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The Oil Well that Changed the West

It was 50 years ago this winter that oil was discovered in a farmer's field near the sleepy town of Leduc, Alta. Spirits were high the day the well came in, but no one knew then the role the discovery was to play in the fortunes of the nation.

BY WAYNE THOMAS

It was probably the only time in history that an oil company had invited government officials, civic dignitaries, the media and the general public to witness a wildcat oil well come into production.

The date was February 13, 1947, virtually half a century ago. The place, a farmer's field near Leduc, a small town 30 kilometres south of Edmonton. Ten days earlier, following decades of disappointment and more than 130 "dry holes," an exploration well drilled by Imperial Oil had shown early indications of success.

Even so, to issue an official invitation to all and sundry to watch the well come into production was an audacious move. Things could easily go wrong - and they very nearly did.

The supervisor of drilling operations - the "toolpusher" in industry parlance - at the Leduc well was a man named Vern Hunter, the son of a Baptist minister from Nanton, Alta., who had chosen the oil industry for a career. Over the years he had acquired the affectionate nicknames of "Sawmaster" and "Dry Hole" because he had supervised the drilling of a whole series of wells that, unfortunately, had turned up nothing but water or dust.

When Imperial's management asked Hunter to name the day the well could possibly be brought into production, he protested. "So many things can happen with temperamental oil wells," he said later. "However, I named February 13 and started praying." Hunter's plan was to have a crew ready at daylight to begin "swabbing" the well, a technique designed to draw the first oil to the surface. Initially, things went well, but then an engine broke down, delaying operations by several hours. Imperial had boldly predicted that the well would come in by 1 p.m., and since early morning hundreds of curious spectators had been assembling at the corry site, braving a cold wind. By early afternoon a crowd of around 500 had gathered - they munched on sandwiches, pickles and cake supplied by the Cottage Tea Room in Edmonton.

Some milled around the 41-metre drilling derrick, others sought protection from the cold in the nearby boiler room (so many, recalled Hunter, that the men in charge of the boiler could "hardly get near it to throw in the coal and was tempted to throw in a stone of the visitors").

Finally it happened. "Shortly before 4 p.m.," Hunter remembered, "the well
Leduc was by no means Canada's first oil discovery. Crude oil had been found in southwestern Ontario as early as 1858 (an event that was to lead to the establishment of Imperial in 1889), but production was small and short-lived.

A few small oil fields were made in Western Canada around the turn of the century, but the nation's first major oil field was discovered at Norman Wells, N.W.T., in 1920 by a brilliant Imperial geologist, Dr. Ted Link, who was later to play a major role in the Leduc discovery. At the time, because of its remote location just south of the Arctic Circle, the Norman Wells field was of limited commercial value. Today, more than 75 years later, the field is still in production, enabling Imperial to send more than 35,000 barrels a day of very high-quality crude oil — about 10 times the original daily production — to southern markets by pipeline.

At the end of the Second World War, the outlook for the Canadian oil industry was dim. More than 50 years of exploration, about 1,200 wells and the expenditure of around $200 million had yielded slim pickings in total, reserves of about six trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 250 million barrels of crude oil. No oilfield of any significance had been discovered since Turner Valley more than 10 years earlier, and the oil from that discovery, just west of Calgary, was fast running out.

Even Imperial, for many years the only major company to conduct any kind of consistent exploration programme in the West, had relatively little to show for its efforts. Since 1912 the company had spent $23 million on oil exploration in Western Canada, had conducted half of the industry's geological studies on the Prairies, a third of the seismographic work and a quarter of the drilling. Apart from its Norman Wells field, its only reward was a share of rapidly shrinking Turner Valley production (which, by 1946, was down to 6.4 million barrels a year from a 1942 high of 10 million barrels). By 1946 the company had achieved the dubious distinction of having drilled 133 unsuccessful exploratory wells in a row.

Shortage of crude oil was a serious problem for Imperial. Production from Turner Valley and a few producing wells in southern Alberta was barely sufficient to meet the needs of the company's Calgary refinery. Its Regina refinery had to be supplied with imported oil at the then punitive price of $5 a barrel.

Many years later, one of Imperial's directors of that era, Bill Taylor, who was to become president and chairman of Imperial's board, summed up the company's difficulties: "We were importing, by tank car, oil from Colombia, Louisiana, etc., to the Regina refinery at an out-of-pocket cost of over $1 a barrel. In the meantime, we had drilled our way across Saskatchewan, southern Alberta and some [Alberta] foothills prospects without success. In fact, so disappointed were Imperial's directors with the company's lack of exploration success that they were giving serious consideration to a scheme to manufacture synthetic gasoline from natural gas.

But Imperial's oil explorers, led by the enthusiastic Ted Link, now chief geologist, were not quite ready to throw in the towel. At a critical strategy meeting held at Imperial's Toronto headquarters in April 1946, the company's senior technical staff urged Imperial's management to approve a final exploration effort to assess what they regarded as the most promising oil prospect: an area of central Alberta extending from northwest of Edmonton, south to Leduc and beyond.

Imperial's directors endorsed the plan with considerable reservations: it was clear that the company could no longer afford to pour money into dry holes. Bill Taylor commented later, "I recall there was a major argument in the Imperial board, ending in a reluctant agreement to proceed with the test rather than immediately developing a final design on a gas-synthetiser plant. The word was..."
“After $2.3 million [spent on exploration], this is final.”

The month after the fatal meeting in Toronto, the decision to drill in central Alberta received a strong endorsement from Imperial’s 32 staff geologists. Link had sent them a questionnaire asking where they thought oil was most likely to be found in Western Canada. The plains of central Alberta were the firm choice of 18 geologists and the second choice of another six. Knowledge, judgment, conviction and sheer luck together led to the choice of Leduc as the location of the first of the series of fast-reacting wells.

Quietly, so as not to arouse the interest of other companies, Imperial began to acquire “reservations” — exploration rights — on land in the Leduc area from the province, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Hudson’s Bay Company and private landowners. By the late spring of 1946, everything was in place for the first big shot. The situation was described by one of the company’s senior geologists.

