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New website highlights historic properties in Rochester area /MARY BETH ALMOND malmond@candgnews.com /

ROCHESTER - The Rochester-Avon Historical Society unveiled a new website this month they hope will attract tourists to historic properties in the Rochester area.

For over a year, members have worked on the website, www.oaklandregionalhistoricsites.com, which officially went live Oct. 1.

Sponsored and led by the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, the Oakland Regional Historic Sites website is a collaboration of various historical agencies of the greater Rochester area, including the Rochester Avon Historical Society, the Rochester Hills Historic District Commission, the Rochester Historical Commission, the Oakland Township Historical Society and Oakland Township Historic District Commission.

Rochester-Avon Historical Society President Rod Wilson said the database is designed to be a one-stop resource for anyone interested in exploring a community's historic sites.

"If someone goes to the website, up will come a map of the Rochester area, and it will include Rochester, Rochester Hills and Oakland Township. There will be pins on the map, and if you put the cursor over the pins, it will give you an address. If you click on that, up will come a picture of that location along with the history of that location," Wilson said.

James Hopkins, a member of the Board of Directors for the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, said the website is also meant to encourage local history education and research, appreciation and support of local resources, and heritage tourism by increasing the awareness of people and government organizations to the historic properties and areas inside their municipalities.

"We found that when we almost lost the (Lysander) Woodward House in Rochester, various people didn't know it was there and the historical value behind it," he said. "We wanted to get that info out there, other than on our regular website, so we thought that an interactive map with historic sites and historic information about each site was the perfect way to do that." The Rochester-Avon Historical Society decided to open the website to other historical societies, Hopkins said, to create a synergy and bring awareness of what people have available to them.

"Since then, what I've found is there is tremendous interest by government and other historical societies to have a place where people can get together and interact with information," Hopkins said.

Historical society members intentionally created the website with a regional scope, in the hopes that neighboring communities will join the effort and make the site a truly regional resource.

"We are opening this up to areas beyond Oakland County, like Shelby Township, Washington Township, Macomb County, and so on, to eliminate these political boundaries. When our families came here in the early 1800s, there weren't any political boundaries, people went where the land was good," Hopkins said. At press time, over 100 historical sites

were included on the interactive map - mainly in the city of Rochester - but over the next few months, Wilson said, other communities would add their sites to the map.

"We can't have everything in there right in the beginning, so it will be ongoing and we will continue adding sites, and other communities will continue adding sites," he said.

Hopkins said the website will constantly be updated as new information becomes available on the properties.

"The content will get richer and richer," he added.

For more information, email admin@rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org.

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