

French-speaking town hopes to attract U.S. tourists

Canada's largely French-speaking city of Saint Georges is a small dot on the other side of the U.S. border crossing, going north through Jackman on the way to Quebec City.

"There are about 400 known English-speaking families in Saint Georges, with a French population of around 30,000," says Marc Pembroke, 55, a lawyer and selectman in Jackman who works with Saint Georges commerce efforts.

"Saint Georges is an excellent place for families to stop on the way to Quebec's Winter Carnival and to see the Ice Hotel," he adds.

Many of Maine's Franco-American ancestors passed through Saint Georges when they migrated to New England. At about the same size in population and area as Bangor, Saint Georges is a small municipality compared to Quebec. Nevertheless, Pembroke says tourists should take the time to stop



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because it's actually a family-friendly place to visit.

A driver cannot miss Saint Georges when U.S. Route 201 in Jackman eventually becomes Canada's Route 173, going through the Beauce region of Quebec. Working with area municipal officials like Pembroke, Saint Georges hopes tourists who enjoy finding off-the-beaten-path attractions will want to visit the city's sites on their way north.

Quebec Carnival revelers notwithstanding, Saint Georges especially wants to attract people expected to attend the festivities scheduled in 2008, when the town and others in Canada will be celebrating the 400-year anniversary of the founding of

Quebec by explorer Samuel de Champlain.

For now, Pembroke recommends travelers stop to visit two simultaneous winter exhibitions showing at the Marie-Fitzbach Cultural Center, on the third floor of the Saint Georges Public Library.

This particular location is a venue for expositions, lectures and concerts, especially for events sponsored or endorsed by Saint Georges. York County residents will appreciate knowing more about Marie-Fitzbach, the cultural center's namesake.

Mother Fitzbach was the beloved religious founder of the Good Shepherd Sisters of Quebec, the order that sent French-speaking nuns to Saco where they continue to occupy a convent and retreat center at Ferry Beach. The purpose of their mission to Saco was to care for unmarried women and babies at nearby Biddeford's Saint Andre's Home.

A joint program sponsored by

the Mining Museum of Thetford Mines (Musée minéralogique et minier de Thetford Mines) and the Kamouraska Museum highlighting the historic small community in the Bas-Saint-Laurent Region, founded in 1692, is the featured exhibit. A children's program coincides with the Thetford museum's geologic exhibit.

Pembroke says the children's program is put to the plot of a love story to help explain how flora and minerals interact. It's a fairy tale love story between a daisy named Princess Marguerite, (because daisies are "Marguerites" in French), and a rock named Prince Stone. Visitors are led through a castle with dungeons and secret passages as the love story unfolds.

The Kamouraska exhibit describes the local textile industry,

a mirror of something like we might see in Maine and New England. Beauce area's leather industry, particularly shoe factories that historically played a major role in the economy of the region, are featured in this exhibit.

Additionally, Quebec artists, painter Judith Saint-Hilaire and glass sculptor François Fréchette will display their works. Displays will continue Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 1 to 8:30 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Admission is free, and the public is invited. Although most of the information available will be in French, advises Pembroke, the actual exhibits are, obviously, self-explanatory.

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