FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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South Haven Celebrates Its Sesquicentennial

The lakefront community of South Haven will be celebrating a special moment in history during 2019 with the celebration of its Sesquicentennial.

It was 150 years ago (1869) that South Haven was incorporated as a village. The area traces its roots many years before that. The Ottawa, Miami and Pottawatomie Native American tribes first developed the area before settlement. They called the area “Ni-No-Kong” or “beautiful sunset.”

The first settlers arrived in the 1830s. A community was platted in 1852 and it took until 1869 for South Haven to officially become a village. In 1902 South Haven became incorporated as a city.

“The city’s centennial year in 1969 was cause for a great community celebration,” noted resident Tom Renner. “Several of us current residents fondly remember that time so we approached city leaders about the possibility of celebrating the Sesquicentennial year. The response from Mayor Scott Smith, City Manager Brian Dissette and his staff has been overwhelmingly encouraging.”

Mayor Smith responded: “As Mayor, I am proud to see our residents and visitors observing 150 years as a city. This celebration will be a great opportunity to honor our past and celebrate our future. South Haven is truly an amazing city. We have wonderful people, natural resources in our beaches, parks and trails and so much more. I hope everyone is able to take some time to celebrate our history and become part of our future.”

Groups of community leaders have been meeting in recent months to discuss celebration possibilities. The leadership of the South Haven Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau and Greater South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce has been actively involved in the early planning. Advisory committees have been created and are working.

A Sesquicentennial logo highlighting South Haven’s heritage has been developed by Marketing Committee member Jen Sistrunk and a website (www.southhaven.org/150) designed by the Visitors Bureau’s Amanda Owens has been launched. Soon there will be billboards along Michigan Interstate highways and advertisements in travel guides announcing the Sesquicentennial.

The official kickoff is being planned for Friday, May 10 with a community picnic and other activities at
Stanley Johnston Park. “The event is in the planning stages and will be very family-oriented,” said Rosalie Plechaty, kickoff event chair.

Unlike the 1969 Centennial when the celebration centered around a single week, the Sesquicentennial will be marked by events throughout the remainder of the year.

“South Haven is blessed with many outstanding established events for residents and visitors alike,” noted Scott Reinert, executive director of the Visitors Bureau. “We want to capitalize on these great traditional events by adding the Sesquicentennial identity to them.”

For example, the Fourth of July Parade, a South Haven tradition that goes back to 1849, will have a Sesquicentennial theme according to Becky Kark, editor of the South Haven Tribune who sponsors the event.

The traditional Michigan Mayor Exchange Day, scheduled for August, will match South Haven with Portland which is also celebrating its Sesquicentennial.

Organizations such as the Historical Association of South Haven (HASH), Lake Michigan Maritime Museum, Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, the South Haven Arts Center, Scott Club and others say they will focus some of their 2019 activities on the Sesquicentennial. As they become available event details will be posted on www.southhaven.org/150.

South Haven Postmaster Melissa Fillip has announced that a commemorative postal cancellation will be created in honor of the Sesquicentennial.

Help from the community is being sought. For example, the organization SHOUT is interested in having its annual Cottage Walk, scheduled for Saturday, June 29, focus on historic homes. Interested homeowners are asked to contact event chair Sue Cunningham, 269-639-8657.

A fundraising initiative is underway through the Historical Association of South Haven (HASH). If there are any surplus proceeds when the celebration has concluded, they will be donated to causes that further the legacy of the community.

Community organizations or individuals wishing to become engaged in the Sesquicentennial celebration should contact City Manager Brian Dissette (bdissette@south-haven.com).

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Photo Attachment Explanation
South Haven has a long history as an active Lake Michigan port. In black and white photo courtesy of the Historical Association of South Haven, the steamer the City of South Haven, with a capacity of over 2,000 passengers, is pictured in the early 1900s entering the harbor and at the William Street dock while the aerial photo shows a bustling recreational harbor during the 2017 Queen’s Cup Regatta.