

Governor General thrilled to be here

By JULIA SKIKAVICH
Star Reporter

Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, and her husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, have arrived in the Yukon to conclude their first official tour of the country.

Jean arrived at the Whitehorse airport on Sunday afternoon before being whisked downtown to be greeted by Premier Dennis Fentie and Andy Carvill, the grand chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations.

Upon inspecting Canadian Rangers, military representatives, cadets, Scouts and Girl Guides, the Governor General entered the Yukon government's administration building to preside over a special citizenship ceremony and to present a Caring Canadian Award.

Yukon Commissioner Geraldine Van Bibber welcomes their Excellencies to the territory for the first time.

It is a treat to have the Queen's representative in Canada arrive in the territory while the midnight sun is at its highest, said Van Bibber.

"The North always has a reputation of capturing people. They come for a season and stay or leave and just have to come back," she said, adding she hopes their imaginations will be caught and they return to the territory.

Mayor Bev Buckway told Jean and Lafond that the governors general visits have an important impact on the lives of average Canadians.

Buckway recounted memories of dusting a pew for former governor general Roland Michener to sit on when she was a child and of her mother worrying whether she was wearing the right shoes for his arrival.

Her mother was assured "the governor general was not in the Yukon to do official shoe inspections."

Whitehorse has much to be proud of and is thrilled to be included on the agenda of the official visit, said Buckway.

"Our economy is strong, our unemployment rate is almost too low, our population is growing," she said. "You'll leave with a better understanding of the people from this corner of Canada."



Star photos by VINCE FEDOROFF

A GIFT FOR HER EXCELLENCY – Teslin artist William Callaghan presents a mask to Governor General Michaëlle Jean on Sunday evening at the official dinner held in her honour. Jean's, husband Jean-Daniel Lafond, is in the centre.

Later in the evening, a lavish dinner was hosted for Jean at the High Country Inn and Convention Centre.

The dinner hosted recipients of the Order of Canada, former mayors and commissioners, recipients of the Caring Canadian Award, current ministers and MLAs and a variety of Yukon artists and musicians.

With tables and chairs draped in white clothes, the \$75-a-plate meal was made up of smoked elk carpaccio, mixed greens with poached morel mushrooms and blackberry port vinaigrette, baked Arctic char with roasted Yukon Gold and sweet mashed potatoes and poached pear for dessert.

Fentie had the opportunity to address the Governor General at the meal. Focusing on the "magnificence" of the Yukon, Fentie highlighted the history and traditions of the territory.

Jean and Lafond will be meeting

with Yukoners from a cross-section of society, he said.

"With each activity that your Excellencies undertake, you'll encounter Yukoners from many, many walks of life and I have no doubt that you will find each and every one of them reaching out to you with great warmth and our renowned Yukon hospitality."

During the dinner, Jean was presented with a mask of a beaver made by Teslin Tlingit carver William Callaghan. Jean said she was thrilled to be in the Yukon.

"We have come to discover and celebrate the rich diversity of the population of Yukon," she said.

Having grown up in Haiti, Jean said, she sees the nature in the North as a "precious gift that casts a spell on us."

Free spirits, and individuals with a taste for adventure are drawn to the territory, she said.

"But Yukon is so much more than a legend," she said. "It is a place where – if my impressions thus far are correct – solidarity is a way of life. This is how people talk about you."

Jean's address touched on the importance of protecting the environment and the Yukon's ecosystems.

"I want to hear about the climate change strategy that you are trying to implement," she said. "I understand it is an innovative approach to the threat facing the entire planet."

Jean also congratulated the government on its efforts to fight alcoholism and drug abuse and addressing the problems faced by young people.

"I know that one of the greatest challenges facing young people in Yukon is finding the right balance between the traditional ways of life here in the North and the demands of the modern world," she said.

Jean is spending today visiting artists in Whitehorse. She will be hosted at the Yukon Artists@Work gallery, Arts Underground and Sundog Carving studio.

Art Matters is also being hosted at the Yukon Arts Centre to discuss the creative process and the notion of culture in motion. She has hosted similar events across Canada.

A discussion on civic engagement

will also be hosted in several of the Yukon communities Jean will be visiting during her tour.

She will depart for Haines Junction tomorrow, where she will visit Klwane National Park and meet with members of the Champagne-Aishihik First Nation at Klukshu Village.

She will then proceed to Dawson City on Wednesday to preside over the opening of a new daycare. She will also be visiting the Danoja Zho cultural centre and meeting with the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation.

Later in the day, she will return to Whitehorse for a meeting with the Association Franco-Yukonnaise and reception with Whitehorse's francophone community.

Jean will then participate in National Aboriginal Day activities and meet with Carvill on Thursday before her departure.

"I will go and meet the people of this territory," she said. "We will be listening. Artists, young people, women and men who are involved in their communities. We want to see the passion in the people of this territory."

Jean said she will take the words and concerns of Yukoners and echo them "with pride and determination" when she visits other parts of Canada and goes abroad.

Man has sentence set for June 27

A man's sentencing for a kidnapping last October has been put over to June 27.

Territorial court Judge Karen Ruddy opted to schedule the sentencing after Mitchell Leblanc made his most recent court appearance Friday afternoon for a pre-sentence report on charges of sexual assault, kidnapping and possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose.

Court documents show Mitchell has previously pleaded guilty to the charges. He is also charged with

forceful confinement and assault with a weapon on the same file.

The documents also note that between Oct. 31 and Nov. 2, 2006, Leblanc kidnapped a woman with the intention of confining her against her will.

Early last November, Whitehorse RCMP closed off part of the Alaska Highway when they located two people who had been reported missing earlier.

Both were taken and treated at Whitehorse General Hospital.



INSPECTION TIME – Governor General Michaëlle Jean inspects the Canadian Rangers after arriving in Whitehorse on Sunday.