

A national treasure

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State Sen. Robert O'Leary, D-Barnstable, addresses the hard-hat wearing crowd at Provincetown Hall yesterday morning as work continues on restoration of the building. A national historic group named Provincetown as one of a dozen "distinctive destinations" in America yesterday.

By **Mary Ann Bragg**
mbragg@capecodonline.com
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PROVINCETOWN — Town crier Ken Lonergan — dressed in Pilgrim garb — stood at the front door of town hall yesterday ringing in what town officials hope will be good economic news.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has chosen Provincetown as one of "America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations" for 2010. The trust has given the award to a dozen U.S. communities each year since 2000, said trust spokeswoman Rebecca Williams yesterday, speaking in the town hall auditorium.

The trust considers a town "distinctive" when visitors are offered a vital downtown area, cultural diversity, attractive architecture, cultural landscapes, and examples of historic preservation. Residents must also have proven their commitment to protecting their community's character and sense of place.

Provincetown was the only town the trust chose in Massachusetts this year, based on an application submitted by the Provincetown Historical Commission. The town was chosen because it is where the Pilgrims first landed in America, in 1620, and where the Mayflower Compact was signed; because of its longstanding artist colony; because of its sand dune and whale watching tours; because it is home to the oldest gay bar in America — the Atlantic House — and because of its historic walking tours, antique properties, ties to notable authors and playwrights, beaches and galleries, and other distinctions, according to the trust.

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Pick your favorite

Go to www.preservationnation.org/ddd through Feb. 28 to vote for your favorite National Trust for Historic Preservation 2010 Distinctive Destinations town. Voters will automatically be entered to win a complimentary two-night stay at any Historic Hotel of America, a program of the trust.

In New England, the towns of Rockland, Maine, and Simsbury, Conn., were also chosen for 2010.

Since the program began, Chatham is the only other town on the Cape and Islands to have received the designation, which came in 2007.

The trust is a charitable, educational and nonprofit corporation chartered by Congress in 1949. It is privately funded by about 250,000 members, and works in many arenas — courts, legislatures, workshops, conferences, media — to promote historic preservation. The Distinctive Destinations program is one of four programs the trust has to promote travel to historic areas of the country.

"A lot of people don't realize the history Provincetown has," Provincetown Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Candice Collins-Boden said yesterday.

The award is a plaque that Williams gave to town officials yesterday in a ceremony attended by about 50 townspeople and town workers. The trust is also holding an online contest through Feb. 28 where voters can choose their favorite "Distinctive Destinations" town, out of the dozen named. The winning town receives a year's worth of free advertising on a travel Web site that is owned by a trust subsidiary.

But the less tangible — and perhaps more profitable — benefit to the town is the national and international attention the award could bring, said trust executive vice president David Brown yesterday.

Tourism is considered the primary economic "engine" in Provincetown, a former fishing village with a year-round population of about 3,500. The town spends among the highest amount of public money of all Cape and Island towns — about \$210,000 annually — to market itself to visitors.

In February particularly, and throughout the year, the trust will also publicize Provincetown through press releases to a broad list of media outlets, as well as through its Web site and social media sites, Brown said. "We don't have any rough statistics," Brown said. "But the past (designees) have said the increased visibility has been wonderful, that the advertising dollar in terms of media attention is incredibly valuable."