

MEDIA RELEASE with photo

SPIRIT LAKE CENTRE WINS LES GRANDS PRIX DU TOURISME QUÉBÉCOIS

La Ferme/UCC Montreal: Camp Spirit Lake Internment Interpretative Centre, the first internment interpretative museum established in 2010, won the highest award at the “Les Grands Prix du Tourisme Québécois”. The announcement was made on March 14 at a special gala ceremony held at Hotel d’Eskers in Amos, Quebec in the presence of over 600 guests at the banquet dinner, after being short-listed weeks ago in the competition.

A standing ovation was given to James Slobodian and his team, following his acceptance speech for Spirit Lake Centre’s victory. This top award was granted by a Special Jury, with Spirit Lake out winning over many project-entries in various categories in the 29th annual competition. The prestigious, hand crafted trophy, designed by Jacques Baril was presented as the Jury’s Choice at the end, as the Grand prize.

The competition is sponsored by Desjardins of Quebec head office in Montreal, with participation of the City of Amos, major Quebec corporations such as Hydro-Quebec, Quebec Ministry of Tourism, Quebec Development Corporation, NRJ Radio (Bell Affiliate), IGA-Sobeys, Federal Government Canada and others. Although it does not come with monetary support, the aim is to acknowledge and bring attention to Quebec projects of excellence whose programs have an outstanding impact on the general Quebec community and worthy of public interest.

With the victory, Spirit Lake received thousands of dollars of free mainstream media advertising by NRJ Radio (Bell Affiliate), to help inform and encourage visits to this Centre. During the gala banquet ceremony numerous media outlets were present from the press, radio and television from Quebec and other Northern Ontario cities. Spirit Lake has been receiving major coverage. Attending the event were twelve mayors from the many cities and towns in the Abitibi area including Rouyn-Noranda, Val d’Or, Amos; Vice-Premier of Quebec François Gendron; and others.

In his acceptance speech, James Slobodian, chair of Camp Spirit Lake Corporation, thanked the Special Jury for this unexpected, prestigious award. He expressed his gratitude for the Jury’s recognition of the work of this unique Centre which tells the story of the still little known, unjust internment of 1,200 innocent men, women and children, mainly Ukrainians taken to Spirit Lake 1915-17, during Canada’s First National internment operations between 1914-20. He mentioned, the Centre recalls one aspect of early Ukrainian immigration to Quebec, the hardships they endured, their eventual release, and their later contribution to the growth and prosperity of the Abitibi region of Quebec and beyond. The Centre helps further public awareness. With the present international focus on Ukraine, Mr. Slobodian mentioned the current crisis in Ukraine and the efforts of the Ukrainian people to live in freedom, just as the early Ukrainian immigrants that came to

Quebec valued and yearned for freedom above all else. **He also thanked Andrij Hladyshevsky, president of The Shevchenko Foundation and its Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund that gave a major grant to help develop the Centre.**

Several representatives from the Spirit Lake Corporation board of directors that oversees the working of the Centre's museum, were Marcel Kurello, Mary Kureluk, Eric LaRose, Madame Larochelle (mayor of Trecesson), Alice Levasseur (councilor of Trecesson), Lucie Alaire and Monique Cossette attended, all sharing in the trophy's presentation.

The Centre is open twelve months a year, providing guided tours in French, English or Ukrainian. Spirit Lake is included as a "most recommended museum" to be visited by various organization in Quebec, other provinces and Europe, and by Quebec Tourist companies.

Spirit Lake Centre is uniquely located on the vast, wooded grounds of the original internment camp 350 miles north of Montreal, naturally capturing the sense of isolation and trepidation experienced by the original internees. The Museum's walls constructed from the original stones chiseled by the internees, holds authentic artifacts discovered from that period, with many more being found. The Centre incorporates showings of the historical documentaries Freedom Had A Price and Ukrainians in Quebec helping to help better understand the historic context of internment (available at: www.yluhovy.com).

This year marks the 100 anniversary of Canada's First National Internment Operations 1914-2014. Receiving the award by Spirit Lake Centre is a fitting way to draw attention to the internment story and the Centre's work. Spirit Lake has major upcoming projects being planned in the next months, with details to follow.

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Photo ID

James Slobodian (right) giving acceptance speech, with members of the Spirit Lake Corporation board of directors standing on the left.

Photo courtesy of: Guy Lacroix, L'Echo Abitibien (Quebecor Media)