



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 25, 2006

Contact: Julie Connolly 312-233-1246
julie.connolly@edelman.com

NEW ONLINE TOUR PLANNER MAKES ILLINOIS THE ULTIMATE GROUP TOUR DESTINATION

*Exciting itineraries and group-friendly accommodations
all available at www.tourillinois.org*

CHICAGO – Illinois' newly redesigned online group tour site, www.tourillinois.org, is one of the fastest, easiest-to-navigate resources of its type, offering tour operators pre-planned itineraries and a valuable downloadable travel planner featuring wineries, outdoor recreation, museums and more.

Now, visitors to the updated group tour site will find it easier than ever to locate pre-planned group tour itineraries sorted by region or theme. For instance, **See the Sites in Central Illinois** is a regional tour that takes visitors on a ride down the newly named National Scenic Byway Route 66 and on a tour of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield. It also provides a glimpse of Alaskan reindeer at Hardy's Reindeer Ranch in Rantoul. The **Harvest Tours in the Heartland** is a themed trip that takes visitors through family-owned wineries, Amish farms and John Deere historic sites and attractions statewide.

The Web site will also keep operators current on the most exciting new attractions and events throughout the state, including:

Chicago

This spring, Chicago's Field Museum will send visitors back in time with its newest landmark exhibit, **Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs**. The exhibition, May 26, 2006 - Jan. 1, 2007, features more than 130 major artifacts from King Tut's tomb and other royal graves of Egypt's Valley of the Kings.

For more information, contact The Field Museum (312-665-7300, www.fieldmuseum.org).

More than 20 vessels sail into Chicago this summer for **Tall Ships Chicago 2006**, Aug. 3-9. The festival brings these magnificent ships to the shores of Lake Michigan, where the boats will dock along Navy Pier, the Chicago River and DuSable Harbor. Groups will have the opportunity to board the vessels to learn about the ships and get a glimpse of sailing life in the 1800s.

For more information, contact the Mayor's Office of Special Events (312-744-3315, www.tallshipschicago.net).

Sports enthusiasts can swing over to U.S. Cellular Field to see the **2005 World Champion Chicago White Sox** home opener on April 2 when the Sox take on the Cleveland Indians.

-more-

Baseball fans can also head over to the historic Wrigley Field for the **Chicago Cubs** home opener on April 7 against the St. Louis Cardinals.

For more information, contact the Chicago White Sox (866-769-4263, www.whitesox.com) or the Chicago Cubs (773-404-CUBS, www.cubs.com).

Chicago's exciting theater scene presents vibrant performances this year. Shows include "**The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee**," now playing for an extended run at the Drury Lane Theatre Water Tower Place and at the LaSalle Bank Theatre, "**Golda's Balcony**" in June and "**Altar Boyz**," Oct. 11-22.

For more information on group tickets, contact Broadway in Chicago (312-977-1710, www.broadwayinchicago.com).

Chicagoland

Beyond Chicago, group tour visitors will delight in a rewarding outlet shopping experience at the **Chicago Premium Outlets** in Aurora. The outlets feature more than 120 stores offering the finest designer labels and brands for less, including Kate Spade, Polo Ralph Lauren and J. Crew. Groups of 10 or more can receive discount coupons to be used at participating stores, and many area hotels offer group rates and special packages to visiting shoppers.

For more information, contact Chicago Premium Outlets (630-585-2021, www.premiumoutlets.com).

Tractor enthusiasts will enjoy the five-day **Heritage Tractor Adventure** along the I&M Canal, June 10-14. This historic ride begins at the Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, where more than 300 participants rev up their tractor engines for the 100-mile trek. Spectators and drivers will enjoy great food, entertainment and unusual vintage tractors.

For more information, contact the Heritage Tractor Adventure (www.heritagetractoradventure.com).

Northern

DeKalb's first annual **Heartland International Tattoo**, March 25 and 26, is the first musical Tattoo in the Midwest. The Tattoo, a signal sounded on a drum or bugle to summon soldiers, is an event that honors all U.S. military bands. The show will dazzle spectators with more than 350 musicians and entertainers that includes brass bands, drum corps, wind bands, bagpipes and an array of dancers.

For more information, contact the Heartland International Tattoo (815-756-1263, www.heartlandtattoo.org).

The Burpee Museum of Natural History in Rockford presents Jane, a 66 million-year-old dinosaur skeleton, at **Jane: Diary of a Dinosaur**. Museum guests will learn how scientists worked to uncover Jane's identity as a juvenile Tyrannosaurus rex and will receive an up-close view of this fascinating prehistoric creature. Visitors will also learn about her discovery through an exhibit that includes photos, maps and videos.

