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Mayor's message: 50th anniversary of Gaspee Days

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In recent weeks, those traveling through historic Pawtuxet Village have been treated to the sight of dozens of festive blue banners touting the 50th anniversary of Gaspee Days, the beloved community celebration of the burning of the HMS Gaspee, in 1772, off the shores of Narragansett Parkway.

The banners, paid for through a grant from the city's Department of Tourism, Culture, and Development, are disbursed throughout the village neighborhoods of Warwick and Cranston, the two communities comprising Pawtuxet, in advance of the May 14 Gaspee Days Proclamation ceremony at the Rhode Island State House. This event is the traditional kick-off to the two-month long series of events commemorating the brave men who, under cover of darkness, burned the British schooner. Known as the "First Blow for Freedom," the event is considered the precursor of the many acts of rebellion that culminated in the Revolutionary War and the founding of our nation.

For a half century, the hardworking volunteers - past and present - of the Gaspee Days Committee have sacrificed thousands of hours in planning and fundraising for the events that make Gaspee Days so special and popular, drawing thousands of locals and tourists to our city. Their determination and enthusiasm have ensured that that remarkable act of defiance is remembered, ensuring that generations to come will know of the role of Rhode Islanders in our community's - and our nation's - rich and storied history.

In addition to the proclamation ceremony, the annual schedule of events include a historic walking tour of the village, an arts and crafts festival held throughout Memorial Day weekend, an essay contest, a Warwick Symphony Orchestra Concert and fireworks, and a weekend that includes the Colonial encampment, a 5K roadrace, Ecumenical service, the crowd-favorite parade, and the burning of the Gaspee. A raffle, 50th Anniversary block party fundraiser, a maritime history symposium, Waterfire in Providence, and other events are also being eagerly awaited.

For more information on these family-friendly events, visit www.gaspee.com. We hope to see you in Pawtuxet Village soon!

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick and the chairman of the RIPTA board of directors.

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