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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 20, 2023

Spooky Specters and Lurking Lutins Await at Fort Fright October 6-7

MACKINAW CITY — Be wary of were-wolves and look out for lutins as you walk the lantern-lit path along the shore of Lake Michigan to Colonial Michilimackinac for Fort Fright the evenings of October 6 and 7.

From 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. (last admission at 8:30 p.m.) on Friday and Saturday, eighteenth-century French-Canadian folklore comes to life. Visitors must tread lightly on the path along the shoreline, because as the sun sets on the horizon, all manner of monsters take over the fort and eagerly await your arrival inside. There are campfires glowing in the night where a voyageur tells eerie tales and warns you of the terror that might await you before you approach the guarded gates of Colonial Michilimackinac. You are now on your own to enter the wooden palisade, a frightening world of fun and phantoms wrapped into one.

As you venture inside the gate, British Redcoats of a different order patrol the wooden fort. Look closer to see they're not ordinary soldiers, but skeletons with bony fingers outstretched beckoning you to enter.

More campfires crackle inside the fort, but there are friendly faces around these. French fur traders and voyageurs are telling more tales, singing songs played to traditional music of the

1700s, and visiting with guests. The fires offer a respite from the mythical creatures that prefer other places, like the upper stories of the wooden buildings where they throw open shutters and cackle, howl or prowl around the palisade.

Other frightening features include the Demon Walk boasting vicious monsters waiting to trick you out of fortune and pull you into the underworld and the Werewolf Walk, where the most terrifying of the creatures in the fort prowl and hunt for you in the dark.

“The majority of the activities at Fort Fright will be suitable for the entire family,” said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks director. “But we’ll also have a number of interesting and scary activities designed to appeal to older children and adults.” A tour of the haunted rowhouse, a custom designed exhibit for this occasion, will not be easily forgotten.

In other wooden buildings within the fort and fur trading village, colonial residents serve warm autumn treats like homemade cookies and toffee. Guests can learn about death and burial in the 1700s, and the various traditions and ceremonies for the dead from over 250 years ago in the church. In addition to creatures, colonial residents with friendly faces roam the village, following the lantern-lit paths that wind throughout the fort, a unique nighttime atmosphere available only on these two nights.

Fort Fright isn’t meant to simply scare visitors. There’s an eerie but real background to the event, which stems from French-Canadian tales that were passed on from person-to-person as voyageurs and other people traveled. As such, there’s a strong history of oral tradition behind Fort Fright. That oral history is shared around campfires much in the same way it was shared over two-and-a-half centuries ago.

The characters that roam Fort Fright, such as were-wolves, lutins, and Le Dame Blanche, meaning White Lady (Ghost), are drawn from a book called *Were-Wolves and Will-o-the-Wisps:*

French Tales of Mackinac Retold by Dirk Gringhuis. The collection of short stories, published by Mackinac State Historic Parks, is based on French-Canadian folktales brought to the Mackinac Straits area by the voyageurs during the height of the French fur trade. The stories and chilling ambiance shared at Fort Fright often have modern day counterparts, but they are still new and different with many twists. By combining the nuances of the oral history and live interpretation of the terrifying characters, Mackinac State Historic Parks is able to create a fun and, at times, spooky atmosphere for all ages. It's the stories and the individuals sharing them that make this such a chilling and memorable experience—leaving you to wonder if that noise you hear is really just the wind, or perhaps something far more frightening. Priced at \$6, the book is sold during the event and can also be purchased prior to Fort Fright at the Colonial Michilimackinac Visitor's Center or by calling 231-436-4100.

Admission to Fort Fright is \$12 per adult, \$8 children ages 5-12, and free for children 4 and under and Mackinac Associates members (excluding Heritage Level). Tickets are available now online, or pre-purchase your family's tickets beginning October 1 in the Colonial Michilimackinac Visitor's Center. Visitors who purchase in advance will be able to enter through a shorter line, indicated by the "Mackinac Associates and Pre-Paid Tickets Here" sign. Last admission on both nights is at 8:30 p.m. Call 231-436-4100 for more information.

Much of Colonial Michilimackinac has been reconstructed based on archaeological excavations, including its 13 buildings and structures, many of which will be open and featuring special activities during Fort Fright. The fort and fur trading village was founded by the French in 1715 and is depicted today as it was in the 1770s when occupied by the British.

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan's Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, the Biddle House, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Historic

Downtown Mackinac, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park and Michilimackinac State Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks' rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or online at www.mackinacparks.com.

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