The seismic techniques used were standard for that time. A series of lines, each about 10 kilometres apart, were delineated on the area to be explored. The seismic crew then drilled a series of 18-metre-deep holes at regular intervals along each line, placed small quantities of explosives in the holes and detonated them. The shock wave produced by the explosions travelled underground until they reached solid rock and were then reflected back to the surface, to geophones placed on the ground. The time taken for the waves to reach the surface indicated the distance between the underlying rock and the surface, enabling geologists to draw a profile of the rocks.

It so happened that for the first line to be tested, the seismic crew chose a gravel road just within the northern border of Leduc township. They chose to start there for no better reason than that it was one of the very few roads in the area and that, because of the spring thaw, it was about to be closed to heavy traffic. In fact, the road was not even included in the company’s reservation.

When the results of the test shots along the gravel road were mapped by Carl Chapman, a geophysicist in Imperial’s Calgary office, he noticed an irregularity: an unexpected rise in the Cretaceous rock formation, which he thought could possibly have oil trapped beneath it. It was only a small anomaly — what geologists call a “nip-point” high — but he suspected, likely had no significance.

Still, Ray Walters, the head geophysicist, thought that if Imperial was going to drill anywhere in the Leduc area, it might as well be on that anomaly. Chapman recalled the historic moment years later. “The actual location for Leduc No.1,” he said, “was picked from my map by Ray [Walters] and approved by Jack Webb [the company’s western exploration manager].”

The die had been cast. Imperial decided to apply to the Alberta government for a licence to drill its exploration acreage and moved in a drilling rig and crew.

When Vern Hunter and his work crew of four drillers and 28 roughnecks (who handled a variety of jobs around the rig) arrived in Leduc in November 1946, they found a sleepy community of about 1,200 souls. There was a decrepit town hall, an antique fire engine fitted with buggy wheels, an outdoor curling rink, a baseball field and a hotel called the Waldorf.

The citizenry of Leduc was less than thrilled with the arrival of the roughnecks, who travelled with a reputation for robustness, and, likewise, the drilling crew was not overly impressed with Leduc. George McInnes, a geologist, remembered the place as having “the typical and somewhat drab appearance of a small western town with all of the customary attributes, both good and bad. Those of us who were single moved into the hotel or private homes, while the married element lived in a trailer park centered roughly on second base on the baseball diamond. The Leduc area rapidly proved capable of supplying in abundance most of the inconveniences of rather indifferent food, bad weather, snow and mud....”

The well was begun (“spuddied-in” in drillers’ terms) in bitterly cold weather on November 20 in a field some 100 metres from the barnyard of a farmer named Mike Tutta. The Tuttas turned out to be as friendly as the rest of the community was wary, and crew members were always welcome at the family table for a cup of tea or a meal. In return, the crew made a point of buying cream, eggs and chickens from the family, and a very satisfactory relationship developed.

Despite the hopes of Imperial’s geologists, no one on the drilling crew had serious expectations of discovering oil at Leduc. “They’ll never find oil here,” announced Vern Hunter. “It’s too close to the city.” Nor, in the opinion of Doug Layter, a geologist who was to play a significant role in the discovery, did most Imperial managers really expect to find oil there. “They didn’t think that Leduc would be any different,” Layter was to recall. “It was going to be just another dry hole.”

And yet, almost from the beginning, there was a different feel to this well. The crew members found themselves feeling something they hadn’t often encountered before: hope. It was hard to pin down, but it was there. George McInnes felt that something was happening: “Just when most of us began to feel that we had a tiger by the tail is difficult to say...”

As Vern Hunter was to describe events later, “All the way down from the first 2,200 feet [670 meters]...
Ten days later, while Imperial’s directors were entertaining Alberta dignitaries at Edmonton’s MacDonald Hotel to celebrate bringing the discovery well into production that afternoon, former Mike Titta hitched a team of horses to a sleigh, drove into the nearby town of Calmar for beer, and threw a party for the 35 drills and roughnecks who were on the site that day.

The youngest of them was John Funk, then 22, who still vividly remembers the day the well came in. “Vern Hunter,” he recalled recently at his Edmonton home, “thought I should have the honour of lighting the flare. I’d practised the day before, and when the moment arrived, I won that burning oil-soaked sack around my head and let it fly.”

“Up it soared about 100 feet [30 metres],” W. Howard’s flame and black smoke shot into the air. The well belched a few times as it cleared itself, then a perfect smoke ring formed and floated off in the cold, clear air. A good omen, some people said.”

A good omen, indeed. The previous day, on a location a couple of kilometres southeast of the first well, Imperial had spudded-in Leduc No. 2. Initial results were disappointing: no oil, some gas and lots of water. Testing of the D2 layer—the source of the oil discovered by Leduc No. 1—proved even more disappointing; porosity was poor and there was no evidence of oil.

Those on the spot faced a dilemma. Should the well be abandoned, as some geologists urged, or was it worth going deeper? The problem was solved when the drill bit unexpectedly encountered a layer of porous dolomite—potential oil reservoir material—at 1,637 metres. Aubrey Kerr, the geologist on duty, ordered drilling to stop and called for a test. Initial tests were negative, but success was not long in coming. As dawn broke on May 7, 1947, oil began flowing from a completely new and prolific producing zone—the soon-to-be-famous D3 formation. The drill bit had penetrated an oil-bearing Devonian reef, and Imperial hit the jackpot.

No one could realize it at the time, but Leduc No. 2 was to overshadow Leduc No. 1 in its ultimate significance for the Canadian oil industry. It was the first time that oil-bearing Devonian reef structures—known to be fruitful sources of oil—had been demonstrated to exist in the western provinces.

So revolutionary was the idea that oil-bearing subterranean reefs existed (coal reefs in Alberta?) that it was several months before all of Imperial’s technical personnel could be persuaded that this was the case—fortunately, it took some of the company’s competitors even longer to accept the fact. Armed with this vital new piece of information, Imperial went on to record a string of drilling exploration achievements. Major fields such as Redwater (abandoned earlier by a competitor) and Golden Spike were discovered during the next two years, laying the basis for the company’s prosperity for decades to come.

Both Leduc discovery wells were to be prolific producers. No. 1 was finally abandoned in 1974 after producing more than 300,000 barrels of oil. No. 2 remained in operation for 29 years, producing 346,000 barrels.

