second is the ongoing need for partners with which to collaborate." Schmidt says RTOs exist to create synergies, and their role is to leverage existing resources, not replace them. "The region's tourism organizations play a critical role in driving this important economic engine. We want the municipalities and stakeholders that fund tourism to know that their support is as important as ever."

RTO7 Chair Crysler acknowledges that, like many other sectors, tourism is facing its share of challenges in an increasingly competitive environment. "The keys to success are going to be thinking bigger, and working together. If the region prospers, we all stand to win. As has often been said, a rising tide floats all boats."

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