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# College of New Caledonia



## NEWS RELEASE

*For release on April 20, 2012*

### **Internment Mural unveiled at the College of New Caledonia (CNC)**

Canadian artist and CNC Fine Arts instructor, Betty Kovacic unveiled her largest piece of work ever on April 4, 2012, at the CNC for the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWWIRF) grant project.

Titled, "Shadows of the Past," the 6 feet by 16 feet painting commemorates and recognizes the experiences of ethno-cultural communities affected by Canada's first national internment operations from 1914 to 1920. The painting is exhibited just outside the cafeteria of the Prince George campus in British Columbia.

"Requiring a great deal of research, "Shadows of the Past" has presented an opportunity for a greater understanding of the events that happened in Canada during the First World War," said Kovacic. "This level of research has resulted in the growth of a deep compassion and empathy for both the internees and their families."

During Canada's first national internment operations of 1914 to 1920, thousands of men, women and children of Ukrainian and other European descent were branded as "enemy aliens." Many were imprisoned at various locations across Canada and forced to do heavy labour in the country's hinterlands such as Banff National Park and Spirit Lake in the Abitibi region of Quebec. They were stripped of any wealth they had, disenfranchised and subjected to other state sanctioned censures not because of anything they had done, but only because of where they had come from and who they were.

"In addition to creatively recounting information, I hoped to express my dismay, sadness, and indignation about this event," said Kovacic. "I also wished to depict and express the internee's strength in dealing with the physical, emotional and spiritual hardships of life in an internment camp."

In December, 2009, Kovacic was awarded \$19,500 from the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund. The grant was used to create the acrylic and mixed media piece four sections. She completed the piece in August, 2011.

Kovacic, who found "Shadows of the Past" both challenging and exhilarating, knows its dimension alone will demand attention.

"The physical size not only offers opportunities for complex, creative problem-solving, it also presented unexpected practical and artistic challenges," she said. "It was creatively and intellectually invigorating to discover unexpected methods and techniques with which to create the large images and collages for this project. "My

involvement in it was so complete that I could not stop thinking about it. IT even frequented my dreams.”

She hopes that the continuous flow of people of all ages and demographics who view “Shadows of the Past” will experience and understand the issues and events of Canada’s First World War Internment Camps.

“Art speaks to the viewer on a profound level in a manner that cannot be achieved by the written word alone,” she said. “The aesthetic elements of art can elicit emotional responses including compassion and empathy as well as deep levels of comprehension.

“I hope this piece adds to the visual richness of Prince George while revealing important information about Canada’s past.”

In May 2008, representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian community reached an agreement with the federal government providing for the creation of a \$10-million endowment fund to support commemorative, educational, scholarly and cultural projects intended to remind all Canadians of this episode in our nation’s history.

While most Canadians are aware of this type of treatment being forced upon Japanese Canadians during World War II, the fact it had been experienced by those of European descent from 1914 to 1918, and two years beyond the end of the war to 1920 is largely unknown. “There is a reason for that” says Andrew Hladyshevsky, Vice- Chair of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, “In the ‘50’s and ‘60’s the Canadian government was cleaning up records and destroyed all of the documentation on these internees and their families. It is only through the research involving survivors, their families and descendants of guards that we have the information we have.”

Andrew Hladyshevsky says many internees were used to develop Canada’s National Parks, that there was such a camp across the lake from where the Jasper Park Lodge now sits, and that internees were used to build at least part of the golf course at Banff . “They were promised \$1.25 a day, but the Government charged them 75 cents a day for room and board, and many never did get the rest of the money they were owed.”

### **About CFWWIRF**

The Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWWIRF) was established to support projects that commemorate and recognize the experiences of all of the ethno-cultural communities affected by Canada’s first national internment operations of 1914 to 1920.

**For more information on this event or the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund contact the Program Manager, Andrea Malysh, toll free at 1-866-288-7931.**

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Photo courtesy of Andrea Johnson