

Canada Games torch relay launched in Alert

Whitehorse Star Online – April 2006

By ECHO ROSS

The Canada Winter Games torches are now on their way to the three Northern territories, following their official lighting in Alert, Nunavut Monday. Canadian Olympic wrestler Christine Nordhagen helped kick off the celebration, which came on the heels of a major event in Ottawa last Thursday. The official Roly McLenahan Torch was lit in the nation's capital, in the attendance of several politicians, 2007 Games Host Society members, and Olympic and paralympic athletes. President and CEO of the Canada Games Council, Sue Hylland, and President of the 2007 host society, Piers McDonald, used the Centennial Flame on Parliament Hill to light the official torch. It was then passed symbolically from the Nunavut Minister of Culture, Language, Elder and Youth, Louis Tapardjuk, to the Member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories, Dennis Bevington, to the Yukon Minister of Community Services, Glenn Hart. From Ottawa, the torch travelled to Alert, Nunavut, where it was flown over the North Pole and delivered to Ward Hunt Island, the most northerly point in Canada. The trip was made possible by the Canadian Forces, which were already taking part in a special mission of their own in the area. "It was amazing," stated Pam Boyde, the chair of the torch relay, in an interview from Yellowknife this morning. "We had an absolutely fabulous launch (Monday). We actually went to Resolute first, saw the return of the huge ranger patrol. Then when we landed in Alert, it was a clear blue sky, the sun and moon were in the sky at the same time. It was just glorious." Nordhagen was the first to light the three torches, which are made out of caribou antler, carved by Shane Wilson. The Olympian then passed a torch to each of the three athletes representing Yukon, Nunavut and N.W.T. The Yukon athlete chosen to start the torch relay was alpine skier Sam Kent. Kent was nominated to be the torch bearer by Yukon Alpine. He is currently living and training in Calgary, where he attends the National Sport School. It's an elite school for the top 100 up-and-coming athletes in Canada. Badminton guru Michael Pulutik represented Nunavut while cross-country skier Mike Argue was chosen for the N.W.T. The three athletes then ran with the torch in the direction of their territory – flags were set up, in the geographically correct position. Nunavut actually held the first actual portion of the relay, as Pulutik passed it on to personnel at the Canadian Forces headquarters in Alert. "It was an absolutely wonderful start to the relay," said Boyde. Participants did run into a bit of a snag at the conclusion of the launch, as a blizzard forced the cancellation of their planned flight to Yellowknife Monday evening. Instead, they bunkered down in Alert overnight and headed into Yellowknife Tuesday, making their scheduled flight back to Whitehorse this morning. Each torch will now travel within one territory and together, they will visit all 83 communities in the North before reuniting in Whitehorse for the 2007 Games opening ceremony, on February 24. The first stop for the Yukon torch will be Carmacks, on May 5. The relay symbolizes the journey that Canadian athletes will take, to get to the 2007 Canada Games in Whitehorse. "The Canada Games combine high level sport competition with cultural activities from across our country," said McDonald. "Our torch relay is bringing spirit and enthusiasm from across the North to Whitehorse and will add to the excitement of these Games." The Games have been hosted in every province at least once since their inception in Quebec City during Canada's Centennial in 1967. This will be the first time they are held North of 60.