But far overshadowing the wells’ individual performances is the fact that they revolutionized the oil industry in the West, revealed a wealth of new knowledge for geophysicists and geologists, and pointed the way to a resource-rich and energy-secure future for Canada.

or so, we started to pick up a light gas and signs of oil in the Leduc. The whole thing was alive. And when we got down to the D2 [lay of Devonian rock], well, that’s when the whole thing started for Western Canada.”

On a chilly afternoon in late January 1947, Steve Cottban, another geologist, was at the well when drilling reached the 1,352-foot level. Examining samples of dolomite limestone from the well, he noticed a clear, yellowish liquid in the limestone pores. Oil! Not much of it, but there was more to come.

On February 3, when drilling had reached a depth of 1,544 metres, a geyser shot from the drill pipe, showering one of the roughnecks, Al Deenway, with a mixture of mud and light crude oil. After 133 dry holes, it was a welcome event. There were no regrets any lingering doubts—Leduc No. 1 was a winner.
A Matter of Responsibility

During the last 20 years, our world has undergone enormous change, compelling business to re-examine its responsibility to society

By Dean Cohen

What goes on in corporate boardrooms is generally privileged information, with only directors and senior managers privy to the discussions. Still, it’s no secret that one of the hottest boardroom topics these days is corporate social responsibility.

The responsibility that business has to society is a new topic. For decades the various corporate stakeholders have looked to corporations to respond to a number of their needs and concerns. Employees have called for safe, healthy working conditions, competitive wages, income protection when they are sick and pensions when they retire. Consumers have insisted on the delivery of good quality, competitively priced products and services. Charitable and other nonprofit groups have counted on corporate contributions to fund special causes. Various social actions have seen corporate dollars flowing through the various levels of change. And more recently, governments and local communities have looked to business to create jobs.

Over the years, business has taken its responsibilities seriously, in part with increasing seriousness. The measures the corporate sector has taken to address these needs and concerns have vastly improved our quality of life. Many of the innovations of the past few decades are now so commonplace that we take them for granted. Flexible work hours, benefits tailored to the needs of individual employees, a variety of pension options, products made to zero-defect standards, service guarantees and commitment to the environment campaigns (which requires companies to set aside one percent of pretax profits for charitable contributions) are just a few of them.

But recently, the focus of corporate social responsibility has altered. Technological change — especially the linking of the computer and the telephone — has brought about a revolution in the way work and business are conducted. Telecommunication advances, followed by various trade- liberalization agreements, have resulted in the globalization of markets. As Marshall McConahy’s global village becomes a reality, competition for new sources of supply and new customers for products has intensified. So has the power of social action groups. A group with a cause and a modus has enormous power to press corporations to change their practices in response to changing public values or legislation. As well, more and more frequently, cash-strapped governments are backing away from many of their traditional societal roles as they struggle to balance their books.

These new global realities are forcing business to consider many new questions about its role in society. To what extent, for example, should corporations take up the slack left by governments as they withdraw from many of their traditional areas of social support? Should corporations be funding charitable organizations to an even greater extent than in the past? Does business have a responsibility for reducing unemployment? And what should its role be in caring for the environment?

Some of the Corporate Responsibility issues facing business 20 years ago have, to a large degree, been obliterated by the imperatives of the modern world. The need for special measures to ensure gender or race equality is a case in point. The reality today is that companies can no longer afford to leave any source of talent untapped in the struggle to survive. There are still a lot of dub by aspects to corporate culture, but they are fast disappearing under competitive pressures. Although companies may differ widely in their ability to capture the talents of people with diverse backgrounds, capitalizing on human resources, especially those of gender or race, is an absolute necessity today.

Access by the physically challenged is another issue that more and more companies are addressing simply because they recognize the contribution members of this sector of the population can make. New technology that allows workers to participate relatively fully from home in the day-to-day affairs of a company is a major contributor to this process.

Some areas of corporate social responsibility are fraught with major controversy. One is job creation. This is an area in which corporations have received the strongest criticism recently — some from members of the business community itself. Business has been faulted for laying off large numbers of people in the midst of soaring earnings. Without question, the biggest companies are dominating, making headlines as they struggle to survive a competition they never imagined a generation ago.

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Three decades ago, Alvin Toffler began writing about what he calls the "time of history," the period in which smokestack civilizations, having dominated the earth for centuries, is finally replaced by another, far different one. ... Toffler reckons we are now halfway through the transitional period, and while society has not yet accepted the implications of the new ways of working, most members of the public are no longer denying the need for workplace change.

But the issue of job creation goes deeper than this. The issue is one of competitiveness. The fact is that economic growth and job creation have been decoupled for decades. Once competition becomes global, investment in one jurisdiction may lead to job creation in another. Some displacement of jobs from high-income to low-income areas is bound to happen and is a major factor in the progress of developing countries. Is this bad? Certainly it is for people whose jobs have suddenly been exposed to global economic realities and have disappeared at a result. But it is surely welcomed by the recipients. The solution to the problem of job loss is sensible transition programs such as those that have been promised by government but not yet delivered. Despite our lack of such programmes, however, Canada falls behind only the United States as the leading job creator in the G7 countries.

In both Canada and the United States, it is businesses — many of them new — with between 50 and 500 employees that are responsible for the job growth. The new jobs in this area are themselves a reflection of the changing times. Many, for example, are not full-time — partly to get around payroll taxes and other regulatory burdens and partly to take advantage of more efficient ways of getting work done. Self-employment is growing, as well, accounting for 35.4 percent of total employment in Canada. Among the new-
one of the worst in the industrialized world," and we have an overall tax burden 25 percent higher than that of the United States. Thus, both international records and Canadians are investing much of their money elsewhere.

The evidence is overwhelming that corporate restructuring designed to make companies more competitive and innovative has been a matter of survival for most Canadian corporations. A blunt example for readers of this magazine is Imperial Oil itself. The structure of imperial during the 1970s and even the 1980s was simply not equal to the competitive challenge it faced in the 1990s. In the

Canadian corporations have been major contributors to charitable and nonprofit agencies for decades... The best-managed corporations seek to align their contributions with their business practices

eminent producers with equipment with child labour, the problem must be worked out in conformity with the values the organization proclaims. This is happening (albeit too slowly for some) in spontaneous organization and top-down liberalizing pressures converge.

