

Report

Celebrations of 30 years of the Vietnamese community in Canada: Ottawa, December 16-18, 2005

The activities organized by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Canada on December 16-18, 2005 at the Travelodge Hotel in Ottawa consisted of a workshop, a gala dinner, and an exhibition.

I. Workshop

In 2000, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Canada, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation organized a workshop on April 29 in Ottawa with the theme *The Arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Canada: What have we learned?* The target groups of that workshop were government, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations dealing with refugees and immigrants, as well as researchers working in this area. The targets of the 2004 workshop, with the theme *Vietnamese community celebrating 30 years in Canada: Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges*, were members of the Vietnamese community, especially the younger ones.

The main purpose of this event was to review the community's achievements, over the last 30 years, in different areas such as culture, business, science/technology, services, and medicine/dentistry/pharmacy, in order to analyze the opportunities that were open to the community as well as to discuss the challenges that its members will face in the future. This was also an opportunity for community members to strengthen or establish links, among different generations and regions, with a view to contributing to the building of community capacity in general and the development of individuals in particular.

The workshop consisted of 5 parts:

- 1/ Background of the Vietnamese community in Canada
- 2/ Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges in:
 - Culture and Business
 - Science and Technology
 - Services
 - Medicine/Dentistry/Pharmacy
- 3/ Experiences of Other Ethnic Groups
- 4/ Panel discussions: Opportunities and Challenges - Community Perspective
- 5/ Panel discussions: Reaching Out and Building Community Capacity.

In addition, there was a presentation entitled *Building Capacity in the Vietnamese American Community* by the keynote speaker, Dr. Thang D. Nguyen, Executive Director of the Boat People SOS Committee in Virginia, U.S.A.

The speakers in the workshop came from a variety of professional fields, and are in different age brackets, including: Dr. Tung N. Pham of the Toronto District School Board; Professor Louis-Jacques Dorais, Laval University; Toronto Writer Tra Lu; Mr. Dat Nguyen, Publisher of the Thoi Bao Weekly in Toronto; Scientist and Lawyer, Dr. Lac A. Nguyen, Montreal; Dr. Truong Vo-Van, Vice-President of Research, Concordia University; Professor Suong V. Hoa, Head of the Dept. of Mechanical Engineering, Concordia University; Professor Raymond Le Van Mao, Concordia University; Mr. Hung Vu, Chairman of the Board of Directors, The Third Brigade Corp., Ottawa; Lawyer Nhung Hoang, Ottawa; two young sisters / lawyers Van Phuong Ngo (Goslings) and Van Thy Ngo (Dpt. of Justice, Ottawa); Mr. Hai M. Nguyen, Alberta Regional Manager, Canadian Heritage; Dr. Ngoc B. Dao, MD, President of the Vietnamese Physicians Association of Canada, Montreal; Dentist Hoa Phu Nguyen, Ottawa; Pharmacist Can T. Dao, Montreal; Mr. Tuan Trinh, Montreal Police Dpt., also the first Vietnamese-born police officer in Canada; Ms. Bich Quyen Vo, budget officer, U.S. Dpt. of Defense; Mr. Tuan Tram, systems analyst, Lockheed Martin, NJ, U.S.; and Christine Nguyen, medical student, University of Toronto.

In addition to the above Vietnamese speaking presenters, there were three speakers from the ethnic groups: Ms. Sherin Emmanuel, Sri Lankan Community; Mr. Andrew Cardozo, West Indies Community; and Mr. Frank Ling, Chinese Community.

Over 200 people attended this workshop, more than double the number anticipated by the Organizing Committee, including the representatives of the Vietnamese communities in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Sherbrooke, Montreal, and Ottawa.

Among the guests of honour participating were the Honourable Mauril Bélanger, Associate Minister of National Defense; Ottawa Deputy Police Chief Larry Hill; former Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar; and Mr. Rob Burley, Vietnam Desk Officer, Dpt. of Foreign Affairs.

