

Oak Island mystery still captivates

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New partners hope to finally unlock 212-year-old treasure
By RENEE STEVENS | 4:41 AM

OAK ISLAND — Danny Hennigar has been talking about Oak Island for 34 years, but this year as he tells people tales about its mysteries, there is a new sparkle in his eye. He feels answers may be closer than ever.

Hundreds of people followed Mr. Hennigar this weekend on walking tours of the Lunenburg County island as part of Discover Oak Island Days. The three-day event includes displays, lectures and activities that focus around one of the longest-running and most famous treasure hunts in history.

Mr. Hennigar said that as the communications director of the Oak Island Tourism Society, he was not at all surprised that many of the visitors were already aware that the hunt for the island's elusive treasure is in the process of restarting.

"Everyone loves a good mystery and a whodunit and this certainly has it all and then some. It's a fascinating story that spans 212 years so people keep up on what's going on," he said.

"We get a lot of visitors from around the area, but we also get people from all over Canada, the U.S. and Europe too and some people tell me that they even plan their vacations around coming to visit the island."

Dan Blankenship and David Tobias worked together for years trying to solve the mysteries of the island and find the treasure. But then a bitter dispute between the two partners stalled their efforts. Last summer, Mr. Tobias decided to sell off his share of the land. Four Michigan businessmen, three of whom are brothers, bought out his half of the company.

They now own 23 lots, including the site of the infamous money pit. Mr. Blankenship still owns the other half of the company and will be working with the new partners. They have applied for a Nova Scotia treasure licence, but Mr. Hennigar said things won't actually get moving until next year.

"The province won't officially issue a new treasure hunting licence until 2008," he said. "So I think you'll most likely see things start happening next June. That doesn't mean that these guys are sitting back waiting, though. I understand that they are doing everything they can to start looking for treasure."

The businessmen are represented by Wayne Marryatt of the McInnes Cooper law firm in Halifax. He could not be reached for comment on their progress.

Mr. Hennigar said he is very excited about the prospects and thinks it would be great for Nova Scotia, but his society may have to come up with a new game plan if things are up and running by next summer.

"We are doing very well with this (Explore Oak Island Days) now. Every year it just keeps getting bigger and bigger and everyone especially loves the island tour," he said.

"Since (the island) has been closed to the public since 1995, people just jump at the chance to get out there. I'm actually kind of scared for next year because I think once things start up again, we could be so busy that we may not be able to handle it."

That is the kind of problem he says they look forward to facing, though, and if someone finally does solve the mystery, he'll cross that bridge too when he comes to it.

"If the mystery is solved, positively it will be great for all those skeptics out there who didn't believe, but if it's not, then I am going to have to find a rock to crawl under because of the stories that I have been telling people for all these years."