



# The Friendship Herald

Volume 2006 - Issue 6

a supplement to the Windmill Herald

Friendship Day celebrated in new venue

## Botanical Gardens adds Royal touch to Friendship event



**BURLINGTON, Ontario** – The Royal venue for the Canada Netherlands Friendship Day on April 29 will have a colourful floral setting and admission is free of charge for the occasion. The evening event, which takes place at the Royal Botanical Gardens, includes the unveiling of a garden with tulips named after the Royal Lepage Shelter Foundation's Shelter Blooms. Many local entrepreneurs are showcasing their services at the event as well. The flag raising ceremony at Burlington City Hall has been moved from the customary noon time to 3:00pm.

CNFA's spokesman Jack Vander Laan says that the spacious RBG facility which last year was the venue for the first time, has a much improved accommodation for the popular event. Each year, the CNFA has been attracting more participation from the community. In cooperation with the CFNA, the RBG created a dedicated tulip garden na-



*Vander Laan also was a promoter of Burlington's twin city ties with Apeldoorn, which took effect last year.*

med after the Royal Lepage Shelter Foundation. Its director Case Feenstra is working towards the goal that the new tulip – a Dutch variety - will become the symbol for the foundation's program on behalf of women's shelters across the country. Also, Canadian military history author Tom Douglas will premiere his dvd *The Tulip and the Maple Leaf* during the evening program. An event which promotes the Canada-Netherlands ties can count on the interest of the local and regional Legion branches and Regiments. All indications are that CNFA officials will not be disappointed on that score.

The well-known Christian Male Chorus, the Ambassadors, will lend their voices for high friendship notes during the program. Directed by Harold DeHaan, the choir has participated at the Friendship Day many times. After last year's very well-received appearance, the London-based Tomato Soup Band again will add a festive atmosphere to what no doubt is Burlington's largest annual gathering of Dutch Canadians.

### Royal footsteps

Burlington municipal councillor Rick Craven will emcee the event which also will be attended by other government offi-

cialists such as Guelph MP Michael Chong, now also Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Sports in the Canadian cabinet, and MPP Elizabeth Witmer, a former Ontario Deputy Premier. Both have Dutch roots. Toronto-based Consul General Jan Hesselting will represent the Dutch government for the last time since he is destined for Germany, later this year. Several officials from Apeldoorn, Burlington's twin city in the Netherlands, plan to be present at the Friendship Day, reinforcing its Trans-Atlantic flavour.

The 2006 Canada Netherlands Friendship Day event literally follows in the footsteps of Dutch Queen Beatrix who in 1988 visited the Royal Botanical Gardens to meet with the local Dutch community. The colourful venue is widely known and ties in with the deep-felt appreciation for flowers by the Dutch everywhere.

Founded by local enthusiasts in 1941, the Royal Botanical Gardens includes five significantly different gardens, and with four nature sanctuaries on about 2,700 acres, it rates as one of the largest of its kind in the world. RBG's sanctuaries and marshlands are



accessible with trails, covering 30 kilometres. During the tourist season, various parts of the garden complex are linked by shuttle buses.

The gardens are home to more than 40,000 recorded plants, displayed in about 50 different collections. These include the world's largest collection of lilacs and almost two acres of roses.

The April 29 event, of course, is early in the RBG's new season. To fully appreciate what RBG offers, a return visit definitely is a must.

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CANADA NETHERLANDS FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

INSERT to the *Windmill Herald*

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Canada-wide initiative

## Realtor Feenstra promotes Dutch tulips as new symbol of friendship



*Colouring the landscape is easy, just plant Feenstra's new tulip variety.*

**OAKVILLE, Ontario** - Say it with flowers. Say it with lots of flowers. Say it with flowers everywhere in the country. The man pushing colleagues to say it with tulips all throughout Canada, and for several good reasons, is not even a flower grower. Realtor Case Feenstra envisions 11,000 colleagues at his company each selling bags of tulips nation-wide in support of his Shelter Blooms concept. Royal LePage Shelter Foundation adopted the concept, and last September installed a volunteer committee to help promote the Shelter Blooms campaign. As the flowering season is at hand, the Shelter Blooms initiative will be unveiled at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) on April 29.

A flower conscious 1970s Dutch immigrant, Feenstra liked the gesture by Princess Juliana who in

the Fall of 1945 said it with flowers when she donated tulip bulbs to the City of Ottawa, in recognition for its war-time hospitality to her and her family. Some years later, the annual donation gave rise to the Canadian Tulip Festival, now a huge May event.

This Spring, the first 150,000 red Royal LePage Shelter Foundation tulips enhance gardens in many places, including a display of 3,000 at RBG. The firm's realtors are encouraged to use the tulips as a Thank-You-gift for new listings, referrals, closings or open houses, display them at events such as Fall fairs, or make them part of presentations to affiliated service companies. They also can be donated for planting at the many war memorials across the country.