A related and still evolving issue is whether business should, through the use of sanctions, act as an enforcement mechanism against abuses. Some argue that sanctions are an effective means to bring about change, while others say that they punish the victims still further. Protest groups have had more success than govt.

interests of its shareholders, its employees and, indeed, its customers, it had to become a lower-cost, more efficient company.

The root of the restructuring issue is innovation and entrepreneurship — what the early-20th century Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter called "creative destruction." It is true that this is a business process just barely tolerable for those directly involved. The fact is that society needs to have a better conversation about how to deal with x-governments, individuals and business.

Business is doing its part. A successful company today seeks a relatively close relationship with its various stakeholder groups, developing, among other things, common expectations, which constitute a kind of culture of shared norms. More and more companies are developing charters that address the concerns of their stakeholder groups. Starbucks Coffee, for instance, has introduced a code of conduct to which all its suppliers are asked to adhere. With the globalization of business, the values of corporations must be shared not only by citizens of their own country but by a network of people from various cultures around the world. Values, not geography, bind communities. If someone in the group violates the values of a commu-

Corporations’ responsibility to the natural environment is also a major consideration today. Bluntly stated, there is no profit in living on a poisoned planet. The Soviets may not have cared. Business does. Consciousness of the threat to the natural environment posed by its current systems of production has replaced other distribution issues as one of the main determinants of corpo-

is becoming more significant as government lessens its support for culture and education. Philanthropy is in many ways a corporate value statement. Canadian corporations have been major contributors to charitable and nonprofit agencies for decades. In the past, a scatter-gun approach to good corporate citizenship was the accepted norm. Today, the best-managed corporations seek to align their contributions with their business practices, promoting the wellbeing of their host communities. Avon and Estée Lauder (both cosmetics manufacturers whose primary customers are women) have, for example, raised millions of dollars in recent years for breast cancer research. Apple, IBM, Microsoft and Novell are renowned for equipping counties not-for-profit organizations with hardware, software and the resources they need to develop Freenet and Internet connections.

As for the contribution of corporations to the lives of employees, business will continue to do its part. It is rethinking work structures, processes, cultures and norms in order to keep employees united in the interests of an effective, productive organization. A good many companies, for example, are already building consideration of family issues into job design. Many, for instance, provide on-site child care or child-care referral services and allow employees to work partly from home in an effort to meet the needs of two-income families. Pension plans, too, are being evaluated and revised to meet modern needs.

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Finally, we cannot forget that the first imperative of business is to stay in business and make a profit to enable it to meet society's present and future goals. Corporate social responsibility at the end of the 20th century is partly an identifi-

able state and partly a work-in-progress based on changing expectations and new conditions. Al-
Another Woman's Way

Through Unknown Labrador

A Canadian writer travels to Labrador and finds a land of desolate beauty and quiet charm

BY SUSAN MUSGRAVE

The travel agent in Toronto didn't know where Labrador was. I'd called enquiring about maps. "I believe it's part of Newfoundland," he ventured, hoping I didn't sound too expectant. "Yes, but..." he hesitated, "Isn't it a separate sort of place?"

When I asked a canner, the canner said, "if not encouraging, at least more knowledgeable. "It's fairly inhospitable country," he said. "You'll need a kind of lens that will allow you to shoot from a distance."

Labrador, a distant appendage on the northeastern corner of Canada, has always had its detractors. In fact, I can think of few other places in the world about which more uncomplimentary things have been said. "Wasteful country," exclaimed the first known Viking visitor in A.D. 986. "Poor for wild beasts," concluded Jacques Cartier, more than 300 years later. Even present-day Labradorians themselves have a saying: "Men God finished creating the world. He set down and threw rocks at this land."

But others have been enthusiastic in their praise. Of Labrador, the Victorian explorer Minto Hubbed wrote, "It has a strange wild beauty... which bares itself silently in the deep parts of one's being." Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who in 1903 established the first hospital on the Labrador coast, found the climate so healthy he recommended it "even for neuritics." All in all, it sounded like my sort of place.

I set out for unknown Labrador - without a map. The plane carrying me from Toronto via Halifax and two stops on the island of Newfoundland descended over stands of black spruce and clumps of stumpy green cafeteria moss onto the tarmac at Happy Valley-Goose Bay, a town in south-central Labrador, which, next to Labrador City, is the region's second-largest community. Barbara Kitowski, who was to be my guide here, met my plane and raced me out of town to a dock about 10 kilometres southeast of Happy Valley. I speed-read my itinerary as we drove. I was late for my first appointment, dinner with "Hooker" Bass.

Hooker, like many Labradorians, Barbara explained, as we wound through an area of white-blossomed Labrador tea plants, was descended from Europeans, who came to Labrador as trappers, traders and fishermen, beginning in the 1700s. A tanned, handsome man with mischievous eyes, Hooker got up at a dock, took put for a "coast ride" over the "the coast." Chapel Hill River to Mud Lake. Accessible only by boat or snowmobile, the community was settled more than 100 years ago and shared along with the logging industry until 1910, when the sawmill closed. Of the 65 people who still make their homes in Mud Lake, Hooker is one of only a handful who have a full-time job - as a machine-parts worker at the Goose Bay military base.

While Donna, Hooker's wife, prepared a traditional Labrador dinner (root vegetables, purse pudding and vegetables boiled with salt beef), Hooker showed me the sights: a nest in the long grass full
of tiny chirping birds, an Innu burial ground and his kitchen garden and chicken house. As we ate our dessert – bowls heaped with bakeapples (known elsewhere as cloudberry) and whipped sweet cream – a black horse named Rosley galloped back and forth past the window, tossing her head. Hooker told us she was trying to outrun the flies. The following day Barbara took me on a tour of 5 Wing Goose Bay, a Canadian Forces base that supports the controversial multinational NATO flight training exercises. Allied forces conduct low-level flight training sessions over a designated area of Labrador wilderness where there are no permanent residents. But groups of Innu often set up camp in the area, and they complain that the planes disturb their peaceful hunting and gathering.

Left: To Right: WOOD DRINKING IN FLIES AT NORTH WEST RIVER; JOHN GOUDE WORKING WITH LABRADOR AT HIS STUDY; A CROWN STANDING ON SEVERAL GRAPES AT AN ENNIE HONOUR SITE.

ing life. Like other Labradorians I spoke to, Bar-
bara feels the conflict between the "hunters and bolders" is not likely to be easily resolved in a land rich in both resources and humanity.

