



*Dr. James Raffan
and his wife Gail Simmons*



*L-R: Leeds and Thousand Islands
Mayor Joe Baptista, fellow
performer Will MacPhail, Dr. James
Raffan and his wife Gail Simmons.*

A SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

With Dr. James Raffan
and Friends

Seeley's Bay started their celebrations this year with a special storyfest, "Canada One Five Oh Em Gee," on January 15th featuring Dr. James Raffan, who "in 2015 was named by Canadian Geographic Magazine as one of Canada's Greatest Contemporary Explorers." James, a longtime resident of the area, is known, not only for his reputation as being a famous explorer and author, but also for his work as a geographer and a professor at Queens. Perhaps what people around here know him best for is his community involvement and willingness to share his talents in story and song.

Thus, it was no surprise that a good crowd turned out to hear James and to show their support for the event, which also doubled as a fundraiser for the ongoing community revitalization work of the Seeley's Bay Area Residents Association. Some who attended were even sporting outfits their ancestors may have worn 150 years ago.

However, the focus of the afternoon was clearly on James and those who shared the stage with him including his talented wife Gail Simmons, our own Mayor, Joe Baptista (Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands), and fellow performer, Will MacPhail. The four entertained the crowd with songs once

considered alternative national anthems including Something to Sing About (by Oscar Brand), Four Strong Winds (by Ian Tyson), and North West Passage (by Stan Rogers).

James fueled the Canadian pride that seemed to be swelling from within each of us, by taking some time to remind the audience about interesting Canadian facts. I expect the teacher in him must impart some knowledge to his listeners, although mixing it with just the right amount of humour to keep everyone listening intently.

With great enthusiasm, James entertained us with a story revived from an old French folktale about a canoe in flight. He referred to the canoe throughout the day with the same love and respect he clearly has for his country. James recounted his proudest moment when the Canada One was launched in the Thames in London for the Queens 60th celebration. In keeping with the strong canoe influence, he showed us an awe-inspiring trailer shot by filmmaker Goh Iromoto, commissioned by Ontario Tourism for promoting the "Canadian Canoe Culture" campaign.

James also announced Canada C3 (Coast to Coast), an epic 150-day journey by

ship led by the Students on Ice Foundation. The voyage will include fifteen ten-day segments, starting June 1st with a different group of Canadians on board for each segment celebrating Canada's diverse culture and immense coastline. James Raffan, the Adventurer, was the voice that most impacted me that day. As he spoke of his love for the North, where he has set out on exploration every year since 1977, I could see the beauty of his travels take shape in my mind. Looking into his eyes at that moment, is where I saw the story come to life. I could see that the spirit of the wolf lives in him and the North beckons him with the vast wilderness where he is free to explore, to breathe, and simply to be.

We are fortunate to have someone who feels the power of the North and what natural beauty our great nation, Canada has to offer, and to share his stories so vividly in photographs and voice. It was truly a privilege to experience a piece of Canada through the eyes of Dr. James Raffan, an Explorer with a flair for theatrical song and finesse for folklore. The day ended fittingly, with everyone proudly singing our national anthem, and I left with a desire to explore and discover the beauty that surrounds us right here at home! [LH](#)