



For Immediate Use

New Heritage Solutions CIC
The Cut
New Cut
Halesworth
Suffolk
IP19 8BY

Telephone: 01986 873516

Mobile: 07966 508305

Eighth Air-Force Project Preparing For Take-Off

Twenty-six thousand airmen killed, twenty-eight thousand taken prisoner and over six thousand aircraft destroyed; seventy-years on the story of the Eighth U.S. Army Air Force dominates the recent history of Eastern England and is now the theme of a major community project which has just been awarded a development grant of £14,500 from The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The project has the working title: “The Eighth in the East”, and its aim is to ensure that the story of the so-called ‘Friendly Invasion’ during World War 2 is kept alive for people to understand in the future and local communities to benefit from today.

Inspired by a team of archaeologists, archivists and museum curators the project is aimed at helping local people of all ages who live close to one of the sixty-seven wartime airfields, to take ownership of this rich legacy by recording oral histories, mapping each airbase and putting together events which will engage everyone with a three-year period which changed the course of history.

The project is a cross-regional partnership involving museums from across the East of England, the Norfolk Record Office, UEA, the Second Air Division Memorial Library and a new social enterprise company from Suffolk, New Heritage Solutions started by the Artistic Director of Eastern Angles Theatre Company, Ivan Cutting, and BBC programme-maker Nick Patrick.

“It’s almost shameful” said Nick Patrick “that, were it not for a handful of dedicated volunteers and museum professionals, this history has almost been allowed to die. We feel that it’s as important to the East of England as Boudica, Bunyan or Benjamin Britten.”

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The project team already has wide support from aviation museums, town and parish councils and organisations such as the Council for British Archaeology (East). Now the task is to secure further partners and funding with the intention that later this year it can roll out a three year programme of research, interpretation and events across the East of England.

“The Eighth in the East has huge potential to engage people with their past and deliver key benefits today”, said Nick Patrick. “This history can be central to supporting the leisure and tourist industry; it can help develop research and media skills; get people out into our wonderful countryside; support the school curriculum; and, maybe most importantly, encourage a stronger sense of place”.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said, “We are delighted to be able to support the further development of the Eighth to the East project. The presence of the 8th United States Air Army Force during the Second World War has left a huge legacy on communities and landscape across the East of England. Part of the strength of this project lies in the partnership of organisations that will be working together to unearth this history, whether it be through exploring the landscape or collecting the stories of those who experienced the ‘friendly invasion’, ensuring this fascinating story can be passed on to future generations.”

Dr John Alban, the County Archivist of Norfolk, said, “The Norfolk Record Office and the Norfolk Sound Archive are delighted to be associated with this project, especially since it has a very strong element of oral history attached to it. Local people’s spoken recollections can provide extremely powerful testament to historical events which took place within living memory, but unless they are properly recorded for posterity, they will be lost forever.”

If your organisation can help in any way do get in touch. **A meeting of all interested parties will be held at the 95th Bomb Group Museum at Horham near Eye in Suffolk on Sunday 26th February.**

For further information please contact: Nick Patrick 01986 873516/07966 508305 or Email nick.patrick@btinternet.com

Notes to Editors

- A first-round award means that a project meets HLF criteria for funding and is understood to have potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.
- Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage of present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK, including over £308million to the East of England alone. Website: www.hlf.org.uk

Picture Editors

- We can supply archive and present day images.