Left: Where Bumbling Outside John Goude's Studio at North West River (pronounced "Storm") by some of the locals), their heads bowed under fans of rain. On the beach, a canoe was drawn up alongside a traditional Labradorian wodpple – long, slim lengths of wood stacked to dry in a teepee shape. Goude makes jewellery from a gem-quality feldspar called labradore, which is found in northern Labrador and prized for its selective reflections of certain colours, such as purple, blue and green. The jewellery reminded me of some I'd seen in Mexico made from the wings of indecent nusique butterflies. Everywhere you look in North West River the Nunatsi's of Montagnais, actually all belong to the Innuqun linguistic family and prefer to be identified as one people – the Innu. They have inhabited Labrador for thousands of years. Nowadays, most Innu live in the communities of Sheshuak, across from North West River, and Davis Inlet, but many still travel inland to hunt caribou. As we climbed Sunday Hill to look out over Grand Lake towards the interior, Barbara told me the story of the ill-fated Leonidas Hubbard Jr., who came from the United States to explore this unmapped territory in the early 1900s. Hubbard planned to canoe from the village of North West River all the way to Ungava Bay. He made a poor choice and paddled up the wrong river, a mistake that cost him his life. Hankered down in the snow in the tent, he kept a journal of his last days. "To night or tomorrow, I will improve so I can build a fire, eat the rest of my meat – a fly swatter with a dart gun attached. The plane made five stops en route to Nanu. Each time the doors were opened, hundreds of bloodthirsty mosquitoes swarmed inside. I overheard one passenger say he'd come to Labrador because "you could still wet a fly in a stream no one had fished before." But he'd done more fly-swatting than fly-fishing, he joked.

Barbara Katswaski and others had warned me that I would find the pace in and around Nain frantic. Wayey Bay, just south of Nain, was the site of a large discovery of nickel, copper and cobalt and was booming. As we disembarked I could see the Northern Ranger, a supply vessel that sails the Labrador coast from mid-June until November, carrying freight and passengers to as many as 45 ports and anchorage. Here, in Nain, I was to board the vessel to begin a week-long cruise south "up the coast."
I asked him of the halibut from Newfoundland or Labrador. "Newfoundland, lady," he said, with a hint of indignation, "I'm a Canadian.

To me, I put myself in the cook's good books by being one of the few to sample his cod's tongue meal the first night. He interrupted my chewing, hurrying me up on deck, where he pointed to a narwhale and crystal iceberg half a kilometre from the ship.

I was to see many more of these - 10,000-year-old mountains of fresh water calved from the massive glaciers of Greenland. The waters off Labrador are often referred to as "iceberg alley." Icebergs are considered extremely hazardous to ships, which was the reason, Reg Mootes said, for our anchoring each night.

At dusk we docked at Davis Inlet, the sole Innu community on the coast of Labrador. I stood at the railing watching the children try to straddle up the ship's ropes. The world had spread that it was inadvisable to go ashore. When the Northern Ranger had docked the night before, hundreds of children had tried to board the ship and, when they were unsuccessful, had petted the deck with rocks.

Hopedale was our next port of call. The Moravian Mission Museum, a national historic site, was built in 1782 and includes the oldest Moravian structure on the Labrador Coast. In the church, which is presided over by Labrador's first female minister, men still sit on one side, women on the other.

Our stops were brief - anywhere from 10 minutes to two hours. Most settlements we visited had at least one craft store that sold local greenstone, beaded mosaic, soapstone carvings and Innu word "tickle" (a narrow, difficult passage), "bergy bit" (a small iceberg in the size of a cottage) and "lomatik" (a Labradorian riddle).

After several days on board, the pace of life slowed to "Labrador time," which, like the ship's itinerary, was loose - product of the weather, the workload and the ride. Throughout my stay in Labrador, I was never certain of the exact time. A schoolteacher who joined the ship at Paradise River told me the town itself was divided: one side kept their clocks on Atlantic standard time, the other on Newfoundland time, half an hour later.

It took six days from the time we left Nain to reach Red Bay, the farthest point south in our journey. Our ship had followed the shoreline, weaving among subarctic islands, past sea-caved stone arches and ice-encrusted cliffs. I found myself thinking that the coast probably hadn't changed much since the late 16th century, when Basque fishermen regularly crossed the Atlantic to exploit the vast codfish stocks off the Labrador coast. The Basques established a seasonal fishery of factory in Red Bay, which, in the 1550s, became a whaling capital of the world.

We took a short boat ride across the bay to Saddle Island, whose beaches were strewn with blue mussel shells and shards of red clay roofing tiles left over from the Basque occupation. I set out over the lichen-covered cobbles, following a path through yellow moss carpet and pale green seaweed tossed above the high-tide line by heavy seas, to visit the whalers' cemetery, where the bones of more than 140 men offer silent testimony to the impossible hardships of life at a 16th-century whaling station. Offshore, Gladys, who had been my loyal interpreter, wouldn't explain what "Népichin" meant. I soon found out.

Those crossing the Strait of Belle Isle for the first time had to be initiated "into the north" by Neoprune (or "Népichin") in Newfoundland dialect, the Roman god of the sea. Mickman's in the Strait, Neoprune came up over the side of the ship, dressed in draping cockspur and with a mop in his hand. All the women making their first trip were anointed with seal oil, male newcomers had their moustaches shaved off.

Nowadays, Neoprune wears a yellow rubber suit with a codfish around his waist. I was seated while his assistant, Bubbles, smothered my face with whipping cream and shaved me with a spatula.

Trapped in the rocks, an iceberg rose out of the sea beyond the wreck of a freighter driven ashore by fierce winds in 1966. Elsewhere in the gin-clear waters of Red Bay lie the wrecks of three Spanish galleons.

That night we crossed the Strait of Belle Isle, leaving Labrador behind. I was icebergs watching at the stern when I saw Gladys's pink nylon jacket fly past and settle on the foam, as if it had decided, on its own, to return to Labrador. I recalled the schoolteacher from Paradise River telling me he'd drifted away to the "island" (Newfoundland) but always drifted back. He said his first reaction - every time - upon returning to Labrador "from away" was to exclaim, "Thank God ... finally back to civilization."

