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National Internment Mural project launched in Vernon, British Columbia

On February 20th 2013, The National Internment Mural called the *Sunflower Project* was officially launched in Vernon, British Columbia.

The Sunflower project, headed by international muralist and internee descendant, Michelle Loughery, will serve to create memorial murals for the communities affected by the internment of thousands of men, women and children of Ukrainian and European descent living within Canada during WW1. The murals, which will combine multi-media, traditional art and videography as well as historical photographs and personal stories from the families directly affected, are slated to appear in the 24 affected communities across Canada over the centennial years, 2014 to 2020.

Between 1914-1920, thousands of Ukrainians and other Europeans were imprisoned in 24 internment camps across Canada, simply on the basis of their origins. For decades their stories were buried under fear and shame. The Canadian Government has finally recognized the internment operations, with the establishment of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, (CFWWIRF) yet it still remains an unknown chapter in our nation's history. As an internee descendent, Michelle Loughery heard stories of her grandfather (Gido) spending his entire life looking for his brother who had been working in a camp and then disappeared. Her great uncle was finally found in the document, *Roll Call*, as POW #47 interned at Banff/Castle Mountain, Alberta. It is not known what happened to him since his incarceration. Her mural healing work with First Nation families who have survived residential schools and the fact her own family had been marginalized makes this project a personal journey to help educate the future on the past failings of Canadian soil. As it is only in learning from the past, can we become the wings of a better future.

Beginning in Vernon, the Provincial internment camp for British Columbia and one of the 24 internment camp locations, Loughery and her team will provide educational workshops in each community. These events will focus on information and story collection, and will engage all generations and affected groups within the community. The goal of each workshop will be to share the cultural history of the people featured in the mural, and to create opportunities for social healing and the promotion of human rights. While Ukrainians made up the majority of those interned others affected by Canada's first national internment operations were the Poles, Italians, Bulgarians, Croatians, Turks, Serbians, Hungarians, Russians, Jews, Slovaks, Slovenes, Czechs and Romanians.

The National Launch of The Sunflower Project was well attended by the Ukrainian community and local residents at St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Vernon, B.C. This was the first opportunity for project coordinators and affected community members to collaborate. Loughery said, "We are hopeful that it will provide the impetus for further conversations about internment, the importance of cultural history, human rights and social responsibility.

We are starting the conversation between our youth and our seniors, our past and our present to ensure a stronger future. Using our voices, Taking It To The Wall.”

Lois Campbell, educational liaison for the Sunflower project explained that through public education people will learn and understand the treatment of over 96,000 Central and Eastern Europeans who were unjustly classified as “enemy aliens.” Campbell shared the following quote from Louis Riel, “My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who given them their spirit back.”

In attendance was Vernon Mayor, Rob Sawatzky who presented a cheque on behalf of the City of Vernon for \$10,000 towards the Vernon Internment mural slated to be unveiled on June 15th. Mayor Sawatzky commented, “This mural speaks to our past and prepares us for our future.” Ruth Hoyte, President of the Downtown Vernon Association (DVA) announced their financial commitment as a co-sponsor of the Sunflower Project as an ongoing Vernon mural project that includes youth employment, revitalization, and heritage conservation strategies. The DVA has invested considerable resources into the creation of the 27 amazing works of art that grace the downtown buildings. These murals depict the history, culture, scenery, and folklore that made Vernon what it is today.

Also, speaking at this event was Roman Chez, President of both the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Vernon Branch and St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who spoke about the local Ukrainian support of the project. The Vernon Branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association placed a memorial plaque at the site of the internment camp in Vernon on June 7, 1997. A donation was also presented to Michelle Loughery by Sophia Kniaz, President of the Ukrainian Women’s Association, St. Olha Branch of Vernon, who was in return invited by Loughery to come and paint Ukrainian Easter Eggs at the mural site.

Speaking on behalf of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation was local resident, Andrea Malysh, stating, “February 20th marks the 93rd anniversary of the closing of the Vernon Internment camp. Today we commemorate those 2nd class internees of the Vernon camp who were forced to do heavy labour and sent out on work forays to build the local highways that opened up the Okanagan Valley, thus connecting the region to the Trans-Canada highway in the north, and east to the Kootenays, without compensation, for the Province of British Columbia.”

Following the unveiling of the Vernon Internment Mural, the Sunflower Project will move east to other internment camp locations, including the National Internment Mural in Ottawa for the centennial commemoration in 2014. This project has been possible in part by a grant from the Endowment Council of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund. (CFWWIRF)

**For more information on the Sunflower Project or to donate visit: www.michelleloughery.org
For more on the CFWWIRF go to www.internmentcanada.ca**