

Haida Heritage Centre

AT KAAY L NAGAAY

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HAIDA HERITAGE CENTRE OFFICIALLY OPENS WITH A GREAT CELEBRATION

Skidegate, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, Canada – After 15 years of planning and development, the people of Skidegate fulfilled their dream and officially opened the Haida Heritage Centre at Kaay Lnagaay on Saturday, August 23rd. The Centre sits on land that had been set aside for this purpose for over 30 years, on the site of the old Haida seaside village of Kaay Lnagaay. The Centre has been operational since July of 2007, but this official Grand Opening Ceremony marks the full completion of the facility, including new exhibits on Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site.

The day began at 10:00 am with a colourful Haida Clan Parade with many community members and guests in full regalia, wearing traditional Haida button blankets, vests, and woven hats. The participants were drumming and singing as they marched to the beachfront of the Centre to welcome the three newly carved Haida canoes as they landed. These canoes were carved at the Centre by Guujaaw, Billy Bellis and Garner Moody, assisted by their Haida apprentices.

The Opening Ceremony took place in the Welcome House and commenced with remarks by Haida elders and hereditary chiefs. Miles Richardson, CEO of the Centre, said “Our community has dreamed about and planned for this day for decades. This marks an important transition and emphasizes that we are not relics of the past – we are a modern, living, breathing people. While we think of the Centre as being world class, we strive for a higher level – Haida class!” he declared. Richardson went on to thank the provincial and federal governments, community members and other partners for their important contributions and noted that “your support is why this opening is happening today.”

Skidegate Band Chief Councillor, Willard Wilson, said that “For over thirty years our people have been talking about this facility and today we are getting it done. Haaw’aa to the Premier and his cabinet and to the federal government for helping us realize our dream. Haaw’aa to all of you for attending and for coming to help us celebrate.” Chief Wilson also presided over the cedar rope cutting at the end of the ceremony, officially declaring the Centre open, and inviting travelers from around the world to come and visit.

Gujaaw, President of the Council of the Haida Nation, said “The Centre highlights the long-standing relationship our people have with the land. This facility will be measured by how relevant it is to the people who live here. Then when visitors come here, I think they will appreciate it all the more.”

Bill Fisher, Director General of Western and Northern Canada for Parks Canada spoke on behalf of the federal government and said that “the world will be able to appreciate and understand Haida heritage as never before”. Len Munt, the highest ranking provincial official on Haida Gwaii read a message from Premier Gordon Campbell, stating “The Haida Heritage Centre is attracting and inspiring visitors from around the world, and is also a profound place of education and growth, creating a vivid legacy for future artists and expanding the local economy through the Aboriginal tourism industry.”

Guests then enjoyed Haida dancing in the Performing House with dancers from the HIGaagilda Children's Dance Group, the Xaayda Kluu Naay dancers from Old Massett and the Hltaaxuulang Guud Ad K'aaju dance group from Skidegate. This was followed by the unveiling of the Heart of Canada Pole, carved by Reg Davidson. During its tour of 15 cities starting in Winnipeg, the pole was carved on by over 175,000 people from 35 countries. The Pole will now rest in its permanent home in the Pole Gallery in the Haida Gwaii Museum.

A number of contemporary commissions by Haida and non-Haida artists were danced and named, officially bringing them to life. Among these creations were banners, bentwood boxes, weavings, paintings, and a large copper shield carved by Guujaaw.

After a delicious seafood barbecue, the festivities ended with two performances of the Haida language play – *Sinxiigangu* – meaning “Sounding Gambling Sticks”. The play brings together both youth and elders, rallying to create an important work that can be used to help save the endangered Haida language.

For more information on the Haida Heritage Centre, go to www.haidaheritagecentre.com or e-mail info@haidaheritagecentre.com Telephone: 250-559-7885 Fax: 250-559-7886.

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