

Celebrating BC & Fort St. John's Past...

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The Royal B.C. Museum has chosen Fort St. John as the starting point for its Free Spirit Conservation Tour that celebrates the province's 150th birthday.

The tour, a joint effort with BC Hydro PowerSmart, highlights the Free Spirit: Stories of You, Me and B.C. exhibit that is currently on display at the museum and features stories of how and why people settled in the province.

Tim Willis, director of exhibits at the Royal B.C. Museum, said he is proud to bring the exhibition to other parts of the province.

"We knew we were going to do a big exhibition in Victoria at the Royal B.C. Museum, but we wanted to reach out virtually and physically to the rest of the province for those that may not make it down to Victoria," he said.

The exhibit has six components. The main one is at the Royal B.C. Museum. Then there is a Free Spirit website, a book, a program of special events, a Spirit of B.C. train tour that took place this summer, and now the Free Spirit Conservation Tour. Approximately 200 stories in writings, emails,

songs and videos have been submitted for the exhibit.

A prominent figure in the tour will be Margaret 'Ma' Murray, co-founder of the Alaska Highway News, who will be present as a life-size cutout alongside the typewriter she wrote on.

The exhibit also features actors dressed in period costumes performing skits and songs and telling some of the submitted stories.

The North Peace Museum is a partner in the Free Spirit Conservation Tour, and manager Daria Dolsen hopes it will encourage more people to visit the museum.

"Fort St. John is the largest European inland settlement in B.C. and a lot of people don't know that," Dolsen said. "We have a lot of really rich historical and cultural heritage in this town and this is an opportunity to showcase the fact that there is something here beyond oil and gas."

The conservation component of the tour comes in with BC Hydro PowerSmart, which encourages people to consider the future while taking in the past.

"You can't look at the history of 150 years ago without looking forward 150 years. Where PowerSmart comes in is in asking what are we going



to do today to ensure that we're here tomorrow," said Ben Gardiner, PowerSmart specialist for BC Hydro in Fort St. John. "If we keep going at this rate of resource extraction and development and consumption, there won't be another 150 years, so we want people to be aware of their energy conservation and what they can do to reduce it."

Willis added that although the environment wasn't a huge issue a century ago, it is an issue now, so all B.C. residents should be thinking about how they can ensure there will be another tour like this in another 150 years.

People can still submit their stories about their arrival in B.C., as well as family, celebration, tradition and community stories, through the Free Spirit website at www.freespiritbc.ca/peopleshistory. After Fort St. John, the tour will make its way to Prince George, Kamloops, Revelstoke, Courtenay and Fort Langley.

The tour opens at Totem Mall on Oct. 1 and will run until Oct. 4.