

## **OHTO Embraces Small Town Pride at 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tourism Conference and AGM**

PEMBROKE, ON (October 31 , 2013) – Businesses from across the Ontario’s Highlands region gathered in Tweed on Monday to talk tourism, network with industry partners and catch up on the innovative ways the Ontario’s Highlands Tourism Organization (OHTO) is working with local communities to support tourism development in the region. But the conversation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tourism Conference and AGM wasn’t all “business”: on the agenda, between a review of the organization’s Annual Report and an election of a new Board of Directors, were butter tarts, fossils, motorcycles and a little thing called “small town pride” –which, as it turns out, can impact tourism in a huge way.

Throughout the day, approximately 100 of OHTO’s partners, members and stakeholders who filled the seats at Trudeau’s Park Resort were reminded of the many unique, authentic and down-right incredible rural experiences that differentiate Ontario’s Highlands – an entirely rural region that stretches from Haliburton to the Upper Ottawa Valley– from the rest of the province. Michael Bainbridge, OHTO’s Recreational Geology Project Coordinator, presented Ontario’s Highlands as a region with a rich mining heritage, making it “one of the most unique geological environments within the whole country” and contributing to everything from the best maple syrup to the best touring routes. Next, Chris Hughes, motorcycle rider and co-owner of BC Hughes, gave a run-down of the region’s best, bendiest and most “badass” motorcycle routes. Hughes shared stories and photos from a recent summer riding tour that had him “experiencing local culture, taking goofy pictures, eating great food and meeting hearty, honest and genuine people” that make up the communities located within the Ontario’s Highlands region ( a stop at a local butter tart shop being one of his favourites).

Afternoon speakers urged local business owners and communities to create memorable “Bucket List” experiences for visitors by celebrating their towns’ deeper stories. “Wear your heart on your sleeve,” said Dan Fallak and Emily Arbour of Small Town Thinking, an Almonte-based creative consulting company. “and embrace your small town pride.” Stephanie Hessel, OHTO’s Tourism Development & Industry Relations Coordinator, did just that by awarding several local business owners with OHvation designations, recognizing that the hard-working people of Ontario’s Highlands offer excellent customer service to go alongside their already friendly smiles and exceptional stories.

“Visitors travelling to Ontario’s Highlands are looking for our unique small-town experience,” says Nicole Whiting, Executive Director. “We are excited to continue working with our industry to tell the amazing stories of our land and our people through the travel experiences we have to offer.” Plans for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Tourism Conference and AGM are already underway.

**About the OHTO**

The OHTO is a not-for-profit organization mandated by the Province of Ontario to increase tourism within the counties of Haliburton, Lanark, and Renfrew and portions of Frontenac, Hastings, and Lennox and Addington. Find out more about the OHTO at [www.ohto.ca](http://www.ohto.ca).

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