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Virginia Invites Visitors to Weigh In on Jamestown - The Most Intriguing Story of America's History

-As National Debate about Prominence of Jamestown Heats Up, New Web Site Engages Online Visitors on Powhatan, John Smith, Pocahontas and Who Really Deserves Thanks for Our Nation-

Media Only

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RICHMOND, Va. – Suppose you are Chief Powhatan living along Virginia’s coast in the early 17th century and see your tribal lands invaded – or imagine you’re one of the first 1607 English settlers, like Gabriel Archer, to feel the sting of the natives’ arrows. Would you – as part of either group -- be able to retain a calm and positive nature in the midst of the volatile situation? Gabriel Archer survived his wounding through both hands at the landing in Cape Henry to become the colony’s secretary and an admirer of Virginia Indians’ skills. Powhatan risked the long-held respect of approximately 30 tribes reporting to him by practicing diplomacy and trading with the English, sometimes saving them from starvation while his kinsman Opechancanough opposed his generosity.

“How would you react – could you see yourself there?” the Virginia Tourism Corporation asks on the different profiles given at its interactive Web site www.Jamestown1607.org. The VTC’s latest Jamestown campaign brings to light little-known facts regarding the three different ethnic groups -- English colonists, Virginia Indians and Africans, who confronted one another in the years following the 1607 settlement. Another profile on the Web site, Anthony Johnson, tells of his achieving great wealth, buying himself out of bondage but buying other slaves to work the 250 acres on Virginia’s Eastern Shore where he and his wife, Mary, and their family lived.

Visitors to www.Jamestown1607.org learn more about Powhatan, Archer and the Johnsons, along with 20 other portraits and stories illustrating three cultural perspectives behind the settling of Jamestown. Comments posted also reveal what readers have to say about each personality profiled. A comment posted by a woman visitor to Mary Johnson’s profile thanks her for making “it possible for women of color” to go further in life. This reader, working toward a college degree, adds, “If these women can make it, I am going all the way. Thank God for this Web site.”

“Many of the individual portraits presented are unknown to the general public,” said Alisa Bailey, president and chief executive officer of the VTC. “This interactive campaign, which complements the other marketing efforts by our Jamestown partners, is designed to keep the public engaged with history that is relevant to their lives.”

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Bailey said the campaign generates user content—so popular with Internet users—through discussion. “For example, the entire story of the Virginia Indians is relatively unknown, as is the story of indentured and free Africans before slavery became engrained. Our site explores those perspectives and does so from the three cultures that formed the American way of life as we know it. By keeping the Jamestown story alive, we continue our invitation to visit Virginia and explore how American history unfolded.”

History often doesn't record many facts about the personalities profiled -- their status, indentured servant or slave, or what became of them -- but their stories are prompting readers to ponder how they might have survived in the uneasy racial coexistence at the first permanent English settlement in the Americas. The Virginia Tourism Corporation is soliciting readers' comments on the profiles found at www.Jamestown1607.org.

Travelers can get trip-planning assistance at the site as well as information on special events during 2007 for the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. For a free Virginia Travel Guide and highway map, call toll-free, 1-800-932-5827.

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