### War memorials

Feenstra especially cherishes the thought that these tulips from the Netherlands - a Dutch grower named the red variety after its sponsor the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation - somehow could be used to add spring colour to Canadian war memorials and say thanks with the tulips. Taking a cue from Dutch tradition, children from area schools ought to be involved in the planting of the tulips and in caring for the memorials, Feenstra feels, so youths in a tangible manner can connect with the country's substantial sacrifices from freedom in two world wars.

The Shelter Blooms initiative also is a fundraiser for the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation of which Feenstra is a director. Since 1998, the foundation has contributed over \$4 million to some 150 women's shelters across the country and for violence prevention and awareness. The latter is done through the foundation supported Fourth R program, a school-based initiative for confronting dating violence, substance abuse, and risky sexual practices.



*Feenstra (centre) and Royal LePage officials ready to give the slogan 'Say it with flowers' a new twist.*

### Canadian experience

Ultimately, Feenstra hopes that the Shelter Blooms tulip campaigns will become as much a part of the Canadian experience as daffodils are for the Canadian Cancer Society, an initiative which had very humble beginnings in Toronto in 1956 when it raised \$1,200 in the first year.

Royal LePage's Shelter Blooms initiative has joined the Canada Netherlands Friendship Day as a platinum sponsor this year, and Feenstra along with other community minded entrepreneurs will be on hand on April 29 to meet the public at the Royal Botanical Gardens.

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### The Tulip and the Maple Leaf

## Friendship Day event to debut documentary by veteran's son and grandson



A welcome for the Douglas duo

A documentary recently filmed in the Netherlands by Oakville writer and best-selling military author Tom Douglas and his son James, a Vancouver videographer, will be launched at the Canada-Netherlands Friendship Day event on April 29. "The Tulip and the Maple Leaf" is a half-hour reflection of the close ties between Canada and the Netherlands,

as seen through the camera of James, a grandson of one of the Canadians who helped liberate the Netherlands in World War II. Tom, the veteran's son, provides the narration based partly on stories his father told him.

When Canadian Army Sergeant Mel Douglas and Dutch civilian Max Coppes met near Nijmegen during the harsh winter of 1944-1945, they had no idea that their brief friendship would be the start of a bond stretching into the 21st century. Sgt. Douglas served with the 19th Field Regiment - Royal Canadian Artillery. Max worked as a baker in the small village of Horssen. Max and his wife Marie, pregnant with their fourth child, offered the lonely Canadian soldier the only thing the Nazis had not taken from them during more than four years of oppression - their hospitality.

A few years into WWII, Mel Douglas could not stand by and let others do the fighting. Although he had a wife and a young son, he enlisted and eventually was part of the huge Allied force that stormed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944.



James (left) and Tom Douglas on their way to film footage for their documentary "The Tulip and the Maple Leaf." The documentary reflects the close ties between Canada and the Netherlands that were formed during the Second World War and continue to this day.

### Sharing

When the Canadians reached the Netherlands, the Army sergeant received word that his son Tom now had a baby brother, Greg. Lonely and far from home, Mel was grateful to the Coppes for being his surrogate family that long winter. He shared his field rations with the Coppes and their three young sons - Wim, Piet and Hans. They shared their home and their friendship. After saying goodbye to his adopted family, Mel returned to the battlefield and fought on through the Netherlands back into Germany until that wonderful day in May 1945 when peace was finally declared.

Mel Douglas returned to his wife and two sons in Canada and the Coppes family got on with their disrupted lives. Marie Coppes gave birth to a baby girl, Mies. Mel's wife Dorene - who had been looking after two small boys and working as a welder at the local steel mill to help in the war effort - would eventually have two more children, a son Norm and a daughter Nancy.

### Language barrier

In 1963, Tom Douglas, then a schoolteacher with Department of National Defence Schools Overseas, dropped in unannounced at the Coppes Bakery in Horssen near Nijmegen. Max was still on the job, but he had forgotten all his English of 18 years earlier. Tom, in a desperate attempt to explain who he was, made the mistake of trying his high school German on the baker. Max snarled at him and stormed out of the room.

When it was obvious that Tom was not going to leave, Max sent one of his sons to get a next-door neighbour, Jan Sommerdijk, an English student. Jan told Max who Tom was, the baker threw his arms around the son of his old friend and a daylong party ensued.

Tom returned to Canada carrying gifts and a note from Max. The old soldier and his wartime friend exchanged letters that had to be translated so that each could read the other's thoughts. The correspondence ended in 1967, however, when Max passed away. Mel Douglas would live on until 1988.

### New idea

In May 2005, Tom Douglas, now a freelance journalist and the author of three books about World War II, was selected by Veterans Affairs Canada to report on ceremonies in Holland commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands. Tom made sure he had time in his schedule to rent a car and visit the remaining members of the Coppes family in and around Horssen near Nijmegen.

That trip gave Tom the idea to return to the Netherlands with his son and film a documentary about the close ties between a Canadian and a Dutch family that resulted from a chance encounter in the winter of 1944-1945. The documentary, with newsreel footage from the war contrasted against happy scenes from contemporary the Netherlands, will have its premiere at the Royal Botanical Gardens on April 29.

