

## Hudson Celebration Tops Tourist List

Officials tout travel group's ranking of Albany's planned quadricentennial events

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ALBANY -- A life-size doll of Henry Hudson, puppets teaching Colonial history to local schoolchildren, and a stream of bus tours disgorging tourists downtown.

These are among the city's plans for events in 2009 to celebrate Henry Hudson's 400th anniversary of sailing up the river that bears his name.

The smattering of quadricentennial offerings next year amounts to a rijsttafel, or rice table, an elaborate meal of many Indonesian dishes developed in the Dutch Colonial era.

Organizers who unveiled the events at a news conference Wednesday expressed confidence that they had cooked up something for every taste.

"I know we're going to have a very successful year," said Michele Vennard, president and CEO of the Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau, where details of the "Hudson 400th Celebration of Discovery" events were announced.

A high point was the announcement that the American Bus Association has named Albany's Hudson 400th festivities No. 1 on its list of 2009's Top 100 events in North America. It's the first time in 28 years that Albany has reached the top spot.

"We're No. 1 and we're going to have a great quadricentennial celebration," said Mayor Jerry Jennings, who added that bus groups could be a windfall for the city.

One overnight visit by a motor coach group can pump between \$5,000 and \$13,000 into the local economy through spending on lodging, meals, admissions and souvenirs, according to a recent academic study.

Jennings noted that the three-day Tulip Festival in May will be a focal point and will include the planting of 209,000 tulips across the city. Another major event will be a celebration in Riverfront Park on Sept. 26, the day that Hudson reached Albany in

1609.

Tara Sullivan, executive director of the state's Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission, announced a stamp exhibition involving 28 philatelic organizations and commemorative stamp cancellations, to be held Sept. 25-27 next year at the Empire State Plaza.

Sullivan's group has been criticized for being slow to organize large-scale, marquee events and for becoming enmeshed in political squabbles.

"We need to keep up the focus on this celebration because our region has so much to offer in terms of its history," said Albany County Executive Mike Breslin.

The biggest hit of the gathering of politicians and marketers was a life-size doll of Henry Hudson, created by Mary Halliday of California. His period costume was fashioned by Chris Persans, an artist and staff member of the convention and visitors bureau.

Dignitaries couldn't keep their hands off the flexible, 5-foot 8-inch explorer, shaking his hand and rubbing his scruffy beard.

"He'll put a happy face on anyone who sees him," said Carol Ann Margolis, the convention and visitors bureau's education coordinator.

The region's libraries will let patrons borrow the doll and will encourage families to take the rugged explorer along with them on trips. Borrowers will help assemble a travelogue of the places Hudson sees.

"We all need to embrace a sense of the silly in this," said Mary Fellows, manager of youth and family services of the Upper Hudson Library System.

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