

Putnam County earns Preserve America status

by Rita J. King

Putnam County has been designated a Preserve America community by First Lady Laura Bush, along with seven other rich historic sites in the United States.

Putnam County Legislator Vincent Tamagna, who also serves as the Hudson River navigator, was instrumental in the county gaining the honor. On March 15 of last year, when the program was announced by Bush, Tamagna learned applicants must have a broad palette of historic markers that could be applied to a grassroots classroom effort to teach American history to children and preserve and protect the landmarks composing that chronicle.

He immediately put together a proposal outlining Putnam County's historic high points, among them the preservation of Main Street in Cold Spring and the Foundry School Museum, also home to the Putnam County Historical Society. Cold Spring's Foundry School Museum contains a historically accurate 18th century classroom where fourth-graders learn about the past.

"The Foundry itself was an important part of American history," Tamagna said. "The Great Chain was constructed there, and it kept the British from crossing the Hudson River. It stretched from Constitution Island in Garrison to West Point, and if the British fleet struck the chain, a ship would be lost."

Benedict Arnold was caught in Garrison. This historically significant moment is marked with a plaque and spawned a great American metaphor for traitorous behavior. Among the county's other important contributions is the design work of Russell Wright, who combined elements of the outdoors with



First Lady Laura Bush, Colonel James Johnson, and Putnam County Legislator Vincent Tamagna as seen in the East Room of the White House in June when Putnam County was designated as one of eight Preserve America communities.

his architectural achievements on home design.

Our Lady of Restoration Chapel is another prominent site, Tamagna said. High on a hill overlooking the Hudson, the chapel, which is now all-denominational and opened only for special ceremonies, was once a pile of rubble on an undesirable high site, given to Catholic Foundry workers to set up a Catholic church

since none existed at the time. The resulting structure, as well as the beauty of the once unapproachable site, are a memorable combination, Tamagna said.

President George W. Bush's 2005 budget will include \$10 million for the Preserve America program, and Tamagna said he's not sure yet how Putnam County may ultimately benefit from these funds.

Augusta, Georgia; Castroville, Texas; Delaware, Ohio; Dorchester County, Maryland; Key West, Florida; Steamboat Springs, Colorado; and Versailles, Kentucky, have also been designated as Preserve America designations.

"Preserve America directs federal agencies to inventory and promote greater use of historical sites in partnership with state, tribal, and local governments. This initiative will provide more opportunities for preservation while increasing tourism and economic development," said First Lady Laura Bush.

"Another goal of Preserve America is to promote the conservation and enjoyment of our natural resources. Our open spaces are sanctuaries for learning and reflection," Laura Bush said on September 15 of last year in Mobile, Alabama.

"It's really exciting to get this award," Tamagna said. "On June 15, I was invited to a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, which is rarely opened up except for the signing of special treaties. It was the thrill of a lifetime, an honor and a privilege."

Tamagna said another program is scheduled for May's upcoming National Heritage Week in which four of America's 14 heritage rivers will be honored. Each river has a navigator who, like Tamagna, is responsible for leveraging resources to cut through bureaucracy and promote development opportunities along their respective rivers while protecting them and telling their stories.

To highlight the Hudson, Tamagna is constructing a timeline of historically important moments that took place along the river, as well as documenting the "environmental revolution" that started on the Hudson River.