

NEWS RELEASE

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Official lighting ceremony for Aboriginal carving

The University Hospital of Northern BC is honoured to be home to a very special and unique depiction of Northern Interior First Nations, following the official lighting ceremony of an aboriginal carving created by artist Peter George.

The 16-foot, almost 500-pound carving was officially unveiled at a Potlatch during the Carrier Sekani Family Services Health and Wellness conference, before being carefully transported to its permanent home in the UHNBC Atrium.

"The carving in the hospital atrium is a physical demonstration of how Northern Health is committed to bridging the health gaps between First Nations and non-First Nations people," said Prince George-Mackenzie MLA Pat Bell. "Health care coordinated at a community level can incorporate all aspects of First Nation wellness- physical, mental, spiritual and cultural."

"The addition of this magnificent carving is a wonderful gift to our community and our hospital," said Prince George-Valemount MLA Shirley Bond. "Integrating First Nations cultural knowledge, values and traditional health practices will undoubtedly enhance First Nations health and increase our awareness and improve our understanding of the health challenges facing First Nations today."

"We are committed to working with First Nations groups across the north to address their health concerns," said Nechako Lakes MLA John Rustad. "Today's lighting ceremony demonstrates how we can all work together."

Much like a totem pole, the All Clans Crest carvings' story starts from the bottom and explains the history of Northern Interior Aboriginal groups. The first three-clan design represents the Frog, Beaver, Grouse clans and recently the Caribou clan was welcomed back to the Lheidli T'enneh, on whose traditional territory UHNBC is located. These Lheidli T'enneh clans are 'held up' by the many other family crests included in the piece.

"The carving, depicting the clans of northern BC, is the start of a collaborative working relationship with the Northern Health Authority and attempts to promote comfort at UHNBC for Indigenous peoples accessing the hospital. While the health and wellness of First Nations people has improved in the last twenty years, much more work remains to be done. First Nations health status is far below the national average in Canada and the rest of British Columbians. We view this event and ceremony as recognition that systems must change to be more inclusive of different cultures in order to improve the care of all citizens. It is our collective responsibility to close the health gaps that exists in First Nations communities", says Warner Adam, Executive Director, Carrier Sekani Family Services.

Several hands were also carved into the plaque representing more than 200 people from organizations across the North who were involved in its creation. The project allowed for the passing along of the culture and traditions to these many participants, creating a better understanding of aboriginal culture.

"Recognizing the significance of family in aboriginal culture assists us to appreciate how aboriginal lifestyle is demonstrated through cultural beliefs and practices," says Dr. Charles Jago, Northern Health board chair. "It is a tremendous honour having the carving installed in UHNBC."

The many donors who contributed to making the carving project a reality will be recognized on a special sign, to be installed directly beneath the carving on the wall of the hospital atrium.

In 2007, the Federal Government, Province of British Columbia and the British Columbia First Nations Leadership Council signed Canada's first-ever Tripartite First Nations Health Plan to improve the health and well-being of First Nations, close the health gaps and ensure First Nations are fully involved in decision-making on the health of their people.