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Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Centre's Official Opening Postponed to 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Amos, Quebec. December, 14, 2010. The official opening of the Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Centre, originally scheduled to open on December 10, has been postponed to early 2011.

Speaking with James Slobodian, chairperson of the Spirit Lake Corporation whose board members have been working on organizing this new museum site “This has been a huge undertaking. Eventhough we have been on target with our construction and renovation plans, due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our Boards’s control, we had to move the date of the opening.”

The Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Center will tell the story of the second largest of the 24 internment sites camps established during Canada’s First Internment Operations 1914 to 1920 and the unjust internment of Ukrainians and others at Sprit Lake near Amos, Quebec. Many families, men, women and children, were taken from Montreal and sent to Spirit Lake. Over the last five months, the solidly built church building where the museum will be established has undergone complete renovations converting the facilities into a modern interpretive museum. New flooring, walls, wiring, have been done by the dedicated construction and electrical crew and all facilities updated, including providing wheel chair accessibility.

Museologists from Quebec City have been working on the information display area in consultation with the Spirit Lake Corporation board members that are overseeing the entire 1.2 million dollars project.

The opening of the Center will now coincide with the marking of the 120 years of Ukrainians coming to Canada 1891-2011.

“I foresee, says project chairperson James Slobodian, that in the year 2011 alone, over 6,000 visitors, including tourists to Northern Quebec, will pass through this Centre. Also, children from 62 schools from the Amos and surrounding area will be taken on tours to learn more about the history of Spirit Lake internment camp. And this does not include the thousands of school children from Rouyn-Noranda, La Sarre and Northern Ontario areas just next to Quebec border. All these schools are already waiting for the Centre to open for educational tours, more than doubling the anticipated visitors annually.”

Quebec has a population of over 6 million and this Centre is creating a buzz and great excitement all over the province. We are working closely with Quebec City and Montreal. Northern Quebec, an important region in the province, is particularly aware the impact it will have drawing visitors all year and thereby, sharing the history of this area.

The Sprit Lake Internment Interpretive Center is a fitting, lasting tribute to remember the difficult road early Ukrainian immigrants and others had to painfully endure in settling their new land. Internment should not have happened and the internment story will be passed onto future generations to better understand Canadian and Quebec history. Recognizing this, the federal government finally established Canada’s First Internment Operation Restitution Fund

Spirit Lake

CAMP DE DÉTENTION EN ABITIBI / 1915-1917

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under the Shevchenko Foundation to help support project such as this. The Centre will also stimulate reflection on the contribution immigrants made over the decades that followed, despite the hardships.

The exact date of the opening will soon be announced, with various dignitaries from the federal, provincial and municipal government confirming their presence.

If descendents of families from Northern Quebec have any photos, clothing, or artifacts dating to the very early history of Ukrainians in the Amos, and Northern Quebec area or wish any further information, please contact James Slobodian, chairperson of the Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Centre at email campspiritlake@cableamos.com or Telephone 819-727-2267

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Photo courtesy film documentary 'Freedom Had A Price'