For more information, contact the Burpee Museum of Natural History (815-965-3433, www.burpee.org).

Visitors to Galena can get a scare on the **Annie Wiggins Ghost Tour**. Departing from the historic Annie Wiggins Guest House, this walking tour features Galena's historic sites and cemeteries, as well as legends and famous ghostly tales. The tour is available Fridays and Saturdays from May through October.

For more information, contact Annie Wiggins Ghost Tour (815-777-0336, www.anniewiggins.com).

Central

Rockome Gardens, a family tourist attraction and Amish theme park in Arcola, features horse-drawn carriage rides and corn husking with antique farm equipment. Groups can also shop at more than 15 specialty stores or take a stroll through the beautiful gardens.

For more information, contact Rockome Gardens (217-268-4106, www.rockome.com).

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield features **Mrs. President: From Martha to Laura**, May 13 – Oct. 29. The exhibit explores the role of America's first ladies throughout history. Their stories will be told through hundreds gowns, historical artifacts, White House furnishings and intimate letters. The narratives will be greatly enhanced by a series of related women's programs, lectures, conferences and more.

For more information, contact the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (217-558-8844, www.alplm.org).

Middle Fork Canoe Outfitters in Danville provides outdoor enthusiasts the opportunity to paddle down 50 miles of the Middle Fork, North Fork, Salt Fork or Big Vermilion rivers. For a complete outdoor group tour, visitors can hike over gorgeous trails that pass through scenic forest and prairie landscapes at either Kennekuk County Park or Forest Glen Preserve.

For more information, contact Middle Fork Canoe Outfitters (217-442-4571, www.middleforkcanoes.com).

Western

RiverWay 2006 in Quad Cities is the 150th anniversary celebration of the country's first railroad bridge to cross the continent, successfully joining the east and west across the Mississippi River. To help celebrate, groups will receive discounts on steam locomotive rides, boat cruises, hotels and more.

For more information contact the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau (800-747-7800, www.visitquadcities.com).

The **Galesburg Railroad Museum** explores America's railroad industry and its great influence on the city of Galesburg for the last 150 years. The museum houses original railroad memorabilia including photographs, conductor uniforms and historical information. The museum also provides tours for groups of ten or more.

For more information, contact the Galesburg Railroad Museum (309-342-9400, www.galesburgrailroadmuseum.org).

Southern

Blue Sky Vineyard, the newest addition to the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, allows visitors to savor the flavor of Illinois while tasting wine in a Tuscan-style villa. Groups can discover all the riches of Illinois wine country during Illinois Wine Month in September with wine tastings, grape stomps, Oktoberfests and more.

For more information, contact Blue Sky Vineyard (618-955-WINE, www.blueskyvineyard.com) or the Illinois Grape Growers and Vintners Association (217-473-6845, www.illinoiswine.com).

The **Shawnee Hills Barn Trail** takes visitors on a tour of scenic Union County to observe these rural icons. Guests will explore the history of barns and embrace their rustic charm in this quaint part of the state. Local communities have preserved the celebrated barns by adding shops and attractions for visitors to enjoy.

For more information, contact Union County Chamber of Commerce (618-833-6311, www.shawneeheartland.com).

Southwest

The **Riverside Flea Market** in Grafton invites antique-lovers to shop for vintage collectibles on the fourth weekend of every month from April through October. The market boasts a wide selection of crafts, antiques and delicious food.

For more information, contact the Alton Convention and Visitors Bureau (618-465-6676 or 618-786-8210, www.visitilton.com).

Camp River DuBois: Point of Departure, May 13 and 14, celebrates the departure of the Lewis & Clark Expedition from Camp River DuBois in Hartford, where the members of the Corps of Discovery set out on their epic westward journey. History will come alive as costumed actors demonstrate blacksmithing, coopering, candle making, weaving, spinning, cooking and many other activities.

For more information, contact the Lewis & Clark State Historic Site (618-251-5811, www.campdubois.com).

In addition, visitors to www.tourillinois.org will have access to a free, downloadable *Team Illinois Group Travel Planner* which offers detailed information on many of Illinois' tour-friendly accommodations with descriptions of each facility's amenities.

For more information about group tour travel options in Illinois, visit **www.tourillinois.org** or call **1-866-TOURSIL**. The Illinois Bureau of Tourism also offers free travel resources featuring seasonal information statewide that is available by calling **1-800-2CONNECT** or by visiting the bureau's Web site at **www.enjoyillinois.com**.

###

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.