I went to find Gladys, who seemed delighted that her jacket had struck out on an adventure of its own. "Népichin, 9:30," she reminded me.

Then I had to "kiss the cod." We sang "Labrador Rose," and I danced a jig, the boat lashed, but not as much as my partner's, an impertinent imber of Sreech, who told me he was travelling to the "island" for a "time." (Gladys translated: "a good part"?)

Before our own party broke up, the captain announced we would be running all night. I lay in my bunk as the ship ploughed through the icy dark waters of the Atlantic, the Northumberland Strait, the Terra Nova, and the Irish."

Then, as we entered the cultured waters of Notre Dame Bay, I dreamt of Gladys's pink nylon jacket bobbing against the waves of Labrador, that large lonely land that had, in a short week, buried itself quietly in a deep part of my being.
Wired Classrooms

Imperial Oil and other corporations are helping to fill the computer void in schools across Canada by recycling used equipment

BY SHONA MCKAY

"I AM SIX AND I LIKE TO BE SIX," THAT'S wonderful," says Deb Keller as she reads the words displayed on a computer monitor being used by Ezra, a t railroad-bred grade 1 student at Credit Meadows Elementary School in Orangeville, Ont. Director of the school's computer laboratory, Keller is offering encouragement to a group of primary students who are writing their first autobiographies using "Story Time," a word-processing programme for children.

Too soon a bell rings, and Keller urges the students to stop and seven-year-olds to gather their belongings and move on to their next class. Outside the lab, a colourful and spacious room with 34 personal computers, 27 grade 7 students wait impatiently for the signal to enter. At Keller's ok, they all but rush into the room, take their places at waiting keyboards and begin to work. The excitement is tangible - and somewhat remarkable given that the assignment for today is to devise sentences using verbs that have a Latin root.

As the students labour away, pulling words such as "persambulate" and "verbal" from their internal lexicons, Keller takes time to lead a programme that has helped make computer-assisted learning a reality at Credit Meadows. It is Computers for Schools, which channels surplus computer software and hardware from government and industry to schools. "About 14 of our 34 computers have come to us through Computers for Schools," says Keller. "Having the extra machines has meant that we have been able to develop a strong computer curriculum. Because we can accommodate an entire class at one time, computers have become a much more integral part of the school's learning environment."

Founded by Industry Canada, the three-year-old programme relies on federal and provincial government bodies and a score of corporate partners such as Imperial Oil to help it meet its goal of promoting early computer literacy and proficiency. "Computers for Schools is responsible for helping to fill an enormous information technology void in our schools," says Pierre Gendron, the Industry Canada official who manages the programme. "Currently in Canadian schools there's an average of 4.8 to 12.7 computers, depending on the province, for every 100 students. But I've received requests from schools with as few as one computer per 100 students." To date, Computers for Schools has delivered approximately 20,000 computers and 10,000 software packages to schools throughout the country. Says Gendron: "The programme is making a major and immediate difference."

The enormous need among Canada's schools for more and newer equipment was the key motivation behind Imperial's involvement in Computers for Schools. "Imperial has a very strong commitment to both children's and education," says Barbara Hejduk, manager of public affairs for the company. She explains that about 65 percent of Imperial's 1996 charitable contributions budget of $6.3 million goes to these areas. "When Industry Canada outlined its plans for Computers for Schools, we jumped at the opportunity to become involved - what better use is there for our surplus equipment?"

Curtis Dubb, who currently works in the information services area at Imperial, is standing before a door in the basement of one of the corporation's office buildings in a north Toronto suburb. As he swipes a card through a security slot and enters a large, bright storage room, he explains that Imperial's partnership in Computers for Schools makes sense to both a philanthropic and business perspective. "In the past, we had little choice but to throw out the computer equipment we no longer used in spite of the fact that much of it still had years of life left," says Dubb as he navigates his way through a space filled with shipping pallets of monitors, keyboards, central processing units, modems and printers. "There is essentially no market for used 10-year-old computers. But thanks to Computers for Schools, they can now be put to good use, contributing to the education of tomorrow's workforce."

"Imperial was the first major corporate donor to come on board, and today the company is our largest corporate source of equipment," says Industry Canada's Gendron. "A full 10 percent of the donated computers have come from Imperial. The company's involvement has been a key factor in the programme's early success."

Gendron's enthusiasm is shared by Prime Minister Jean Chretien. In a recent letter to Imperial's chairman, Robert Peterson, the prime minister thanked Imperial for "the generous support that"
The fact is that computers now play an enormous role in our lives, and their use is only going to grow and become more sophisticated. If kids don’t become computer literate in school, they are at a serious disadvantage.

Not everyone, of course, believes the technological invasion of the classroom is an evolutionary step forward. Certainly, some teachers don’t. But K. Gray, a computer specialist with Computers for Schools, says: "In the future, computer literacy will be as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic."

"It is an industry Canada goal to ensure that Canada is globally competitive. One of the ways to achieve that is to make sure our young people have access to and are familiar with information technology."


"It is an industry Canada goal to ensure that Canada is globally competitive. One of the ways to achieve that is to make sure our young people have access to and are familiar with information technology."
Craig Kielburger
Child-labour Activist

A year ago, Craig Kielburger wasn’t even allowed to ride the subway downtown by himself. But since then the young child-labour activist from Thornhill, Ont., has conducted a seven-and-a-half-week fact-finding trip to South Asia without his parents, met with politicians and media representatives from around the world, influenced changes in legislation, and begun an international speaking career with bookings on three continents. “It’s a bit of a leap from the subway to all this,” muses the slim, fair-haired 13-year-old with an engaging grin.

As the founder of Free the Children, a youth-run group (headquaters: Craig’s house) with a mission to eradicate exploitative child labour around the world and to empower children, Craig says, “I don’t understand why people are so surprised when kids get involved in social issues. Honestly, in other countries children my age and younger are working up to 18 hours a day in factories and fields. People shouldn’t underestimate the abilities of children.”

Craig’s initial inspiration was Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani carpet weaver who had been sold into slavery in a carpet factory at age four, escaped several years later to launch a crusade against forced child labour, and was murdered in the spring of 1995, when he was 12. Very upset by the incident, Craig, who was also 12 at the time, sought more information from his parents. “When Craig started talking about child labour last year,” recalls his mother, Theresa, who, like Craig’s father, Fred, is a schoolteacher, “we didn’t know anything about it.” The boy’s parents sent him to the library to research the issue and encouraged him to phone human rights groups.

