

October 7, 2009

Gettysburg expects 4 million in 2013

Planning is under way for the Battle of Gettysburg's 150th anniversary.

By ERIN JAMES

Preparation activities are in full swing for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, an event less than two years away that some expect will bring more than 4 million people to the town where the momentum of the Civil War transferred from the Confederacy to the Union.

Officials are calling the year 2013 Gettysburg's "Olympic moment."

"It's going to be huge for Gettysburg," said Gettysburg Convention and Visitors Bureau President Norris Flowers, adding that an estimate of 4 million visitors is a "conservative number."

The CVB has estimated about 3 million people visited Gettysburg in 2008.

On Tuesday, local and state officials unveiled more details of the sesquicentennial plans that will include all of Pennsylvania's 67 counties but will be largely focused on Gettysburg.

In a live press conference broadcast from Harrisburg to audiences in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Gettysburg, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Barbara Franco said the statewide initiative dubbed Pennsylvania Civil War 150 will tell the story of the war in a technologically-advanced, entertaining and memorable way.

Franco said the goal is to engage new generations by telling the stories of not only Civil War generals but also of civilians, immigrants, women, children and African Americans.

"The story of this war in Pennsylvania is not just tactics and strategy," she said. "It is a story of will and leadership and doubt."

A recently launched Web site, www.pacivilwar150.com, is the focal point of the initiative. Also planned is a Civil War "road show" that will travel to all Pennsylvania counties and enhanced educational curriculum about the Civil War.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Pennsylvania Heritage Society are spearheading the state initiative at the request of Gov. Ed. Rendell.

Locally, Main Street Gettysburg is taking the reins. Other partners include Gettysburg National Military Park, the Gettysburg Foundation, Gettysburg College and the CVB.

Though Tuesday marked the initiative's official announcement, "we've been hard at work for some time," Flowers said.

There's still a lot of work to be done, however.

Like other "Olympic" towns, Gettysburg needs to significantly improve some aspects of its infrastructure before it can accommodate the expected influx of tourists, officials said.

Substantial increases in visitation to Gettysburg are also expected between 2011 and 2015 - the time period that marks the full 150th anniversary of the four-year Civil War.

A committee is looking at ways to improve parking, traffic flow, signage and restroom availability, said Adams County Historical Society Director Wayne Motts, who is chairing the committee.

Gettysburg will likely benefit from those infrastructure improvements for years to come, he added.

Specific details have not yet been ironed out, however, and funding sources could be both public and private, Motts said.

Pennsylvania is not the only state planning an 150th Civil War anniversary commemoration, though most of the others are in the South, said Pennsylvania Heritage Society project Manager James Pickman.

As the site of the Civil War's most famous battle, Gettysburg is crucial to the success of the Pennsylvania project, he said.

"You're pivotal, what happens here in Gettysburg," he said.

ejames@eveningsun.com

ON THE WEB

More information about plans for the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg is available online at www.pacivilwar150.com.