



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **The Highest Window Overlooking Montréal!**

### **Observation Centre at the Top of the Oratory's Basilica's Dome**

**Montreal, March 12, 2009** – Over 100 years after the Sanctuary's founding, Brother André's "small" project is taking on a whole new dimension. Management at Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal is proud to announce its plan to create a new Observation Center at the top of the Basilica's dome. Upon its completion in 2013, the Observation Center will offer the Sanctuary's visitors an unparalleled panoramic view from the highest window overlooking Montreal.

*"The addition of an Observation Center at the top of the dome represents the culmination of the Sanctuary development and restoration project launched in 2003," says Father Claude Grou, CSC, Rector of Saint Joseph's Oratory. "Not only does this initiative address expectations voiced numerous times by both visitors and pilgrims, it will offer an exceptional experience through the contemplation of a unique view, and has the potential to attract many tourists. This investment allows us to add a unique aspect to this flagship site of our cultural, historical and religious heritage."*

#### **A unique view of Montreal**

Ideally located on Mount Royal, the dome of the Basilica of Saint Joseph's Oratory, already 124 meters high, reaches a height of 243 meters above St. Lawrence River's level. As such, the Observation Center will offer visitors the highest and only 360° panoramic view of Mount Royal, the metropolitan area and, weather permitting, the Laurentians and the US border.

Charles Lapointe, President and CEO of *Tourisme Montréal*, took part in the project's announcement: *"Few people know that the Oratory is one of Montréal's most popular sites or that over 50% of its visitors come from outside the city. As such, Tourisme Montréal wholeheartedly supports the Oratory's project to build an Observation Center at the top of the dome. This will be an important addition to Montreal's attractiveness that will also enhance the quality of the religious tourism experience, which represents a significant segment of our visitors' activities."*

*"We are very proud to offer our support in the realisation of the Observation Center in the apex of the dome of the Saint Joseph Oratory. This project enhances one of Montreal's most popular symbols. We will put our business network to good use and encourage members to associate themselves with this project, which will have significant financial benefits for our region,"* declared Michel LeBlanc, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal.

This project will be completed as part of a development plan, which represents an estimated investment of over \$50 million. To successfully see this initiative through, Saint Joseph's Oratory must be able to count on the support of various governments and the general public. Raymond Bachand, Québec Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade, has already expressed his enthusiastic support for this project, and identified it as a core infrastructure initiative to re-energize Montreal's tourist industry. Furthermore, a similar project was tabled as part of the Building Canada program.

### **Security, accessibility and accommodation capacity**

This project is a component of the Sanctuary's main development and restoration project, and will follow the completion of the Sanctuary's Greeting Hall. *"This is a major project, since considerable work will be needed not only to provide visitors safe access to the top of the dome, but also to update our greeting infrastructures to properly address everyone's needs,"* adds Father Grou, CSC.

### **Over 70 years later, the challenge to innovate continues**

The construction of the Basilica's dome, completed in 1937, was the fruit of the creative spirit that inspired its builders. Its dimensions are already impressive: the Basilica's exterior dome has one hundred and 125 feet (38 m.) in diameter at its base, is 95 feet (28.9 m.) high and it is composed of a concrete shell that is seven inches (17.8 cm.) thick. It is crowned by an eight-sided clerestory, 18 feet (5.4 m.) in diameter (the highlight of the upcoming Observation Center).

The following year, in 1938, the innovative spirit was pushed further through the construction of an interior dome (a rare project to which few current buildings can compare) with a truly "eco-energy" approach, since one of its main objectives was to control heating costs. The space between both domes, called the interdome, offers a breathtaking view of the Basilica's interior. This feature will also be highlighted as part of the future Observation Centre, as visitors will be able to stop there before completing their climb to the top.

Plans and specifications' production for this project was assigned to *Jodoin Lamarre Pratte et associés architectes*, with Mr. Denis Gaudreault acting as project lead.

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*Photos and documents available upon request.*

### **Interview requests**

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