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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2008

WILL COUNTY RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS DESIGNATION AS A PRESERVE AMERICA COMMUNITY ***County Executive Walsh Receives Official Nod from First Lady Laura Bush***

A letter from First Lady Laura Bush came to Will County Executive Larry Walsh recently – and it held some very good news. As honorary chair of *Preserve America*, a White House initiative that supports and helps preserve community history, Mrs. Bush notified Executive Walsh that the County of Will has been designated a Preserve America Community.

“Being designated a Preserve America community is an unbelievable tribute to Will County,” said Walsh. “We have so much to be proud of when it comes to our history and heritage - and through this distinction, others will learn of our legacy as well.”

This recognition is no small achievement. Award recipients are determined through a series of criteria including their accomplishments in the use and preservation of cultural or natural heritage assets. They also must demonstrate a commitment to protect and interpret America’s cultural or natural heritage assets, integrate these assets into contemporary community life and showcase local historic resources.

“The preservation and enjoyment of your historical and cultural resources celebrate an important part of our nation’s heritage,” said Mrs. Bush in the letter. “You (Will County) honor our nation’s past and inspire and educate for the future.”

The Preserve America program recognizes and designates communities, including neighborhoods in large cities. The use of a community’s historic assets for economic development and community revitalization are also part of the program’s criteria.

"They also look for communities that encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources through education and heritage tourism programs," explained Amy Munro, Will County Land Use Department historic preservation manager and liaison to the county's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

Munro, along with the HPC, and members of Land Use and the Executive's Office worked together to pursue the Preserve America designation and complete the lengthy application process. The Will County Board unanimously approved a resolution to apply for the distinction in May 2006.

"When we initially submitted our application, we were asked to strengthen at least one area of our historic preservation program to achieve Preserve America status and decided to focus on the heritage tourism component," added Munro. "Over the course of the time that followed, the Commission worked to develop this programming area."

By enhancing the county's programming, new publication materials were created that profiled the mission and work of HPC, and further promoted historic sites and landmarks.

"None of this would have been possible without the tremendous work and support of County citizens and elected officials, as well as our partnerships with other heritage organizations," Munro added.

Although the designation is recent, the Commission has been actively engaged in efforts to incorporate the preservation of Will County historic and cultural assets in its growth and development plans for over 15 years.

"Since the 1992 establishment of Will County's HPC, the Commission has been honored to work on preserving the main streets of our County's small towns, the barns and houses dotting our rural landscape, and the other landmarks that add meaning and value to the lives of our community life," said Virginia Ferry, historic preservation commission chair. "We are so thrilled that the County has been recognized at the national level for its historic preservation efforts."

Benefits include White House recognition; eligibility to apply for Preserve America grants; a certificate of recognition; authorization to use the Preserve America logo, inclusion in the Preserve America website directory; inclusion in national and regional press releases; official notification of designation to state tourism offices and visitor's bureau; and an official Preserve America Community road sign. Preserve America communities are also featured in National Register Travel Itineraries and "Teaching With Historic Places" curricular materials created by the National Park Service.

"We are enthused by the benefits that this designation will provide in promoting our historic landmarks to those within and outside of the County," said Curt Paddock, Director of county's Land Use Department. "This designation is a tremendous accomplishment for the County"

Since the inception of the Preserve America initiative, Mrs. Bush has designated 608 communities (including 14 neighborhoods and two tribal communities) in all 50 states and one U. S. territory. Last year's award recipients included the History Channel- Save our History nationwide program; Downtown St. Louis Revitalization, Missouri; USS *Midway* Museum, San Diego, California; and Natchitoches-Cane River Region Heritage Tourism Initiative, Louisiana. This year's awards will be given in May 2008 during Preservation month.

"Like many of the past recipients, Will County has gone through quite a transformation due to growth and economic development," said Walsh. "So I'm extremely pleased that as we continue to make progress as a county, we've never lost our sense of history, tradition and heritage. And thanks to the hard work of many, we will be recognized nationwide for it as well."

A special Preserve America Community celebration is being planned for Preservation Month in May. The Commission is also co-sponsoring a two-day rural heritage conference by the Illinois Barn Alliance on June 13 and 14. The conference will offer a barn tour, along with discussion on barns and farms, what threatens them and what steps are being taken to protect them.

For more information contact Amy Munro at (815) 774-3364 or at amunro@willcountylanduse.com. More information on the Preserve America initiative is at www.willcountylanduse.com/HPC or www.preserveamerica.gov.

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