At the conclusion of the workshop, the participants adopted a number of resolutions to thank Canadian Heritage for its financial support, the speakers for their presentations, VCF member associations for their contribution, and the members of the Organizing Committee for their dedication and hard work. The key recommendations include the following ones:

- It was recommended that the Vietnamese Canadian Federation: (1) Establish a Youth Advisory Committee; (2) Implement programs to help youths develop and progress in their careers;
- It was also recommended that governments at all three levels and member associations of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation support the Federation in carrying out its project to build the *Vietnamese Boat People Museum* in Ottawa.

A post-workshop assessment indicated that most of the participants were generally satisfied with the conduct and outcome of this workshop.

The Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation plans to compile the proceedings of the workshop for publication in the Spring of 2006.

II. Gala Dinner

One key feature of the workshop was the gala dinner held on Saturday December 17 at the same location. About 330 people attended this event, again well above the number expected by the Organizing Committee.

The entertainment program following the dinner features a skit entitled *The 30-Year Journey* played by the Ottawa Music Group, a fashion show by this group in conjunction with the students of the University of Ottawa, performances by Lily Doiron (Canadian singer from Montreal who is well versed in popular Vietnamese songs), Thai Hoa and Thai Son (Sherbrooke), Hong Nhung, Kieu Ly and Ivy (The Vietnamese Canadian Idol) from Ottawa.

The skit *The 30-Year Journey* described the life of a Vietnamese refugee orphan whose parents were killed by pirates in their escape for freedom, who was adopted and raised by a Canadian couple, and eventually graduated from the university as a physician. This is a very moving story, based on the poem *A Vietnamese girl and her pebbles* by Vietnamese Poet Tran Trung Dao in Boston, and brought tears to the eyes of many people in the audience.

In the entertainment program, three guests of honour brought their greetings: Dr. Andy Kusi-Appiah, representing Mr. Bob Chiarelli, Mayor of Ottawa; Mr. Richard Mahoney, candidate for the Ottawa Centre riding of the Liberal Party of Canada; and Mr. Paul Dewar, candidate of the New Democratic Party of Canada.

Also at this gala dinner, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation launched its project to build a *Vietnamese Boat People Museum* in Ottawa over the next 3-5 years. Mrs. Marion Dewar, former Mayor of Ottawa and the founder of Project 4000 established in 1979 to rescue thousands of Indochina's refugees, including many Vietnamese refugees, was unable to attend, but she asked her son Paul Dear to read her letter of support of the project.

III. Exhibition

Another feature of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Canada was an exhibition with the theme *A Journey into where we came from and where we're heading*.

The pictures exhibited were divided into four parts: (a) In Search of Freedom; (b) Resettlement and Integration; (c) Community Building; and (d) Thank You Canada.

Some pictures, such as those of the refugees who fled the Communists in North Vietnam in 1954-1955, and the refugees who fled after the Communist take-over of South Vietnam in 1975, were obtained from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Other pictures were collected by the Federation and its member associations.

After being shown in Ottawa, this exhibition will be moved to other major cities by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, similarly to the exhibition mounted in 2004 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Project 4000.

VI. Reaction by the Media

The above events were featured prominently by a wide range of media: the CBC (Dec. 16), Radio Canada (Dec. 17), the Ottawa Citizen (Dec. 16 and 18), the Ottawa Sun (Dec. 20), the SBTN Television Networks, Thai Boa Weekly (Toronto), the Internet Newspaper Dan Chime Viet (Europe), Vietnam Review (Washington, DC, Dec. 27), Cal Today (Dec. 29), the Overseas Vietnam Television Networks (Washington, DC, December 2005), and the SBTN Television Networks (U.S., Canada, and Australia, December 2005).

V. Conclusion

The consensus of the participants of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Canada organized by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation was that they were successful beyond everyone's expectations. The main factor contributing to this success was the enthusiastic participation of the young volunteer professionals and students, from planning the workshop, participating as reporters, arranging for the facilities and the banquet of the gala dinner, preparing the entertainment program, and welcoming out-of-town speakers and delegates. In addition, mention should be made of the invaluable participation by the Federation's member associations in preparing the slide show in the entertainment program, contributing to the exhibition, providing the workshop speakers and chairs, and especially in making arrangements for the young professionals to attend, and advertising these events in their respective communities.

The success of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Vietnamese community in Canada underscores its maturity in Canadian society. It also reinforces the common belief that the community is well on its way to become a strong force in Canada.