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LOCAL COMMUNITIES CELEBRATE OPENING OF I-355 SOUTH EXTENSION WITH FALL FESTIVALS ON THE NEW TOLLWAY

Salute to U.S. Troops and Family-Friendly Events Scheduled Along the Roadway on November 11

DOWERS GROVE, Ill. – High school marching band performances, local restaurants offerings and care-package collections for U.S. military service men and women are just a few highlights of the local festivities taking place on the Illinois Tollway's new I-355 South Extension from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on November 11. As part of the Grand Opening Celebration for the new 12.5-mile roadway and dedication of the entire I-355 corridor as the Veterans Memorial Tollway, the Illinois Tollway is bringing the local communities' dedication events, festivals and activities onto the lanes of the new road and giving the public the rare opportunity to throw a party on an interstate highway. Will County, Lemont, Homer Glen, Lockport and New Lenox are planning events throughout the day to offer a sampling of what each community has to offer and to revel in the opening of the long-awaited roadway stretching from I-55 south to I-80. Event information is available at www.illinoistollway.com.

"The Illinois Tollway is gratified by the overwhelming cooperation we've received from Will County and its communities in seeing the I-355 South Extension through the many years from concept to completion," said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Brian McPartlin. "November 11 is a day for Will County leaders, residents and business owners to celebrate, because they have been so actively involved in its success. This project shows what extraordinary works can be achieved when government, business and communities work together."

In addition to welcoming local festivities to the new roadway, the Tollway and its partners are also hosting various events to celebrate the roadway opening, including the Veterans Memorial Tollway 5K Family Run/Walk/Roll sponsored by SALUTE, Inc., to raise funds for military veterans and their families and the 20-mile Roll the Tollway bike ride sponsored by the Chicagoland Bicycle Federation to help finance a new bike path along I-355. The public will also be able to learn more about the services offered by the Illinois Tollway, Illinois State Police District 15, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources through displays, demonstrations and presentations during the event. The highlight of the day's festivities will be the Dedication Ceremony for the new Veterans Memorial Tollway.

“The opening of the I-355 South Extension stands as one of the most prominent achievements of Will County and the region,” said Will County Executive Lawrence M. Walsh. Will County is experiencing unprecedented growth which this new roadway helps accommodate by providing more direct access from one part of our County and our region to another. This new corridor provides an opportunity for our communities to work together and to use our planning and development expertise to foster the type of development that is balanced and best suited for our area so that all aspects of its development serve the local and regional need of generations to come. We are proud to rally our communities for the I-355 opening events to demonstrate our excitement over this much anticipated project and to share a piece of what our communities have to offer to the region.”

Community celebration events are scheduled at several locations along the new roadway. Shuttle buses will be provided to bring festival goers from conveniently located off-site parking locations onto the roadway and will offer regular routes traveling between the various event venues. Festivals and activities will include:

Will County

Located at the 159th Street interchange, Will County's Fall Festival will showcase County department services, programs and equipment, as well as the services and programs provided by agencies partnering with the County.

In support of active military troops, Joliet-based volunteer organization Operation Care Package, will hold a Troop Christmas Drive to collect non-perishable food items and small unwrapped gifts. In addition, Operation: MOMS Cookies, Inc., will host a Humvee display with personnel from the U.S. Army 308th Civil Affairs Brigade of Homewood to highlight this organization's Troop Christmas Drive. The goal of MOMS Cookies is to fill more than 3,000 hand-made Christmas stockings and 5,000 personal Christmas care packages for U.S. Armed Forces service members.

A Small Recyclables Event to collect shoes, cell phones, eye glasses and household batteries will be hosted by the Waste Services Division of the Will County Land Use Department. Bins will be provided at all three event locations along the roadway at 127th Street, 159th Street and Route 6. In addition, the Will County Workforce Services Division will exhibit its Mobile Learning Center, equipped with wireless computers, a plasma television learning center and a Mobile Learning Facilitator used for job searches, resume preparation and application assistance.

