Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project: Join our Membership

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

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Join our Membership...

Membership participation in the Project assists with transporting and housing students, maintaining field equipment, providing students with public outreach opportunities through the Project’s annual Open House event, and defraying the cost of the excavations. Preparations by both students and professionals are already under way for the 2010 WMU archaeological field school and public outreach activities.

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For more information, please contact:

Department of Anthropology
Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project
Michael S. Nassaney, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
1014 Moore Hall
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5306
Phone: 269-387-3980
Fax: 269-387-3970
e-mail: nassaney@wmich.edu

http://www.wmich.edu/fortstjoseph

Public Archaeology

Making archaeology accessible to the public is a major goal of the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project. It is the community’s history that is being unearthed and interpreted by project researchers, and it is very important that they have the opportunity to learn about the project’s findings and even take part in the archaeological process.

Public outreach initiatives include:

- Week-long Summer Camps during the field season where participants have the chance to take part in the field and laboratory work while learning more about the history of the site and the field of archaeology.
  - July 26-30, Adults (Age 16+)
  - August 2-6, Jr. High School (Grades 6-9)
  - August 9-13, Adults (for Graduate/CEU Credit)
- The annual Archaeology Open House, spans two days, when the public is invited to visit the site to see ongoing excavations and talk with archaeologists, view artifact displays and interpretive panels, interact with historical reenactors interpreting the time-period of the Fort’s occupation, and listen to lectures given by project researchers.

The 2010 Open House will be August 14-15
The 2011 Open House will be August 13-14
Fort History

Fort St. Joseph served as a Jesuit mission, a fur trade post, and a garrison, and was occupied from 1691 to 1781 by the French, then the British. It was located on the St. Joseph River near a strategic portage en route to the Mississippi River, making it an important link in the chain of similar European frontier settlements in the western Great Lakes region.

Project History

The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project was initiated in 1998 by Western Michigan University (WMU) archaeologists in partnership with Support the Fort, the City of Niles, MI, and the Fort St. Joseph Museum. Evidence of the Fort’s location was unearthed just south of present-day downtown Niles during the first season of exploration. Archaeologists returned to the site intermittently over subsequent years until 2006 when excavation became an annual process.

The purpose of the project is to engage students and the community while investigating and interpreting the archaeological remains of Fort St. Joseph. Excavation of the Fort site is enhancing understanding of the 18th century fur trade and the lives of European and Native participants in Southwest Michigan.

Ongoing excavations are being conducted by WMU students enrolled in the Department of Anthropology’s annual archaeological field school, assisted by local volunteers.

Recent Project Outcomes

- The Archaeology Open House was the subject of the documentary film, Making the Past Come Alive: Public Archaeology at Fort St. Joseph, released in 2009, the third film to highlight the project’s efforts.
- Project was featured at the 34th Annual Kalamazoo Living History Show in March of 2009. Presentations, artifact displays, and informational panels highlighted the history of the site, project, and current research.
- Launch of website in May of 2009: http://www.wmich.edu/fortstjoseph
- Electrification of excavation site allowing for the installation of a “greener” electric dewatering system for 2009 field season and elimination of diesel pump.
- Summer Lecture Series co-hosted by the Niles District Library during the 2009 field season presented current research and project outcomes to the community.
- 2009 field season offered the Summer Camp to junior high school students, in addition to the continuation of camps for adults and teachers.

Recent publications relating to the history of the Fort, the project, and current research in scholarly journals and books include: