

ANC-4 1999

Ruins grant welcome but more still needed

BY DEREK GORDANIER

News Editor

Another federal grant has been approved for the restoration of St. Raphael's ruins, but the committee overseeing the work needs much more money to complete the project.

Parks Canada's \$92,800 grant through the National Cost-Sharing Program, announced July 30 by Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh MP Bob Kilger, is merely the final installment of the federal government's \$238,800 share of a \$626,000 restoration project underway at the ruins.

The Friends of the Ruins Inc., the group overseeing the restoration, also received a \$146,000 grant earlier this year through the federal Millennium Partner Program.

The infusion of grant money hasn't been a bonus for the Friends, however. In fact, those funds were spent long before they arrived.

To qualify for the grant money, the committee was required to stake a two-thirds contribution. The Friends in turn borrowed \$160,000 on the strength of the grants.

"Part of the problem is that people read of the grants and think we no longer need assistance," said Ian McLeod, Friends of the Ruins Committee Vice-Chair.

"The executive has borrowed to meet the demands of spending this year," McLeod said, "we're not complaining, but we've got our necks stuck out there."

The millennium money is paid the Friends upon receipt of invoices, but the Parks Canada contribution is staggered over three years, with \$40,000 approved up front.

A 1995 estimate by Keller Engineering Associates pegged the cost of completely restoring the ruins at

about \$626,000.

Applications for grants were made based on that estimate three years ago, although the true cost of the restoration in 1999 dollars is closer to \$875,000.

"If we had proceeded with the work initially we'd have been all right, but we didn't have the grants and fund raising lined up," McLeod said.

The committee will complete \$567,000 of work in this fiscal year. That work includes complete restoration of the interior, repointing and earthquake stabilization.

Further fund raising will be needed to repair the ruins' exterior, the final stage of the restoration.

In 1986, the Ontario Heritage Foundation and the Township of Charlottenburgh spent about \$250,000 to cap the walls and complete some stone repointing. It was the first major expenditure on restoration since the 1970 fire that destroyed the church.

In 1994, the Friends formed to take over ownership of the ruins from the township and to plan its restoration. The federal government designated the ruins a national historic site a year later.

Kilger, who announced the Parks Canada grant Thursday, said the ruins have become a major tourist site in the area.

"I share the desire of the Friends of the Ruins to be able to open the gates for all to visit this important site," he said.

Begun in 1815, St. Raphael's Catholic Church was built by Father Alexander Macdonnell, the first Bishop of Upper Canada. Macdonnell administered his parish from St. Raphael's at a time when it covered all of Ontario and included more than 6,000 parishioners.