Other Will County government displays include the Historic Preservation information booth, presentations on public safety, search-and-rescue dogs and the Adopt-a-Highway Program. In addition, the University of Illinois Extension: Will County Unit, will provide information on Extension programs in Environmental Stewardship, 4-H programs and family nutrition. The environmental program also will feature a giveaway of 355 tree seedlings to attendees and a Q&A session on gardening.

Lockport

Located at 159th Street, the Lockport Expo sponsored by local businesses and organizations will feature baked goods, chili, cornbread, and sloppy joes from The Outpost Pub & Grill; Italian sausage, beef and hot dogs from Genco Subs; and ice cream from Coldstone Creamery. The Lockport High School Marching Band also will be serving chili, hot dogs, hot chocolate and bottled water.

Homer Glen

Located at 159th Street, Homer Glen's Community and Nature in Harmony festival will showcase various military displays, including one by the Fallen Heroes Memorial Organization, Civil War and Revolutionary War re-enactors, Buglers Across America, the Northern Illinois Chapter of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association and the Vehicles of Homer Glen & Classic Car Club.

Homer Glen's festival also will highlight local businesses and community groups. For children, there will be an appearance by Jim Nesci's Cold Blooded Creatures, as well as a Safety Town exhibit, Dino Jump, kids' activity tent and the Homer Library's Book Mobile. The Dance Studio, Elite Dance Academy and the Megaplex's Elite Fitness will conduct demonstrations, and the Homer Junior High Cheerleaders will perform along with the school band.

Participating restaurants include Pepe's Mexican Restaurant, Big Jim's Pizza and Catering, Pelican Harry's and Chesdan's Pizzeria & Grill. Boy Scouts Troop 64 also will have a food booth.

Lemont

Located at 127th Street, the Fall Back into Lemont Festival sponsored by the Lemont Area Chamber of Commerce will showcase local businesses, community groups and government agencies. Local food vendors will include Dinner by Design, The Parlour serving dessert, and Valentine's Italian Bistro serving beef sandwiches. In addition, a dedication ceremony will be held at the Lemont Park District for the ground breaking of their new maintenance building and dedication of One Rod Road as Veterans Parkway.

New Lenox

Located at Route 6, New Lenox will have a morning ceremonial ribbon cutting, presentation of colors by the VFW and American Legion and law-enforcement demonstrations. The New Lenox ceremony will feature a performance by the Lincoln-Way Marching Knights.

I-355 South Extension Celebration Host Committee Guides Events

To commemorate the opening of the first new roadway on the Tollway system in nearly two decades, an I-355 South Extension Celebration Committee was formed to guide the festivities. Led by Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich, the Celebration Committee includes Illinois Tollway Board Chairman John Mitola, Illinois Tollway Executive Director Brian McPartlin, Director of Veterans' Affairs L. Tammy Duckworth, and Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn.

An Honorary Host Committee also has been formed to help coordinate events on the local level. Its members include Illinois Tollway Director Jim Roof, Will County Board Chairman Lawrence Walsh, Lemont Mayor John Piazza, Homer Glen Mayor Jim Daley, Lockport Mayor Tim Murphy and New Lenox Mayor Tim Baldermann.

In addition, the Illinois Tollway has been working closely with state and local veterans' groups for input into the planning of events and ceremonies on the Veterans Day weekend.

Part of Tollway's Congestion-Relief Program

The I-355 South Extension is part of the Illinois Tollway's Congestion-Relief Program – *Open Roads for a Faster Future*, which will reduce travel times by rebuilding/restoring nearly all of the system, widening/adding lanes to many miles of existing roads and converting 20 mainline toll plazas to barrier-free Open Road Tolling. Open Road Tolling lanes are now available at all 20 plazas. Work began in late fall 2004 and the new road is on schedule to open to traffic in November 2007.

About the Illinois Tollway

The Illinois Tollway maintains and operates 274 miles of interstate tollways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Ronald Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the North-South Tollway (I-355), the Northwest Tollway (I-90) and the Tri-State Tollway (I-94, I-294, I-80/I-294). Tollway customers can save time and money with I-PASS electronic toll collection - Get I-PASS & Get Going!