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■ 2003 Canada Games Host Society also receives Dialogue Award

By CARL DAVIES
Telegram Journal

Two former premiers and an organization from the province's north received the Lieutenant-Governor's Dialogue Award Wednesday for their work in bringing together the province's anglophone and francophone communities.

The two men largely responsible for making New Brunswick Canada's only officially bilingual province, former premiers Louis Robichaud and the late Richard Hatfield received the award, as did the host society of 2003 Canada Winter Games in Bathurst and Campbellton.

Between them, Mr. Robichaud and Mr. Hatfield governed the province for 28 straight years, from 1960 to 1987.

While Mr. Robichaud's Liberal government passed the act making the province officially bilingual in the 1960s, Mr. Hatfield's Tories were largely responsible for making it work in the 1970s and '80s.

"We were good friends, although we were not on the same political side," Mr. Robichaud recalled.

"We had the same objective -- mutual understanding in the province."

"He was quite a promoter of the concept of mutual understanding."

The province's first elected Acadian premier, Mr. Robichaud said that bilingualism and the bringing together of two distinct communities was a bipartisan effort that was "way above politics."

"We have to promote mutual understanding. It does not come by itself."

Mr. Robichaud said that work is starting to pay off today.

"It's always a battle, but we are getting there," he said.

"We're getting to the point where there is a lot of respect, much more respect for one another than there was, say 40 years ago."

On hand to accept the award for the late Mr. Hatfield, who died in 1991, was his nephew Bruce Hatfield.

"It was something he was very committed to and he did with enthusiasm," Mr. Hatfield said of his uncle's desire to bring francophones and anglophones together.

"It's a big part of his political legacy that the divide politically that existed before then was eliminated."

Prior to 1960, French-speaking New Brunswick was largely tied to the Liberal party while the English-speaking south tended to support the Conservatives.

"Both political parties became parties for all New Brunswickers, no matter what language they spoke," Mr. Hatfield said.

"I think it was quite an accomplishment to get francophone New Brunswickers to trust the Progressive Conservative party and to trust a leader of that party."

Brian Theede, president of the host society of the 2003 Canada Winter Games, seemed overwhelmed that his organization was being honoured

along with Mr. Robichaud and Mr. Hatfield.

"It's pretty humbling really," Mr. Theede said. "It's truly a great honour."

He said from the moment the Games were awarded to New Brunswick, it was the host society's goal to make them "the most bilingual games in the history of the Canada Games."

He said that was accomplished thanks to 6,000 volunteers, more than

three-quarters of whom were bilingual.

He said visiting athletes were amazed at how bilingual the Games were.

"They just could not believe that no matter where you went or what venues that you were at that you would be served in either one of the official languages." ...

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