



PRESS RELEASE

Centennial Flame from 1967 Pan American Games re-ignited as part of Day of Indigenous Cultural Ceremonies

WINNIPEG (June 21, 2017) – The Centennial Flame in Winnipeg was re-ignited today for the first time since the 1967 Pan American Games. The 12-foot concrete structure supporting a copper cauldron has sat quietly on the median of Memorial Boulevard near the Manitoba Legislature for 50 years. The flame was reignited as part of a full day of Indigenous cultural ceremonies performed on three sites as a way of honouring the culture of the 2017 Canada Summer Games Co-Hosts, Treaty No. 1, No. 3 and the Metis Nation represented by the Manitoba Metis Federation. It will remain lit until the end of the 2017 Canada Summer Games on August 13, 2017.

The cultural ceremonies performed by Elders representing all Indigenous communities of Manitoba aimed to protect and honour the lands and waters the Games will be held upon, protect the athletes who will be competing, and commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Canada Games.

“From the beginning, the vision of the Host Society has been to make the Games in Winnipeg as inclusive as possible. We are grateful to the Elders, Grandmothers, and traditional knowledge keepers who have provided us with cultural guidance,” stated Jeff Hnatiuk, President and CEO of the 2017 Canada Summer Games Host Society. “It was their suggestion that we hold a sacred fire and water ceremony before the Games begin. Holding them on the summer solstice, National Aboriginal Day, makes the day even more meaningful.”

FIRE, WATER, AND CONNECTION TO THE LAND

The day’s activities began with morning ceremonies at Manitou Api, a historic and sacred site approximately 150 km east of Winnipeg. Elders performed a sacred fire ceremony; a water ceremony, water song, and prayers were also part of the program. Elder Dave Courchene led the ceremony at Manitou Api along with Elder Fred Kelly, Elder Harry Bone, Elder Katherine Whitecloud, Elder Florence Paynter and Elder Mary Maytwayashing.

Four Indigenous youth representing the four original peoples each received a torch containing fire from the sacred site, while four others carried a copper vessel filled with water before travelling to Winnipeg for the Centennial flame ceremony.

At 2:00 p.m. on Memorial Boulevard in Winnipeg, the eight Indigenous youth arrived carrying the sacred fire and water. Elder Dave Courchene Jr. used the sacred fire to light the Centennial Torch after merging the flame with that of the Canada Games' Roly McLenahan torch, which was lit on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on June 6, 2017. This ceremony sets the stage for the Manitoba Hydro Torch Relay that will begin on Friday, June 23, 2017 in Steinbach. It will then travel through 10 other communities in Manitoba and Kenora, bringing the excitement of the Canada Games to all Manitobans.

"Today's Centennial torch lighting ceremony is a unique way to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Canada Games and remember the 1967 Pan American Games, a historic event for Winnipeg held during Canada's centennial year," explained Hnatiuk. "As one of the Elders, Dave Courchene Jr. was one of the Front Runners from the 1967 Pan American Games. This was also an opportunity to bring awareness to their story and honour the surviving Front Runners."

A historic ceremony also took place inside the Manitoba Legislative Building to re-ignite the spirit of the building and reconnect it to the land on which it stands. Eight rocks, also known as Grandfathers, that were painted and smudged by Elders, will remain in perpetuity in the Manitoba Legislative Building. The eight rocks represent the Seven Sacred Teachings of respect, love, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth, and their spiritual origin - values shared by Indigenous Peoples to inspire the work of the Manitoba Legislature.

"With Canadians from all across the country set to gather in Winnipeg for the 2017 Canada Summer Games, we have a special opportunity to celebrate our history and the achievements of Manitobans," said Manitoba's Indigenous and Municipal Relations Minister Eileen Clarke. "It is fitting that we light the Centennial Torch, on National Aboriginal Day, in a manner that acknowledges the traditional territory on which these games will be played, and that honours the many stories of Indigenous perseverance and achievement that are embedded into the fabric of our province."

A DAY OF CULTURAL – AND HISTORIC – SIGNIFICANCE

The ceremonies performed today have not been filmed since 1951, when it became illegal to perform Indigenous traditional ceremonies under the Indian Act. Today, members of the media were invited to film the majority of them.

The Elders and Grandmothers believe the time has come to share these important cultural traditions with all people, explained Elder Dave Courchene Jr. who led the day's ceremonies accompanied by Elders from all Indigenous communities of Manitoba: "As we step forward and share a glimpse of our way of life it is our hope we can be inspired to unify to create a peaceful world".

The Elders also stressed that today's activities highlight the 2017 Canada Summer Games Host Society and Co-Hosts' commitment to inclusion and respecting Indigenous cultural and territorial protocols. "These Games have set a new bar for inclusion of cultural elements," concluded Elder Courchene. "From identifying Indigenous volunteers and athletes to including cultural ceremonies at key moments of the Games and adopting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations around sport, the Games held in Winnipeg will be among the most inclusive in their 50 year history".

In an unrelated ceremony yesterday, the 2017 Canada Games Host Society and Co-Hosts signed the City of Winnipeg's Winnipeg Indigenous accord, rooted in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.

"Excitement continues to build as the opening day of the Canada Summer Games draws even closer," said Mayor Brian Bowman. "A full day of Indigenous Cultural Ceremonies is a great way to continue our journey of reconciliation in Winnipeg, and reigniting the Centennial Flame from the 1967 Pan American Games is a tremendous symbol to get these games going."

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About the 2017 Canada Summer Games:

Winnipeg, Manitoba will host the Canada Summer Games July 28 – August 13, 2017. Featuring 16 sports, over 250 events and a major cultural festival, the 2017 Canada Games will welcome over 4,000 athletes and coaches and more than 20,000 visitors. Celebrating the Games' 50th anniversary and acknowledging Canada's 150th anniversary, the Canada Games are this country's largest multisport event for young athletes. They will leave a lasting legacy of new and enhanced sport facilities, volunteer and leadership development that will benefit athletes and the broader community for years to come. This event has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada, Province of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg. canadagames.ca/2017

About the Co-Hosts:

The 2017 Canada Summer Games Host Society acknowledges and welcomes our official Co-Hosts, the First Nation communities of Treaty No.1, Treaty No.3, and the Metis Nation represented by the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) whose traditional lands and waters the 2017 Games will be held upon. As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Canada Games and acknowledge the 150th anniversary of Confederation, the Host Society also recognizes the thousands of years the First Nations communities have called this territory home and the hundreds of years it has been the home of the Metis peoples.

The Host Society and Co-Hosts respectively thank Turtle Lodge and the many Elders and Grandmothers that have provided the Games with cultural guidance and teachings that will make the 2017 Canada Summer Games one of the most inclusive in its 50-year history.

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