Within weeks, by phone, fax and e-mail, Craig had developed contacts at the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude, a New Delhi-based umbrella group of more than 150 organizations. He gave talks on child labour to his class and his boy scout troop, got other kids interested and then started a letter-writing campaign. By October he was planning a trip to India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand and Pakistan with Alan Rahman, a 25-year-old Canadian friend whose father was born in Bangladesh. Theresa, at first dead set against the trip, says somewhat resignedly, “Craig can be very convincing.”

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien discovered the same thing during his Asian trade mission. Initially he had rebuffed Craig’s requests for a meeting. Then, after Craig held his own headline-making news conference in New Delhi, the prime minister agreed to meet with the youth in Pakistan later in their respective tours. Not only did Chrétien move the issue of child labour much higher on Canada’s social agenda, but Craig received an offer to work as a government adviser on children’s issues, an offer he turned down so as not to compromise the independence of Free the Children.

As a direct result of further meetings between Craig and Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the latter presented a bill earlier this year that would allow for the prosecution of Canadians who buy sex from children abroad. Free the Children is now working to raise $300,000 for a rehabilitation and education centre in India for children freed from bonded labour and for four schools in rural areas.

Dressed in blue jeans and a faded T-shirt, playing with his affectionate white dog, Muffin, a cocker spaniel-poodle mix, Craig acknowledges that his youth has helped to open many doors. His boys’ enthusiasm and his unique manner of speaking — alternating like, “I mean” with professorial phrases such as “thus,” “literally speaking” and “going back to the original theory” — have made him a hit on the speakers’ circuit. He has addressed teachers, business groups, unions, child-protection organizations and the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, and twice has spoken at Congressional hearings in Washington, D.C. — all without notes. He speaks from the heart: the 14-year-old working punishing hours in a carpet factory who was branded with red-hot irons for helping a brother escape, of the barefoot eight-year-old girl separating used strings from dirty needles in a recycling plant, of the 10-year-old hauling mud on a sled in a brick kiln to pay off his grandfather’s small loan.

Craig’s father, a quiet-spoken man who grew up helping in his parents’ small grocery store in Toronto, isn’t sure where Craig’s extraverted brand of self-confidence comes from. But he says, “We’ve tried to give our kids the sense that they’re citizens of the world, that humanitarianism is important, and that money is not the be-all and end-all.”

Craig’s older brother, Marc, 19, received an Ontario Citizenship Medal for raising awareness of environmental issues in schools and is currently working with AIDS-infected children in Thailand. As for Craig, he hopes one day to be a doctor with the humanitarian organization Frontiers of Change.

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE ARE SO SURPRISED WHEN KIDS GET INVOLVED IN SOCIAL ISSUES. HONESTLY, IN OTHER COUNTRIES CHILDREN MY AGE AND YOUNGER ARE WORKING UP TO 16 HOURS A DAY IN FACTORIES AND FIELDS”
Canada Goes to Washington

So successful has our embassy in Washington been in promoting Canadian culture that it is now known as one of the U.S. capital’s cultural hot spots

BY MARTIN LEVIN

IT IS A BRISK EVENING IN FEBRUARY 1996, AND CURTIS BARLOW STANDS IN THE DOORWAY OF THE IMMACULATE, BRIGHT, 175-SEAT THEATRE AT THE CANADIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. HE’S SMILING. HE SHOULD BE. HE HAS JUST WITNESSED A STANDING-IN-THE-AISLES-ONLY CROWD being bowled over by four saucy young classical musicians from Toronto, the QuartettoGalateo.

"Are all Canadians this talented?" The question comes from a woman who’s a dead ringer for Cher (and, it turns out, was her stand-in for the 1987 hit movie Moonstruck, directed by, coincidentally, the Canadian film maker Norman Jewison). Barlow smiles at her.

She’s beaming. So are many others. They’re part of a small but steady and influential coterie that has made the Canadian embassy one of the American capital’s cultural hot spots. (Even the fallout from the Helms-Burton Bill, intended to punish foreign firms for doing business in Cuba, hasn’t put a dent in this phenomenon.)

Arthur Erickson’s multi-structure is, appropriately, only steps from the cultural – and political – centre of Washington. The National Gallery of Art is just across the street; the Capitol’s gleaming white neoclassical dome is just a couple of blocks away. That positions the embassy well to represent Canada in what is the heart of the western world.

Canada has seldom figured large in the Washington consciousness, except perhaps as a trading partner and the land of pristine lakes and hockey players. In Washington, this country may be remembered best – although the memory is fading – for its role in rescuing U.S. diplomatic staff members in 1992 during Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iranian revolution. Or maybe for Ben Johnson’s run from glory to goat in the aftermath of the 1988 Olympic doping scandal.

The embassy staff thought things could be better, and it felt that Canadian culture might be the key. Nobody believed that more strongly than Curtis Barlow, Canada’s cultural envoy in Washing- ton from 1990 until this fall. Elegant and culturally confident, Barlow cemented, and in many cases established, strong links between the embassy, Washington’s cultural institutions and Canadian artists.

The former head of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, Barlow was instrumental in building credibility for Canadian arts in Washington. "There has always been a dual objective to the cultural programme," he says. "It works both to promote Canadian art and artists, by exposing them to influential American audiences, and to further Canadian foreign policy." These are separate but linked objectives.

Barlow, who left Washington to become executive director of the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown in October, previously ran Canada’s cultural programme in London, England. "London is very sophisticated artistically," he
Arthur Erickson's stunning structure is, appropriately, only steps from the cultural - and political - centre of Washington.

Films about Glenn Gould. "When it was over," he says, "Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's eyes were brimming with tears, she was so moved."

The embassy has also presented the best Canadian films from the International Festival of Film on Art in Montreal. Among the works shown were a history of the ballet La Sylphide by Frank Augustyn, a former principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, and short films by Atom Egoyan of Toronto and Guy Maddin of Winnipeg that were inspired by the works of painter Aline Goyette and Odilon Redon respectively.

