

# "Loud and proud: Native culture at the Games"

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Hanging on the wall behind native artist Daniel Tom is a two-faced mask he carved out of a birchwood burl, with inlays of abalone, soapstone and alabaster.

"From one side you see the smile, the uplifted eyebrows that show happiness and openness. But the other side is darker mood, with a down-turned mouth and a look of anger," he said, shifting the mask to show the contrasting profiles.

In a way, that mask, which he calls *Good, Bad, Happy, Mad*, is an illustration of the opposing moods of aboriginal groups that have been on display at the Olympic Games.

But while there have been a few angry native protesters, with placards saying, "No Olympics on stolen land," the face overwhelmingly shown to the world has been happy.

The Games began with the symbolic raising of four totem poles at the opening ceremonies, where about 350 young natives from all over Canada performed traditional dances. Since then, the pavilion of the Four Host First Nations has drawn 14,000 people a day to its gift shop and small performance stage.

"The positive energy has been incredible," said Tewanee Joseph, CEO of the Four Host First Nations.

"There has been an outpouring of pride [among natives] the likes of which I've never seen before."

Mr. Joseph said one elder who visited the pavilion this week drew him aside and said: "I've been fighting for native rights all my life and for the first time I feel like I can rest because there's a new generation taking over."

Mr. Joseph said the message the new generation is trying to get across is that native people are both proud of their traditional culture and eager to get involved more deeply in mainstream Canada.

"There are still issues, there will still be protests. But we really are sending the message we're open for business. We're looking for partners," he said.

While the pavilion is a showcase for native performances, with drum dancers and singers in a rotation of 10-minute shows, another less dramatic stage is set just one block away, at Vancouver Community College.

There the Aboriginal Artisan Village and Business Showcase is offering a unique take on the old trade show. There is the typical line of display booths, but all of them feature native enterprises.

"I don't think there's ever been anything like this before," said Vanessa Mountain, director of the village and aboriginal procurement specialist for VANOC.

Ms. Mountain said some of the booths have done a lot of sales, while others have not. "But everyone I've spoken to is glad to be here," she said. "They realize it's a great chance to get exposure."

Mr. Tom had made only one sale –for a \$7,000 carving – and a lot of people picked up his business cards.

At a nearby booth, Terry Baird, vice-president of construction for the Tsawwassen First Nation, was handing out brochures that show conceptual plans to develop industrial and residential lands adjacent to the small reserve. The back of the brochure states: "TFN is looking for partners to develop our lands."

Mr. Baird said a lot of people had stopped to chat and he was hopeful a deal might be triggered. "You might be walking by as a developer and say, 'That's a nice piece of land, let's talk,'" Mr. Baird said.

Ms. Mountain said the volume of business generated by the village isn't known, but the crowds have been impressive, with 44,389 visitors over the past 10 days.

"What we're showing the world at these Games," she said, "is that we can still maintain our culture, but be adaptable and able to participate in the mainstream at the same time."

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