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National initiative spotlights Easton

City among 14 newest communities to be recognized through Preserve America.

By Tracy Jordan

Of The Morning Call

July 12, 2007

Easton Mayor Phil Mitman will be traveling to Washington, D.C., today as Easton receives the designation as a Preserve America community.

Easton is the first in the Lehigh Valley region to receive the designation and one of 500 in the country. Thirteen other communities from Coon Rapids, Iowa, to Rio Grande City, Texas, also will receive the designation today.

"It puts Easton in a national spotlight again from a very credible program," Mitman said Wednesday.

The last time Easton received a national award, which was in January, it turned out the organization bestowing the award required a \$5,000 donation for a table at a dinner. The nonprofit organization also had hosted at least one of the mayor's children as an intern several years ago.

This time, there's no question about the validity of the award and the city wasn't required to do any fundraising, Mitman said.

First lady Laura Bush is honorary chairwoman of Preserve America, and is scheduled to present the award in person.

Preserve America is a White House initiative involving several federal agencies. It was started in March 2003 to support local efforts to preserve and promote historic and cultural resources. The first communities were designated in January 2004.

Becoming a Preserve America community means Easton is now eligible to apply for Preserve America grants. A total of \$15 million has been budgeted for 2007 and 2008.

Although the city didn't pay to receive the award, it did solicit Lafayette College to pay for a consultant to fill out the application.



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Allyson Filippis of Taggart Associates said Lafayette College paid her \$1,000 on behalf of the city to submit the application.

Filippis said she came across the application while researching other opportunities for the city in her role as a consultant to the Greater Easton Development Partnership.

"I just happened to find the opportunity online, read the criteria and it seemed like an excellent fit for the city," Filippis said.

According to a news release from Lafayette College, Easton's annual Heritage Day celebration, the creation of a downtown historic district and its work with the Northampton County Historical and Genealogical Society, National Canal Museum and Hugh Moore Park contributed to the city receiving the designation.

Mitman is traveling to Washington, D.C., with the chairman of the the city's Historic District Commission, Robert Sedey.

tracy.jordan@mcall.com

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Laura Bush honors Easton

by Bill Cahir

Thursday July 12, 2007, 1:54 PM



AP Photo | LAUREN VICTORIA BURKE

First Lady Laura Bush addresses the Preserve America grant ceremony today on Capitol Hill in Washington. She recognized Easton for its efforts to preserve history and revitalize its downtown.

First Lady Laura Bush today honored Easton as one of 14 cities that have taken steps to preserve their historic structures while promoting economic development downtown.

And though this morning's ceremony on Capitol Hill was devoted to several cities joining the U.S. Interior Department's Preserve America program, Mrs. Bush in her remarks singled out Easton and Bridgeport, Conn., as communities that had set the example for revitalization efforts nationwide.

"Some Preserve America communities are using their historic properties to bring whole cities and towns back to life," Mrs. Bush said today. "One community we're recognizing today is Easton, Pennsylvania."

"You may be interested to know Easton probably has a link to your own early history: it was in Easton that cousins Edwin Binney

and Harold Smith founded a business to manufacture slate school pencils," Mrs. Bush stated. "They expanded their line of products, and the first box of Binney & Smith Crayons -- containing seven colors -- was produced in 1903, and sold for a nickel. Binney & Smith Crayons are now known by a different name -- Crayolas -- and since 1903, they've allowed children to express themselves in more than 400 different colors -- including, I'm sure, every one of us in this room.

"In the 1820s, Easton was a bustling canal town, with flourishing tanneries, distilleries, and flour mills," Mrs. Bush continued. "But when the town's industries fell into decline, Easton's downtown went with them.

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Now a different industry has brought this city back to life: heritage tourism is showcasing Easton's rich past, which dates back to the Revolutionary War era.

"Today, residents of Easton celebrate Heritage Day every July, when they re-create one of the first and only public readings of the Declaration of Independence, which took place in Easton on July 8, 1776," Mrs. Bush said. "Eastoners have formed a Historic District Commission, which protects the town's historic architecture. The Crayola Factory is now a museum, and part of Easton's revived downtown -- which attracts more than 300,000 tourists every year."

Lehigh Valley officials were dumbstruck to hear Mrs. Bush discuss Easton in detail.

"That was wonderful. We were pleased and surprised," Mayor Phil Mitman said.

Mrs. Bush serves as honorary chair of Preserve America, which offers grants to cities that prove they are using "historic assets for economic development and community revitalization," according to the [U.S. Interior Department Web page](#).

Easton is seeking \$44,000. It is just now eligible to seek the grant because it has been recognized as a Preserve America community by the White House.



Dent



Mitman

The First Lady posed for photographs this morning with Mitman, Bob Sedey, chairman of the Easton Historic District Commission, and U.S. Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Lehigh Valley. U.S. Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne also attended.

"It's terrific for Easton to be recognized like this, mainly because there are so many volunteers and, I would say, older and new organizations working to preserve our historic resources," even while developing the city anew, Mitman said.

Dent claimed he, too, was surprised to have the First Lady showcase Easton as a historic city. "This is extraordinary public recognition for the city of Easton, much deserved, and unexpected," Dent said.

Sedey added, "We had no idea at all. I'm just curious as to how she found out about us. The next step (for Mrs. Bush) is to come up and visit us."

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