

**For Immediate Release
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Re: 2009 Maple Sugar Festival the Best Yet

Whether it was the great Francophone entertainment, ideal weather, or a growing sweet tooth among residents and visitors, the 9th Annual Nanaimo Maple Sugar Festival, which took place at Beban Park on the weekend, is being considered the best festival to date.

Officially launched on Thursday last week at the Nanaimo Art Gallery, the festival moved to Beban Park on Friday afternoon for a weekend smorgasbord of family fun. Besides Sunday, when light rain showed up, the festival enjoyed beautiful weather conditions for this indoor/outdoor winter event.

"As organizers, we are always hopeful each festival will be more successful than the one before it," says Nicole Langlois, Executive Director of the Francophone Association of Nanaimo (FAN). "For our 9th annual Maple Sugar Festival, we were not disappointed. Attendance was up, the entertainment was fantastic, and the atmosphere was lively and positive. I think it went extremely well."

Highlighting the weekend was a seemingly endless stream of talented Francophone musicians, dancers, buskers and storytellers who performed in front of thousands of people during the three day festival. This year's theme was everything Acadian, an Eastern Canadian culture most famous for its music, folklore, paintings, handicrafts, cinema and literature. The culture came alive with main stage performances by groups such as BLOU, Suroit, Vishten, Bolt the Door and Ataensha among others.

Traditional French Canadian cuisine was also a huge hit with festival goers as they lined up for maple toffee, poutine, savory meat pies and stews, lumberjack breakfasts with maple syrup and sweet sugar pies.

Wrapping up the 2009 Festival was an exciting performance by The McDades at the Port Theatre on Wednesday, Feb. 25. Several hundred people braved a late February snowstorm to take in this celtic-rooted music that fuses the spontaneity of jazz improvisation with infectious global rhythms. Singing in both French and English, this innovative band, fronted by the McDade siblings, certainly captivated its Nanaimo audience.

A crucial part of the Maple Sugar Festival is the volunteer contingent, which numbered around 240 people this year. "The festival wouldn't be possible without our many dedicated volunteers," says Joanne Hogan, president of FAN. "We also very grateful for the level of community support we received and wish to thank all of our partners and sponsors who came on board again this year."

With a highly successful 9th annual event under its belt, organizers will now set their sights on the 10th annual Nanaimo Maple Sugar Festival just in time for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

"We are very excited about our 10th anniversary next year and will put all of our collective energy into making it the best Maple Sugar Festival ever held," says Langlois. For more information on how to get involved in the 10th Annual Nanaimo Maple Sugar Festival, contact the Francophone Association of Nanaimo at 250-729-2776 or visit www.francophonenanaimo.org.

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