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Gazette photo by Sean Tomlinson

An artistic endeavor – Flanked by local artists, Peter Fonseca, Ontario's tourism minister, Taste The County executive director Rebecca LeHeup-Bucknell, and Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Leona Dombrowsky join together to cut the ribbon symbolically on some promotional material to officially launch the Arts Trail.

Tourism minister praises new Arts Trail

At official launch, Fonseca calls 22-member cooperative 'next logical step' for county

By Sean Tomlinson
Gazette Staff

Prince Edward County's artistic side is no longer a hidden gem after the opening of the Arts Trail Thursday morning.

In fact Ontario's Minister of Tourism Peter Fonseca told the crowd gathered at the Fields on West Lake for the trail's opening launch that this new attraction makes the county "one of the greatest gems the province has to offer".

He also called the Arts Trail the "next logical step" to tourism in the county.

Following in the mold of the county's highly successful Taste Trail, the Arts Trail was developed by Taste the County in collaboration with the County's economic development department, the Cultural Round Table and all artists involved.

The trail invites tourists and art enthusiasts to take a self-guided tour leading to well known exhibits and art galleries throughout Prince Edward.

Some of the galleries included are the Red Roof Gallery, Arts on Main in Picton and the Peta Hall Gallery in Bloomfield. In total there are 22 locations featured on the trail.

"Prince Edward County has really done something that we want to share with the rest of the province in setting up these guided tours," said Fonseca. "First with Taste the County and winery and culinary tourism and now with the Arts Trail."

Fonseca said he is proud of the tourism development and promotion efforts of Prince Edward County and the economic success achieved from the work of

organizations like Taste the County and the economic development office.

"This area has managed to carve out a tourism niche and identity that has been able to attract people from far away with its unique and vibrant products," Fonseca added.

Fonseca thanked Rebecca LeHeup-Bucknell, executive director of Taste the County, who did much of the work in the development of the Arts Trail.

Fonseca said the Arts Trail is the perfect complement to the Taste Trail.

"Promoting art in the county will not only benefit the artists but the entire community," he said. "The entire local tourism industry here will benefit."

Funding for the project came through contributions from the municipality as well as grants from the

Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ministry of Tourism Investment and Development Office.

"This can only happen because of these strong partnerships," said Fonseca.

Leona Dombrowsky, MPP for Prince Edward-Hastings, was also present for the opening launch along with Leo Finnegan, mayor of Prince Edward County, and Wellington Councillor Peter Mertens.

Dombrowsky said this project, which is the first cultural initiative of its kind in the province, is "blazing the trail" for the people of Ontario and the tourism industry. She also said this project creates synergy between its partners.

"The partnership you have forged puts our community on the map of Ontario and truly makes it a destination for people with-

in our province looking for a wonderful place to visit," said Dombrowsky.

"What's happening in this community is an example for the rest of the province," she added.

The concept of an arts trail in Prince Edward County was born in 2004 when an economic development study done for council showed that the county's unique culture and heritage was a sector with potential to attract more visitors and tourism.

The following year council adopted a Cultural Strategic Plan, which created the Cultural Round Table. One of the first initiatives of the Cultural Round Table was to develop the Arts Trail, which has now been accomplished through their partnership with Taste the County and the economic development office.