FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2019

South Haven Sesquicentennial Celebration Begins on Friday, May 10

The biggest birthday bash in South Haven history will kick-off the community’s Sesquicentennial celebration on Friday, May 10 when residents gather in historic Stanley Johnston Park for a picnic featuring free food, entertainment, activities for kids and trips down memory lane.

A way to begin the commemoration of South Haven’s 150 years of existence, first as a village in 1869 and since 1902 as a city, has been in the planning stages for several months. May 10 was chosen as it is the date in 1869 when the first village council met to approve the articles of incorporation.

“We also chose May 10 for the launch because it is before South Haven’s tourist rush and we want this to be community-focused, a big ‘ole fashion neighborhood block party,” said planning chair Rosalie Plechaty. “And the best part is that it will be free thanks to the generous financial support of businesses, organizations and individuals.”

Stanley Johnston Park, located on the city’s north side near the Dyckman Avenue drawbridge, was selected for the kickoff because of its historic significance to the community. The area was first known as the Grove when it became a public park in the 1890s, was named Oakland Park in later years because of its stately oak trees and renamed in 1969 as part of the city’s Centennial celebration to honor horticulturist Stanley Johnston who is credited for developing the Haven line of peaches. The park overlooks the city’s historic Black River harbor.

The May 10 kickoff will begin at 4 p.m. and run until 7 p.m. The traditional hot dogs picnic will be highlighted by peach and blueberry flavored Sherman’s ice cream. Entertainment will run from 4:30 until 6 p.m. A formal program, highlighted by the unveiling of a plaque recognizing the Sesquicentennial by the Historical Society of Michigan and other recognitions, will begin at 6 p.m.

Throughout the three-hour-long event there will be a clothes line display featuring vintage items, old-fashioned games for kids, a pickup vintage baseball game, and an antique fire truck and other vehicles from a bygone era. The South Haven History Club and Historical Association of South Haven (HASH) will also present videos of South Haven’s past.

The entertainment will include the Shoreline Dance Academy, vocalists Joe Foster and Pam Chappell

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presenting their historic South Haven songs, the Silver Bag Ladies’ “Letters from the Frontier” and balladeer Ron Van Lente. Mayor Scott Smith will be the master of ceremony.

The winners of an art contest co-sponsored by the South Haven Center for the Arts and South Haven Public Schools will be recognized.

Representatives from the South Haven Post Office will be present to unveil a commemorative Sesquicentennial postal cancellation. A free postcard will be distributed to the first 500 families in attendance.

Commemorative Sesquicentennial items will be available for sale for the first time with proceeds benefiting the Historical Association of South Haven.

The committee is planning for up to 1,000 attendees. Period clothing is being encouraged.

An alternate location should the weather challenge the day is the South Haven High School. If needed, information on a change in venue will be posted on the website southhaven.org/150 and social media sites.

The Sequicentennial is a year-long celebration culminating with New Years Eve in the Haven. Events already on the calendar for the month of May include Farm History Day at the Michigan Flywheelers Museum on May 10 (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.), 150 Years of the Scott Club on May 11, Blessing of the Fleet at Michigan Maritime Museum on May 24, the opening of a new exhibit at the Historical Association of South Haven on May 25 and the annual Harbor Walk of the Michigan Maritime Museum on May 30. The growing list of activities can be found at southhaven.org/150.

The Sesquicentennial planning group consists of nearly 40 volunteers with strong support from City of South Haven staff, the South Haven Convention and Visitors Bureau and South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce.

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