

## MEDIA RELEASE:

### **Minister of Tourism Speaks as BruceGreySimcoe Organization Makes Headway, Unveils New Funding Program**

**BARRIE, November 22, 2012:** Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7), which promotes tourism in the area under the BruceGreySimcoe banner, held an information meeting today to update the local industry on the organization's progress, and to provide a look ahead to marketing and funding initiatives in 2013.

In a noteworthy development, the organization announced that in 2013 it will introduce a new partnership funding program that it says will put up to \$1 million to work in joint projects with tourism businesses and organizations.

"The success of RTO7 and the regional tourism strategy is built on a foundation of great leadership, ongoing collaboration and strong partnerships," said Michael Chan, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. "Working together strategically is what the regional tourism approach is all about. Your efforts will help meet the needs of the consumer, the challenges of a changing economy, and steep competition for the tourist dollar. Ontario is committed to working with you to achieve a stronger industry voice and a more competitive tourism industry."

The meeting provided an opportunity for industry stakeholders to understand where the organization has come from, as well as where it is going, said Paul Crysler, Chair of the organization's board of directors.

"Our brand – BruceGreySimcoe – has only been in the marketplace for a little over six months, so it's still very early days," said Crysler, noting that building awareness remains a big focus. "Our investment in a best-in-class web site and sophisticated online advertising is a leading-edge approach to getting the message out to consumers, and we believe it is already paying dividends."

Marketing Director Bill Sullivan unveiled the organization's winter campaign, explaining that during the 2012/13 year RTO7 will have invested almost half of the organization's \$2 million annual funding in marketing and related initiatives. Sullivan explained that the winter campaign includes Internet, radio and billboard advertising targeting traditional visitors, as well as those who may never have experienced winter in the region.

The organization recently polled business operators and found that 73% reported 2012 repeat business had increased or remained about the same compared to 2011, and that three out of four owners believe that 2013 will be at least as busy as this year. "However, continuing to appeal to existing visitors isn't enough. We also need to attract new visitors, and the unique strength of our winter experiences gives us the perfect opportunity to do exactly that," says Sullivan.

The organization's Executive Director, Jeffrey Schmidt agrees. "Sustainable growth will require more shared effort as well as more resources. Our new partnership funding program will create incentives to deliver both."

The new funding initiative will allow RTO7 to tap into over \$300,000 in extra funding from the province to leverage partner contributions from the private, not-for-profit and municipal sectors to fund projects aimed at developing experiences, promotion, tourist wayfinding and co-operative advertising.

"In and of itself this new money from the province is a significant opportunity," says Schmidt, "But our plan is to go much further. Specifically, RTO7 intends to co-invest in this program to help operators and groups develop and collaboratively promote experiences, and in so doing, effectively make this a truly collaborative, \$1 million program."

RTO7 will roll out the new program in early 2013, with funds from the province slated to start flowing after April 1. In the meantime the organization is working on a number of initiatives including projects to identify opportunities for tourism organizations to align their efforts for mutual benefit, as well as a targeted tourism workforce labour market strategy.

“There’s much work to be done,” says Crysler, who notes that the past year-and-a-half has been challenging for RTO7 as well as the other 12 regional organizations as they carve paths for themselves. “But at the end of the day we’re not doing our job if we’re not working collaboratively for the direct benefit of the operators who depend on tourism for a living. In the year ahead we intend to show just how fully committed we are to that critical objective.”

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#### **About Regional Tourism Organization 7:**

RTO7 provides strategic and collaborative leadership to build, sustain and grow tourism in Bruce, Grey and Simcoe counties. It is one of 13 independent not-for-profit corporations to which the Ontario government provides some \$40 million in annual funding to lead tourism planning, marketing and development in their respective regions.

Quick facts about BruceGreySimcoe tourism:

- In 2010 the three counties that comprise the region attracted an estimated 9.5 million visitors
- Visitors to Bruce, Grey and Simcoe spent an estimated \$1.2 billion in the region, on everything from food & beverage to accommodation to transportation, accounting for almost 7% of \$17.1 billion total Ontario tourism spending in 2010
- Tourism across the region accounts for some 27,000 jobs that deliver billions more in economic outputs
- BruceGreySimcoe has in excess of 25,000 accommodation rooms, including hotels, motels, camping and RV sites, commercial resorts, cabins and B&Bs
- There are over 400 attractions across the region, and over 600 festival and event days each year

#### **For more information:**

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	<b>Consumer sites:</b>	<b>Tourism industry sites:</b>
<b>On the web:</b>	<a href="http://www.BruceGreySimcoe.com">www.BruceGreySimcoe.com</a>	<a href="http://www.rto7.ca">www.rto7.ca</a>
<b>Facebook:</b>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/BruceGreySimcoe">http://www.facebook.com/BruceGreySimcoe</a>	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/RTO7Connection">http://www.facebook.com/RTO7Connection</a>
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