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Maryland Preservation Awards honors Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area website redesign

Annapolis, MD – At the 2016 Maryland Preservation Awards, held today at the Miller Senate Office Building, the Maryland Historical Trust Board of Trustees presented the award for Excellence in Media and Publications to the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (HCWHA) for its website. The Heart of the Civil War website (www.heartofthecivilwar.org)—launched in April 2015—was designed by Jean Peterson Design and developed by Orases, both Frederick-based agencies.

The website encourages both visitors and residents to learn about and engage with historic resources in the three-county (Carroll, Frederick, and Washington) Heritage Area, contributing to a better understanding of Maryland's unique Civil War heritage. With new features such as a blog, interactive map, and timeline of historic events—in addition to a refreshed look and feel—the website allows the Heritage Area to share the rich history of the Heart of the Civil War with a broader public than ever before. As the Civil War sesquicentennial comes to a close, this new website offers an opportunity for potential visitors to engage with the Heritage Area on issues of enduring importance.

The website has been effective in reaching new audiences, with a 71% increase in sessions from 2014 to 2015 and a 70% increase in users. The website also saw a 524% increase in traffic from the Washington, DC area between April-September 2014 and the same period in 2015. The redesign has strengthened HCWHA's robust online presence by integrating social media channels into the website. The number of followers on each platform increased dramatically since the website launched: 62% on Facebook, 40% on Twitter, and 203% on Instagram between March 2015 and March 2016. In addition, social media referrals to the website increased by 366% from 2014 to 2015.

The website redesign was funded by a Marketing Grant from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority matched by the destination marketing organizations (DMOs) in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties: the Carroll County Department of Economic Development, the Tourism Council of Frederick County, and the Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Each of these local tourism hubs deserve credit for recognizing the value in looking past county boundaries and showcasing the Heritage Area's rich cultural heritage as a major feature of the region. Staff from each DMO provided feedback throughout the design process and communicated to local partners how they can leverage the website.

HCWHA is an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization that is one of 13 certified heritage areas in Maryland, encompassing parts of Carroll, Frederick and Washington counties. Its mission is to promote the stewardship of our historic, cultural, and natural Civil War resources; encourage superior visitor experiences; and stimulate tourism, economic prosperity, and educational development, thereby improving the quality of life in our community for the benefit of both residents and visitors.

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