The coming year will be one to remember as the world commemorates America’s 400th Anniversary. This past May, Jamestown 2007 (a sub-agency of the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation) launched the first of several signature events, festivities, and community programs to commemorate Jamestown, Va., as the first permanent English settlement in America.

The 18-month commemoration not only showcases Virginia’s distinctive role in the development of modern America, but also serves as a vehicle to boost the commonwealth’s tourism, economic development, and education initiatives. The commemorative events were designed to provide a glimpse into America’s past and serve as a compass for the nation as it looks toward the future.

Kicking off celebrations, the 17th-century replica ship, Godspeed, set sail in May 2006 on an 80-day journey from Alexandria, Va., to Newport, R.I. More than 450,000 people visited the replica ship—and accompanying Landing Party Festival—during its stops at major ports along the East Coast. Featuring interactive displays, live musical performances, and tours of the ship, the 2006 Godspeed Sail entertained and educated thousands of people about the traditions of representative government, free enterprise, and cultural diversity that first took root at Jamestown. In late April 2007, the Godspeed will journey from the Chesapeake Bay up the James River to re-create parts of the original route sailed by the Jamestown settlers.

Additionally, Jamestown Settlement, Historic Jamestowne, and communities across Virginia have nearly completed long-term improvements to increase tourism and build for a better future. Jamestown Settlement is being renovated to include new galleries, expanded outdoor living-history programs, and a unique exhibition highlighting the world as it was in 1607. Historic Jamestowne is revamping, as well, with an impressive new Archaeaearium, programs, and interpretive experiences showcasing Jamestown’s rich history. In conjunction with Jamestown 2007, more than 165 communities across the commonwealth have implemented a variety of efforts to welcome visitors to Virginia.

Another ongoing commemoration is the America’s Anniversary Gardens project. The Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences teamed up with the Virginia Cooperative Extension to cultivate red, white, and blue flower gardens throughout the commonwealth. Gov. Tim Kaine planted the inaugural anniversary garden at Jamestown Settlement earlier this year. Since then, countless other gardens have sprung up in front of municipal buildings, along transportation corridors, and in yards across Virginia.

One of Jamestown’s greatest legacies is the subject of a yearlong conference series being held throughout Virginia. The Foundations and Future of Democracy series was created to reflect on four centuries of progress and to explore ways for democracy to flourish in the years to come. Beginning in August 2006, a series of seven conferences—each hosted by one of Virginia’s universities—will culminate in a global democracy conference in Williamsburg, Va., from Sept. 16-19, 2007, where world leaders will discuss the future of democratic institutions around the world. For a schedule of the series, go to www.jamestown2007.org/se-democracy-forum.cfm.

Make sure to participate in this truly momentous milestone for America. To learn more about the commemoration or events, visit www.americas400thanniversary.com.

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