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Contact: Jim Watson, DECD, 860-270-8182 (office), 860-306-3737 (cell)

jim.watson@ct.gov



State Launches ‘Our Places, Our Stories’ Initiative to Bring Connecticut’s Ethnic History to Life

The State Historic Preservation Office of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development seeks grant applicants for its “Our Places, Our Stories” initiative – a program designed to raise awareness for the rich cultural assets of our ethnic nationalities. The first phase of the initiative will document the state’s assets, followed by a second phase that will market them as a visitor experience.

Connecticut has more than 100 different organized historical and cultural societies for specific nationalities. This initiative is meant to mobilize and finance them so they can tell their stories in a compelling way. It complements the MyCTStory.com contest, which invites Connecticut residents to tell their favorite stories about the state, as part of a state branding effort for tourism and economic development.

“Connecticut’s story is perhaps best summarized by our state motto, ‘Qui Transtulit Sustinet,’ which roughly translated means ‘Where the Immigrant Prospers,’” said DECD Deputy Commissioner Kip Bergstrom. “For more than 350 years, immigrant communities have prospered in our state. We need to use the power of the stories carried by our cultural landscapes to make sure that the state motto holds true today and into the future.”

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is launching this effort in partnership with ethnic historical and cultural organizations throughout the state. Phase I will document the historical links between the people of various ethnic communities and the cultural landscapes they created: neighborhoods, buildings, shops, sites and events. Up to \$20,000 in non-matching funds are available in Phase I through the SHPO’s Survey and Planning Grant Program to heritage organizations, historical societies, and cultural organizations that are 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organizations. Guidelines and the application are available at www.cultureandtourism.org. For more information contact Cora Murray, at cora.murray@ct.gov.

Phase II will use the stories developed in Phase I to create and market our cultural landscapes as lively visitor experiences via Web sites, bus tours, smart phone applications, brochures and other media.

The SHPO is also partnering with the Connecticut Humanities Council to collect and preserve oral histories related to the ethnic communities that have created our cultural landscapes. A day-long conference called “Our State, Our Stories” will be held June 4, at Manchester Community College to develop the capacity of individuals and organizations to collect and preserve oral histories. The conference will feature David Isay, president and founder of the national oral history initiative StoryCorps. For more information on how to participate contact Melissa@ctculture.org.