

Collaboration and Innovation Key Messages at 1st annual Tourism Conference

Pembroke, ON (October 31, 2011) – The tourism industry in the Ontario's Highlands region gathered at the River's Edge Golf and Country Club in Bancroft on October 26 for the Ontario's Highlands Tourism Organization's (OHTO) first annual Tourism Conference. This landmark, sold-out event marked the first anniversary of the OHTO. It offered attendees a day of presentations and seminars with a focus on using digital assets to increase tourism in the region. The day included the launch of the innovative new Ontario's Highlands regional travel website at <http://ontarioshighlands.ca>, and a draw for an iPad 2 which was won by Mike Beeston of Canadian Radio Syndications.

"The fact that our Tourism Conference was a sold-out event speaks loudly to the importance of tourism in our local communities," says Nicole Whiting, OHTO Manager. "We were proud to present the many successes we've had over the past year, especially in the digital marketplace. Our organization is at the forefront among other Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) in Ontario, as evidenced by initiatives such as our free mobile travel app for Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch), which has been downloaded over 1000 times by people as far away as China and Germany. We have a landing page on TripAdvisor and we just launched an innovative travel website that will enable visitors to book packages to the region online. We recognize the incredible potential of reaching customers looking for the travel experiences we have to offer through technology and will continue to bring these kinds of opportunities to the region over the next year, and for many years to come."

Attendees at the Conference were invited to attend free seminars to help them improve the digital offerings of their own businesses. An SEO seminar, *Demystifying Google: Practical Tips for Better Rankings*, was conducted by Helen Overland, Vice President of Search Engine People (SEP), Canada's largest search marketing firm. Additionally, a seminar focused on the value of developing packages to attract customers was delivered by Jill Vandal, Partner at The Tourism Company.

The OHTO is governed by a Board of Directors nominated through eight partner organizations. Seven new Directors were officially elected to the Board during the Conference. The 2011/2012 Board, which provides complete regional geographic representation, includes:

- Chair: George Offshack, Limerick Lake Lodge & Marina
- Jim Bakker, Madoc & District Chamber of Commerce
- Dave Bishop, Haliburton Forest & Wildlife Reserve
- Bob Cheetham, Town of Smiths Falls
- Kevin Cruickshank, The Loon's Call Campground & Cottage Resort
- Jody Didier, Bancroft & District Chamber of Commerce
- Paula Harding, The Unconventional Moose
- Chris Hinsperger, Bonnechere Caves
- Christine Lightbody, Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn

- Melissa Marquardt, Ottawa Valley Tourist Association
- Rob Plumley, Lennox & Addington County
- Laurel Smith, Classic Theatre Festival
- Robert Smith, County of Haliburton
- Janet Stavinga, Algonquins of Ontario
- Marie White, Lanark County Tourism Association

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. The OHTO works in collaboration with eight sub-regional marketing organizations, tourism agencies and authorities including: Algonquin Nation, Bancroft & District Chamber of Commerce, ComfortCountry.ca, Haliburton Highlands, Lanark County Tourism, Land O' Lakes Tourist Association, Ottawa Valley Tourist Association, and the Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association. Find out more about the OHTO at <http://www.ohto.ca>

For more information, please contact the Ontario's Highlands Tourism Organization at 613-629-6486 or info@ohto.ca