The musicians appearing at the embassy have included the violinist Rivka Golani and the soprano Rosemary Laing - only those who have received accolades (media attention, awards, public funding) are invited to appear. "We've never had a recital by an artist who wasn't first class," says Barlow.

There's also a lecture series that features distinguished Canadians. The Canadian theatre impresario Garth Drabinsky spoke about the commercial theatre's role in the arts community. The prominent Toronto defence attorney Edward Greenspan spoke on freedom of speech to an audience of lawyers, law professors and students, sprinkled with Capitol Hill staffers and members of the American Civil Liberties Union. Writers on speaking tours also drop in - their talks are promoted at major bookstores such as Barnes & Noble. The increasing cachet of Canadian writers like Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields and the late Robertson Davies can be extended, Barlow believes: people reason that if the country has produced these distinguished writers, there must be others they haven't heard of but whose work is worth reading. That provides an opening for somewhat lesser known authors.

The embassy's small art gallery holds four shows a year. Since Washington is fairly conservative, these are almost always historical.

In the fall of 1995, for instance, an exhibit titled "Cornelius Krieghoff / Canada" featured a selection of Krieghoff's works from the Royal Ontario Museum. It was sponsored by Alcan Aluminium Ltd., which is where the business angle comes in.

The embassy has always been able to find a corporation to sponsor shows exhibiting the work of top artists, says Louise Blais, who replaced Barlow as the cultural affairs adviser this past October after four years as manager of the development offices at the National Archives of Canada. In recent years, showings of the photographs of Alex Colville and works by Emily Carr from the Vancouver Art Gallery have been sponsored by Northern Telecom Ltd. and Westcoast Energy Inc. Bombardier Inc. sponsored a six-week music series featuring the quartet Marina Piccinini and the pianist Lisa Godwin. Sponsorship is both a gesture of cultural pride and a means of promoting business. Sponsorship provides an opportunity to support Canadian artists, as well as access to Washington.

Most art exhibitions, says Blais, attract 5,000 to 6,000 people, and many of them are reviewed in The Washington Post. Opening night is usually hosted by the ambassador (currently Raymond Chétrin) and the chairman or chief executive officer of the sponsoring corporation. Corporate involvement is a matter not only of policy but of necessity. The embassy's cultural budget seems paltry - a mere $80,000 annually. Without the $200,000 to $350,000 contributed by corporations each year, the embassy would not be able to present many of the events.

Without the $200,000 to $350,000 contributed by corporations each year, the embassy would not be able to present many of the events.
The embassy houses an impressive collection of Canadian art, with stunning paintings by the likes of David Milne and Jean-Paul Riopelle.

Television and the preservation of historical buildings as well as the Canadian Centre for Architecture, which she founded in Montreal.

Allan Guthe, whom ambassadorship from 1981 to 1989 was a highly visible one, says that although culture was important under his stewardship, the fact that the old embassy had no public rooms meant that "our efforts were inevitably a lot more low-key."

Still, he says, his staff always believed that culture was an important way of projecting Canada's national image. "One thing I thought that I liked about the old embassy was that it was a permanent member of the foreign service." Today, cultural officers are selected from Canada's cultural community and bring with them their extensive and intimate knowledge of the arts.

In film, Guthe worked with the Motion Picture Association of America and its influential head, Jack Valenti, to create an awareness of Canadian film. The embassy would hold black-tie dinners in support of the American Film Institute and bring in directors like Denys Arcand and internationally known actors like Donald Sutherland and Christopher Plummer. These events laid the path for the festivals Curzon introduced.

The embassy's cultural affairs programme is a success not only in promoting Canadian culture but in helping embassy staff with the time-honoured practice of "bilateral networking" - getting to know your neighbours and helping them to get to know you.

And, when your neighbour's proverbial elephant and you're the mouse - or heavier - it's no easy task. But Canada's artists are very welcome in the developing world and native communities in Canada, MAS links such volunteers with nonprofit groups in the Toronto area. "There were a lot of agencies that needed management advice and a large supply of volunteers who could help," says Taylor, who has helped to place MAS volunteers in 50 Toronto agencies since the group was founded in 1993.

Taylor joined CESO in 1987, a few years after retiring from the Ontario government. During his years with the organization, he helped to prepare project proposals and match volunteers with projects. As well, he developed a fund-raising programme. And five years ago, Taylor himself went on a CESO assignment, which saw him spend seven weeks in Budapest, lending his planning expertise to those working to revitalize the country. "I worked with a state institute that was grappling with the country's deadly serious environmental problems," he says. "Hungarians have a very short life span, and I think a large part of the reason has to do with pollution." After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, he explains, Canada, as the most part of the Western world, felt it had a responsibility to assist the former Eastern bloc countries to re-establish themselves. The government asked CESO if it would help. The organization responded, sending 700 volunteers to those countries between 1990 and today.

For a while last year, Taylor could also be found in his grandchildren's school, helping students in kindergarten and grade 1 bite their drawing skills and sketching portraits of them. "But I picked up too many viruses and had to stop going," he says. "I still do the portraits, but at home from photographs."

Over the years, Taylor has volunteered in a variety of other areas. When he was at the University of New Brunswick in the 1940s, he was, for example, president of the social committee. While doing graduate work at the Massa- chusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he was an active member of its social committee. After moving back to New Brunswick in 1950, he joined the Junior Chamber of Com- merce in Fredericton, becoming president a year later. In 1953, he and his wife, Berta, moved to Toronto, where he joined the church choir, became a member - and later chair - of the church's advisory board and sat on the Humber Valley Deeney Council. Before retiring, he was named "honorary chairman," he served as a member of the Ontario Board of Police. But that, he says earnestly, was not strictly volunteer work. "I received an honorarium."

When you ask Don Taylor why he is such an avid volunteer, he doesn't cite all sorts of altruistic reasons but says simply, "I just wanted to do interesting things with my life."

The reason why Taylor and five and a half million other people in this country volunteer their time to help others is perhaps irrelevant. What is important is that they do it, making life a great deal better for all of us. From hospitals and schools to museums and art galleries, a multitude of organizations depend upon their good-will. Their contribution alone is enough to make us proud of them, but there is more. As Maurice Switzer wrote in the Whistling Post Press two years ago, "One of the great contrasts that global fame is a widespread reputation as a people who contribute, per capita, more free time to worthy causes than any race on the planet."

Suzie MacLean