



Victoria Celebrates Grand Opening of Spirit Square

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For Immediate Release

VICTORIA, BC — A new public performance area will bring thousands of people and new opportunities for concerts and events in Victoria's historic city square.

This morning, Mayor Dean Fortin was joined by the Honourable Ida Chong, Minister of Healthy Living and Sport, Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees Nation, Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation and Coast Salish carvers Butch, Clarence and Bradley Dick, to celebrate the grand opening of Victoria's Spirit Square.

"Today we celebrate the revitalizing of our downtown Square," said Mayor Dean Fortin. "Victoria's Spirit Square is now a dynamic space, a people space, there for everyone to enjoy."

Designed to increase opportunities for festivals and events in Centennial Square, the renovation to the Square's west end features three key components: a canopied turn-key performance stage which can accommodate small and medium size events and markets; Spirit Garden, a restful place to experience two First Nations Spirit Poles and a sculptured ladle water feature; and a plaza area enhanced by improved lighting, landscaping and outdoor furnishings.

The Square's open design and new lighting make the Square safer and more visually appealing. Site improvements and additional infrastructure will encourage greater use of the venue for outdoor festivals and help support Victoria's arts and cultural community.

The project is made possible by the BC Spirit Square program, launched by the Ministry of Community and Rural Development (formerly Community Services) in 2006, to support the creation or improvement of town squares or open spaces in communities throughout British Columbia. The Province contributed the maximum amount of \$500,000, which the City matched with additional funds to meet the vision of the design, for a total cost of \$1.65 million.

"Collaboration between the provincial and local governments has made Victoria's Spirit Square a reality," said Ida Chong, Minister of Healthy Living and Sport. "This is a great example of how we can showcase our diversity, while building a meeting place that visitors and residents can enjoy now and into the future."

Butch Dick was nominated by Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees Nation and Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation, to design and carve two, 5.5-metre (18-foot) cedar Spirit Poles to serve as a gateway to the Square's native plant garden. Titled *Two Brothers*, one pole was designed and carved by Butch Dick, and the other was designed and carved by his son Clarence, both with the assistance of Butch's son Bradley. The poles are fashioned after traditional Coast Salish house posts.

“The *Two Brothers* are a legacy of our collaboration with the City of Victoria and the citizens of British Columbia,” said Butch Dick, Lekwungen master carver and member of the Songhees Nation. “They represent the rich and beautiful cultural ways of our ancestors – the Lekwungen people - and their traditional territory where we stand today.”

Years ago, Cormorant Creek ran through what is now Centennial Square and served as a water source for the traditional Songhees community. Known as *Big Dipper*, a large sculptural ladle now offers drinking water to visitors and citizens of Victoria, as well as to the new garden which surrounds the Spirit Poles. The First Nations inspired ladle is a cross-cultural symbol of generosity. Three playful sculptured pebbles in the basin of the ladle’s bowl send sprays of water down the handle.

The canopied multipurpose stage that replaces Knot Garden can accommodate amphitheatre style seating and increases visibility and access to the Square. Non-slip, stainless “pebble” platforms can be used during performances or as safe, fun surfaces for children to climb. Under-lighting and a fine spray mist can be programmed to create a luminous fog-like setting during a performance or when the space is not in use.

Positioned in a sunny corner, the stage is far enough from the road for families to rest, enjoy a snack, or play. Local architect Bill Pechet of Pechet and Robb Studio, and landscape architect Joe Daly, collaborated to create the artistic and unique design for Spirit Square.

Officially opened today, Victoria’s Spirit Square is now available for community events. For more information or to book the new stage, visit: www.victoria.ca and click on *What’s New?*

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Note: Lekwungen is pronounced *Le-KWUNG-en*.

BACKGROUNDER ENCLOSED

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