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'Michigan Volunteers' bring their restoration talents to historic Walker Tavern on Aug. 20

LANSING - The Michigan Volunteers - a historic-restoration group that has completed projects in national parks and forests throughout the United States - will bring a crew to Walker Tavern Historic Site in Brooklyn, starting Monday, Aug. 20, for a week of barn renovation and preparation to repaint the tavern itself.

The crew, under the leadership of Michigan Volunteers founder Ed Brown, plans to begin work at 8 a.m. Monday. It will be joined by volunteer Boy Scouts from the Chief Lenape Trails Great Sauk Trail Council. The Boy Scouts, as part of their community-service projects, will provide backup to the roofers and clean up the old, removed roof shakes. The Walker Tavern barn, with a cedar shake roof, is typical of barns built in the settlement era in Michigan.

"This is truly a community project," said Cletus Brooks, president of the Friends of Walker Tavern. "Several members of our Friends group are joining the Michigan Volunteers to work on this project, and others will provide food and support for the workers during their week at Walker Tavern."

A strong, secure roof is critical to protecting Walker Tavern's historic artifacts, according to site historian Cheryl Valentine. "The barn at Walker Tavern houses several vehicles important to early travel in Michigan," Valentine explained. "They include a covered wagon like those that brought settlers west; a buckboard; and a model of a Concord stagecoach that visitors can climb aboard."

Valentine said other exhibits in the barn show how 19th-century barns and roads were built, and several hands-on activities allow visitors to imagine packing a wagon for a westward move and to learn about the principles behind simple machines.

The Michigan Volunteers started in 1995 after a chance meeting with a granddaughter of Jackson Hole, Wyo., pioneer Andy Chambers led to a small group of volunteers descending on the Chambers homestead on Mormon Row in Grand Teton National Park. The volunteers, mostly from Michigan, completed much work to stabilize the Chambers house and, more importantly, forged key relationships with area preservationists and historical architects.

That small start has led to a cadre of some 65 people who've completed more than 140 "historical work" visits to Grand Teton National Park, and several visits to Denali National Park in Alaska, the Missions at San Antonio, the Willamette Forest in Oregon, and even South Africa. Each summer, a group of six to 12 people travels to several different projects around the country.

"We don't do this for the recognition," said Brown. "We do it because we enjoy being a team; we enjoy the work; and we especially enjoy the satisfaction of having been able to give back to our heritage." This summer, the Michigan Volunteers are pleased to be "giving back" to one of Michigan's most treasured historic places, Walker Tavern Historic Site.

Walker Tavern is located in Brooklyn, next to the Michigan International Speedway, in the Irish Hills region. Situated in Cambridge Junction State Park, at the historic crossroads of M-50 and the U.S. 12 Heritage Trail, Walker Tavern is just 35 miles west of Ann Arbor.

Regular hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday to Sunday, through Sept. 1, 2007. Allow at least one hour to tour Walker Tavern. The historic site is partially handicap-accessible.

Walker Tavern is jointly administered by the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of History, Arts and Libraries. As part of the Michigan Historical Museum System, it is fully accredited by the American Association of Museums. For more information visit www.michigan.gov/walkertavern or call (517) 467-4401, TDD (517) 373-1592.

The Michigan Historical Museum System is a division of the Michigan Historical Center, an agency of the Department of History, Arts and Libraries. Dedicated to enriching quality of life and strengthening the economy by providing access to information, preserving and promoting Michigan heritage and fostering cultural creativity, the department also includes the Library of Michigan, the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the Michigan Film Office.

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