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to everyone for making the  
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Dutch Canadian buried at Holten

## Grandnephew pays tribute to WWII casualty Gael Visser



Gael Visser

A Dutch Canadian immigrant who in 1942 at the age of 21 first enlisted with the Dufferin Haldimand Rifles will be remembered at the Burlington City Hall flag raising ceremony on April 29. Gael Visser's grandnephew Jordan Slump in various ways has raised the legacy of the soldier who was shot and killed near Wilhelmshaven in Germany on April 23, 1945, two weeks short of the end of WWII in Europe. Visser is one of the thousands of Canadians buried at the Holten war cemetery in the Netherlands.

Slump, two years ago as a 12-year-old elementary school student, earned praise from his teacher for his paper titled A Hero's Story. He will use parts of his paper as an address to the assembly at city hall.

Visser was one of many Dutch Canadians who joined the army. Some chose to serve in the Prinses Irene Brigade, then being formed in Stratford, Ontario, consisting mostly of Dutch nationals who were away from the Netherlands when it was invaded on May 10, 1940. Among them were also second and third generation descendents of Dutch settlers who made their home in countries such as Argentine, Canada, Morocco, Turkey and the U.S.A. and who spoke no Dutch. Others, such as Visser, instead joined the Canadian or U.S. armed forces. A very incomplete list of fellow casualties of the Canadian army were *Abe Bruinsma*, Lacombe; *Henry Bernard Ebbers*, Edmonton, Alberta; and *George Esser*, Sarnia, Ontario; *Jim Antonides* of Sarnia had joined the Dutch

army. Hundreds of Dutch Americans did not come home from service in the U.S. armed forces.

### Languages

In his paper, Slump quotes from letters Visser wrote to his parents and siblings. While the correspondence was being censored and Visser carefully avoided giving clues to his unit's whereabouts, his father, who had served in the Dutch army during WWI some times could tell where his son was based on terrain descriptions.

Born in Haskerhorne, Visser who knew also German and French, frequently was an interpreter on reconnaissance missions. On April 13, 1945 he wrote home about his unit's liberation of a concentration camp in Germany. Three days later he wrote his last letter, ending it with the promise, *If God wills, I'll write a little more next time. Until then, under His wings my soul shall abide.*

Visser's Dutch hometown mayor paid a tribute to him at Holten, on May 4, 2002.

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business, he may well decide on this four-word line his business used in recent tour advertisements for WWII veterans and their families: Keeping the memory alive. Taking former Canadian soldiers for a return visit to battlefields and other significant places increasingly has become his specialty. He still arranges such tours, even though WWII veterans now are aged 80 and over.

His Keeping the memory alive tours often attract younger family members as well, who accompany returning veterans on their trips. Repeat participants of the tours have introduced different family members to their war-time past this way. Georgetown, Ontario-resident Martin Boomsma has conducted many such tours with Verstraete and has planned another France-bound journey for May 29.

Keeping the memory alive is, of course, much easier if one has been to the sites where history was made during the campaign to restore freedom in Europe. Seeing battle sites and war cemeteries also gives a deeper appreciation for the true cost of freedom.

A tour with an Apeldoorn focus has been planned for August. Canada Netherlands Friendship Association's Jack VanderLaan and his wife Theresa during a three-day stop-over in their 12-day European tour hope to introduce Burlington area residents to Apeldoorn, Burlington's twin-city in the Netherlands. Following the Liberation of the Netherlands in 1945, Apeldoorn was the command centre for Canadian troops while they awaited their turn for repatriation. The city in recent years became the site of the only Canadian Legion branch in the country.

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Memory Project volunteers

Classroom speakers recall campaign in the Netherlands



TORONTO When any of the 1,500 volunteers registered with the Memory Project Speakers Bureau appear in classrooms and before community groups across the country, they usually soon talk about an episode in history which involves more than one country. To share the history of Canada's sacrifices for freedom, they often switch to talking about their experiences in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries. The volunteers of these speaking engagements are none other than Canadian veterans who served overseas.



Taking the message to the schools.

Perhaps not surprisingly at all, the Dominion Institute was co-founded in 1997 by a young activist who was raised in the Dutch Canadian community and who had visited the Netherlands a number of times. The son of a Guelph, Ontario physician, Michael Chong established the institute with his friends Rudyard Griffiths and Erik Penz. Since then, Chong was twice elected as a Member of Parliament and now serves as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Sports in the Harper cabinet.

The Dominion Institute plans to be present at the Canada Netherlands Friendship Day on April 29.

Set up in 2001, the Memory Project is one of the initiatives of the Dominion Institute, itself a fairly new organization devoted to raising awareness of Canadian identity and history. It is estimated that already 300,000 young people heard a veteran talk about Canada's recent history.

One of the Institutes' objectives is interviewing Dutch-Canadians about their wartime experiences and recollections of the Liberation of 1944 and 1945.

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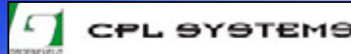
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