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Local living history group busy with year-long events

Continued from front page
La Compagnie's captain, Michel Loiselle, said the exhibit is "aimed at raising awareness among Manitobans of the significance of (La Vérendrye) as a major figure in Western Canadian history and an important symbol for Manitoba's francophone community."
Loiselle, a St. Boniface resident and outreach worker for the federal government, formed the group with a friend 20 years ago.
"We were both passionate about military history and wanted to explore the French side, so we started finding officer information," Loiselle said, noting the group aims to enact the lives of the soldiers and voyageurs who accompanied La Vérendrye "to find a route to the Western Sea in the 1730s."
"They travelled across Manitoba and part of the American Midwest to discover new territories in the name of the King of France, Louis XV. I like to call it the first military force of Canada," Loiselle said.

He said the exhibit gives a snapshot of the time period, "freezing time in 1738."
Due to an available inventory of items La Vérendrye possessed at the time of his death, and La Compagnie's research in Quebec museums, the exhibit includes personal artifacts, a mannequin of La Vérendrye wearing period clothing and a model of Fort Rouge, Loiselle said.
"We're very much in to the material culture of the era. These items give substance to the man and a glimpse into his daily life," he said.
There are 22 members in La Compagnie and the group is always looking to recruit new members, Loiselle said. The group currently includes school teachers, government employees, a scientist and students. Members must understand and speak French, as all enactment orders are given in French.
"The exhibit celebrates the deep roots the francophone community has in Manitoba and to make it accessible and share it with everybody," Loiselle said.
"La Vérendrye was a leader — a kind, but firm commander. He was able to get things done and form alliances with the First Nations peoples," he added, noting he died of a fever in his sixties.
To mark this year's landmark anniversary, the group will take part in numerous events throughout the year, including a Fort Rouge exhibit at the Pavillion Canadien-français during Folklorama in August, a celebratory banquet at Fort Gibraltar in October and the launch of a commemorative book in December.
For more information about the group, visit www.fortrouge275.ca or go to Facebook and search for La Compagnie de La Vérendrye.

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From left to right: Michel Loiselle, captain of La Compagnie de La Vérendrye, Flor

Supplied photo