

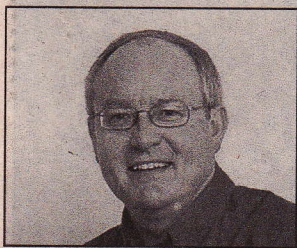
AROUND TOWN

Photographs by **BRUCE STOTESBURY** Times Colonist



Chef Shirley Lang, right, and Melanie Gagnon served First Nation-inspired canapés.

Festival recognizes the diversity of B.C. First Nations



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Around Town

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It wasn't just chef Shirley Lang's First Nations-inspired cuisine at Wednesday's partners reception that gave guests a taste of what to expect during the Aboriginal Culture Festival, the free event that took place June 19-21 at the Royal B.C. Museum to celebrate the diversity of aboriginal cultures in B.C. and honour the treaties of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations.

The Cree "culinary explorer" and her First Nations staff certainly set the mood with appetizers that included locally grown and made bison sausage, wild rice and corn patties with smoked salmon to celebrate coastal cuisine, a wild-mushroom ragout on a goat cheese crostini, and what turned out to be her biggest hit — halibut cooked in Sambuca with fennel and served on Red River grits.

The aboriginal flavour that permeated the Robert Bateman Centre was felt in other ways, including a prayer from elders Mary Ann Thomas of Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation's Elmer George; a Lekwungen traditional dance performance; and when Esquimalt and Songhees Nation chiefs Andy Thomas and Ron Sam spoke about the Douglas Treaties and importance of partnerships.

B.C.'s minister of state for tourism and small business, Naomi Yamamoto, was also on hand to express her gratitude and support for the Aboriginal Tourism Association of B.C.-driven festival.

The reception was an opportunity for local business, community and gov-

celebrate, said Keith Henry, chief executive officer of AtB.C. Partners include Greater Victoria Harbour Authority, First Peoples Cultural Council, Tourism Victoria and Royal B.C. Museum, where the exhibition *Our Living Languages: First People's Voices in B.C.* opened Saturday.

"We're trying to showcase all the different nations," Henry said. "No matter how mystical or confusing it might seem, we all want to work together to support aboriginal tourism. We're trying to bring everyone together and leverage each other's capacity to make these events happen, because it would have been difficult for any of the single communities to take this on themselves."

Board member Sara Bateman said it was an honour for her family to host the reception, partly as a gesture of gratitude for being involved in a First Nations blanketing ceremony at Royal Roads a few years ago.

ing things of aboriginal culture and of course that's a huge part of what my father [artist Robert Bateman] has dedicated his life to," she said. "He's not only passionate about our natural heritage, but our cultural heritage."

Dave Cowen, Tourism Victoria chairman and general manager of Butchart Gardens, said the inaugural Aboriginal Cultural Festival is a "very exciting" tourism driver.

He collaborated with Henry four years ago when he brought a taste of Stanley Park's Klahowya Village, a one-day showcase of aboriginal culture, to Butchart Gardens.

"We talked about First Nations tourism and what we could do in the capital city to support that," said Cowen, who says he has observed renewed interest in Canadian and aboriginal culture.

"When you go to long-haul markets like China and Europe where interest is high, you come to know how important First Nations tourism is for B.C.

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AtB.C. chairwoman Lillian Hunt, left, Sally and Curtis Grad.



Marcus Goldsmith with grand uncle Augie Thomas and nephew Nicholas Thomas, part of Esquimalt Nation Dancers.



Songhees Nation Chief

Celebrating aboriginal c

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