

The Honourable Robert R. McLeod Remarks

Rare in Nature gala

February 4, 2010

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. As the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment for the Government of the Northwest Territories, I am here with my colleague, Mr. Robert Hawkins, MLA for Yellowknife Centre, to extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you to the North's Olympic pavilion – Canada's Northern House.

To many Canadians, the Northwest Territories is the great white north, land of polar bears, snow, ice, the aurora borealis and minus 40 temperatures. But there is so much more to our territory than that, and here at Canada's Northern House, we are showcasing the "more" – our culture, our people, our art, our land and our business opportunities – to the world.

In our ongoing efforts to showcase our territory, tonight's "Rare in Nature" gala is something I'm extremely excited about. It is an event that melds something old with something new.

Ladies and gentleman, I was born and raised in the tiny community of Fort Providence, NWT. It is a community that knows all about blending the old ways with the new ways, just as this gala is doing here at Canada's Northern House.

Tonight, the old at our Rare in Nature gala comes in the form of northern renewable resources like wild game and fur. For centuries, northerners have depended on nature to provide them their food and clothing.

We're giving you a taste of that food by providing you with some tasty traditional northern staples to enjoy: caribou, muskox and Arctic char.

And then there is Northwest Territories fur and wool. You will see it displayed in the fashions at this gala. Some of those fashions come from Dene Fur Clouds, a small clothing company from my home community of Fort Providence, which makes gorgeous garments out of NWT wild fur. You will also see it in the fine woven garments made of muskox wool, also known as qiviut, which is harvested from muskox on Banks Island, well north of the Arctic Circle.

As for the "new" aspect of this gala, this is where diamonds come in. Since diamonds were first mined in the Northwest Territories in 1998, we have become a major player in global diamond production. And I'm happy to say that one of the people responsible for the diamond boom our territory has experienced — Ms. Eira Thomas, who discovered the Diavik Diamond Mine with her father Grenville Thomas — is with us tonight. Ms. Thomas, I'm honoured you were able to be here tonight.

Ladies and gentlemen, our three diamond mines are EKATI, operated by BHP Billiton, Diavik, operated by Rio Tinto and Harry Winston Diamonds, and Snap Lake, operated by DeBeers Canada. They have made Canada the world's third largest diamond producer by value, just behind Botswana and Russia and ahead of South Africa.

To date, NWT mines have produced almost 92 million carats of gem quality diamonds. Our capital, the city of Yellowknife, is recognized as the Diamond Capital of North America.

The diamond mining industry has provided jobs and business opportunities for hundreds of NWT residents and hundreds of Canadians. This is an economic success story.

Another success story is the diamonds themselves. These precious stones, many of them cut and polished in the Northwest Territories by companies like Crossworks Manufacturing — whose headquarters are in Vancouver — are some of the highest quality diamonds produced in the world. You will see that quality tonight as our diamonds are set in pieces fashioned by designers from Whitehorse, British Columbia and Yellowknife's very own Francois Thibault, an artist who has created many pieces using NWT diamonds. All of these designers and artists have been brought here tonight by Mr. Andrew Costen.

I'll conclude my comments there. But before I go, I ask you to savour the northern treasures on display here tonight. Enjoy the food, enjoy the fashions and enjoy the Rare in Nature gala.

Thank you.