

Wollaston Heritage wins 2015 Hastings HOTie Award

By Jim Eadie

Word has leaked out that Wollaston Heritage Centre will be this year's winner of the County of Hastings 2015 HOTie Award - Organization of the Year for their relentless hard work. The HOTie awards are given every year at this time in five different categories by Hastings County to recognize businesses or organizations that make significant contribution to tourism in the county. The official announcement will be made during the Tourism Awards celebration to be held at the Stirling Festival Theatre on Nov. 6.

This past summer the Wollaston Heritage organization opened the Heritage Centre for the first time, and according to Edith McCaw saw a steady flow of visitors for their first year.

Since June 2007, a committee has been working towards a vision centered around the old Coe Hill iron mine property, which they now own. This includes restoration of the mineshaft area and head frame to its original character, display of mining and farming artifacts from the 19th century, and reassembly of an old 1890s barn

“We envisage self guided tours of the mine and other areas,” said John Irwin, president of the Wollaston Heritage organization. “We will have space to host community events and festivals.”

The mine has immense historical significance to the area according to Irwin. “It led to the establishment of the hamlet of Coe Hill,” he said. “It also resulted in the building of the Central Ontario Railroad to Coe Hill.” The railroad line was eventually extended to Bancroft, and Hastings Highlands.

In a letter of support for the HOTie award nomination dated Aug. 13, Wollaston Township clerk Jennifer Cohen recognized the dedicated committee and volunteers, their hopes, and the countless hours put into this project over the past eight years.

“The Wollaston Heritage Centre is not just a tourist attraction,” she further noted. “It is an attraction to those interested in genealogy, local history, geology, and antique machinery and equipment. It also plays an integral role in preserving the identity of a small town, and the heritage of the community.”

“This puts us on the map!” said Irwin. “People don't realize the extent of the project here. It has been amazing how many people have come to the Heritage Centre, and didn't know anything about the mine.”

The Wollaston Heritage Centre is located on High St in Coe Hill, just behind the LCBO building. The old mine site is not open yet, but is located nearby on the same property. The Heritage Centre at the present time does not maintain regular winter hours, but anyone interested in learning more or participating in this work can contact Irwin at 613-332-2241.

Wollaston Heritage has also published three books over the past few years detailing local history. All proceeds from the books go towards development of the heritage centre.