



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 21, 2009



Youth and Communities across the North Gather at the Northern Saskatchewan Sport & Cultural Festival

Approximately two hundred and fifty youth and their chaperones, people with special needs, artists, coaches, and workshop leaders from seventeen Northern communities; as well as organizers, volunteers, special guests and visitors gathered from October 13-15, 2009 in Beauval for the Northern Saskatchewan Sport & Cultural Festival. An opening ceremony kicked off the Festival with emcees, “Ernestine & Alphonse”, greetings from the organizers and funders, as well as a keynote speaker, Gail Maurice, who owns a film production business in Ontario and is from Beauval. Gail also worked with MBC over the course of the three days on the production of a DVD which will be a record of and promote the 2009 Northern Saskatchewan Sport & Cultural Festival.

Youth participated in workshops during the day including: badminton, wrestling (both youth and coach workshops in these two sports); traditional culture workshops such as food preparation, beadwork, storytelling and others; contemporary culture workshops such as Canada CODE (digital storytelling), Beat Making, and Print Making as well as others; and a one day workshop specifically designed for people with special needs. The workshops were focused on hands on learning and activity, celebrating traditional culture, exploring contemporary culture, and developing sport skills.

The evening entertainment included a hip hop group, performances by Northern Spirits Youth, a Much Video Dance, Sipishk Square Dancers from Beauval, Sakitawak Square Dancers and the Closed Session Youth Band, both from Ile a la Crosse, Voice of the True North, and much more! Each of the youth groups in the culture workshops displayed what they learned on stage Wednesday evening including a drama performance, showcase of the prints made in print making, a CD of each youth's beats made in the Beat Making workshop, a power point of pictures taken by the youth in the Canada CODE workshop and a performance on guitar from the Guitar workshop. It was amazing to see and hear what they created in just a few hours!

“I had a lot of fun. I took part in the drama workshop and traditional workshops and they were all great. Our drama group did some silly skits for everyone. I was also one of the youth in the Northern Spirits Showcase and I played the fiddle at the Festival on both evenings. I learned to play the fiddle from tapes of my grandfather playing and I learned a lot of traditional songs from Ralph Opikokew”, said Tristen Durocher, a youth participant from Air Ronge.

There was also a Northern Arts Show & Sale at the Festival, displaying the incredible amount of talent from artists across the North. With the Art Show & Sale was adjudication as well as a workshop for the artists. The Saskatchewan Arts Board lead project and website “Show Us Your North” (<http://suyn.artsboard.sk.ca>) was also profiled at the Festival. A Northern Artists Gathering organized by the Saskatchewan Arts Board was held in conjunction with the Festival, and the Team North trials for badminton and wrestling teams to participate in the 2010 Saskatchewan Winter Games were also held after the Festival was over on Thursday afternoon.

“The Festival was fantastic”, says Terri-Lynn Beavereye, chairperson of the Northern Sport, Culture and Recreation District. “... The youth were very engaged in the workshops, learned a lot, met new friends, and had a lot of fun. Thank you to the host community of Beauval for doing such a great job with food, accommodations, and welcoming us to their community”. In his comments at the Closing Ceremonies, Host Community Chairperson Alex Maurice said, “Thank you to the youth participating in this Festival for being so respectful, you, your families and communities should be proud ... thank you also to the Northern Sport, Culture and Recreation District for this program, this gathering, Saskatchewan Lotteries for their funding for it, our sponsors to the Host Community, particularly our platinum and gold sponsors, Cameco and Areva, and to the volunteers from Beauval.”

In August 1980, the first Northern Saskatchewan Games and Cultural Festival were held in La Ronge. The theme “Knowing Each Other” rang true as participants from throughout northern Saskatchewan, representing five regional teams, came together for a week of festivities. The overwhelming success of this gathering attributed to future Games/Festivals in 1989 in Beauval, 1993 in Cumberland House, 1997 in Buffalo Narrows, 2001 in Stony Rapids and Black Lake, and 2006 in Montreal Lake (Northern Saskatchewan Cultural Gathering), and now in 2009, the Northern Saskatchewan Sport & Cultural Festival. “Games” were replaced with sport development opportunities largely due to the number of games that the youth in Northern communities are already participating in such as the First Nations Games, North American Indigenous Games, Saskatchewan Winter and Summer Games, and the Northern Lights School Division Student Games and Cultural Festival. The purpose of the 2009 Northern Saskatchewan Sport & Cultural Festival was to bring youth, families, and communities from Northern Saskatchewan together to participate in and celebrate traditional and contemporary cultural activities, athlete and coach sport development. That was accomplished, plus friendships and fun!

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