

Cross-border hopping

To make that point, one need travel no farther than any regional track meet, film festival, scientific conference, hobbyist gathering or good-sized public event of any description on the continent. Almost invariably, Canadians and Americans will both be present.

When Toronto's Santa Claus Parade recently celebrated its 100th anniversary, for example, U.S. marching bands took their place alongside the Canadian musical groups. Participants from the U.S. are seamlessly welcomed into such contexts as fixtures of the Canadian landscape.

"I thought we were wonderfully well-received," recounts Mark Maxwell, band director for Lexington High School in Lexington, Ohio, who brought 84 young musicians and 25 adult volunteers and staff to Toronto for the occasion. "I enjoyed the friendliness of the city, I enjoyed the people."

The Band of Gold, as the ensemble is known, carried a banner to display their place of origin, but not much else distinguishes Canadian from U.S. participants in countless other settings.

For instance, young competitive figure skaters in Manitoba might find themselves skating in competitions in Grand Forks, North Dakota, or Duluth, Minnesota, as readily as Winnipeg, and vice-versa. Amateur athletes registered with Skate Canada or the U.S. Figure Skating Association travel freely between events on either side of the border. "We're all in the same little happy family," declares Karen Landers, head coach of Skate Winnipeg.

The same comment could be made about oncologists, chemical engineers, sociologists, model train enthusiasts or participants of any other professional, industrial or recreational pursuit. So familiar is the dynamic that a major conference of any description in Canada or the U.S. rarely fails to include delegates from both nations.

Indeed, many professional, academic, business, labour and other associations have an explicitly Canada-U.S. orientation, with shared governance. Community and charitable groups such as Rotary International and Toastmasters International don't divide chapters at the border but by region, with, say, Ontario and Michigan or British Columbia and Washington treated as single population areas.

U.S. public radio and television affiliates near the border rely on donations from Canadians for much of their funding, while the Stratford Festival in southwestern Ontario derives up to half of its box-office revenues from U.S. visitors.

Trading spaces

There are many such anecdotes all along the border, but trade also quantifies the point. "About 40 per cent of the trade between the two countries is within companies that operate on both sides of the border," notes Dawson, "which really speaks of the high level of integration."

As globalizing trends and technology advance the growth of multinational corporations, Canada and the U.S., old hands at integration, are more of an allied business entity than ever.

Heather Nicol, professor of political geography at the University of West Georgia in Carrollton, Georgia, and president of the Southern Association for Canadian Studies, says that Home Depot, the hardware chain headquartered in her home city of Atlanta, is reported to be responsible for more trade with Ontario than the entire U.S. is with France.

Nicol, who is originally from Toronto, notes that there remains a different way of seeing the world from the Canadian side of the border, and this has been good for

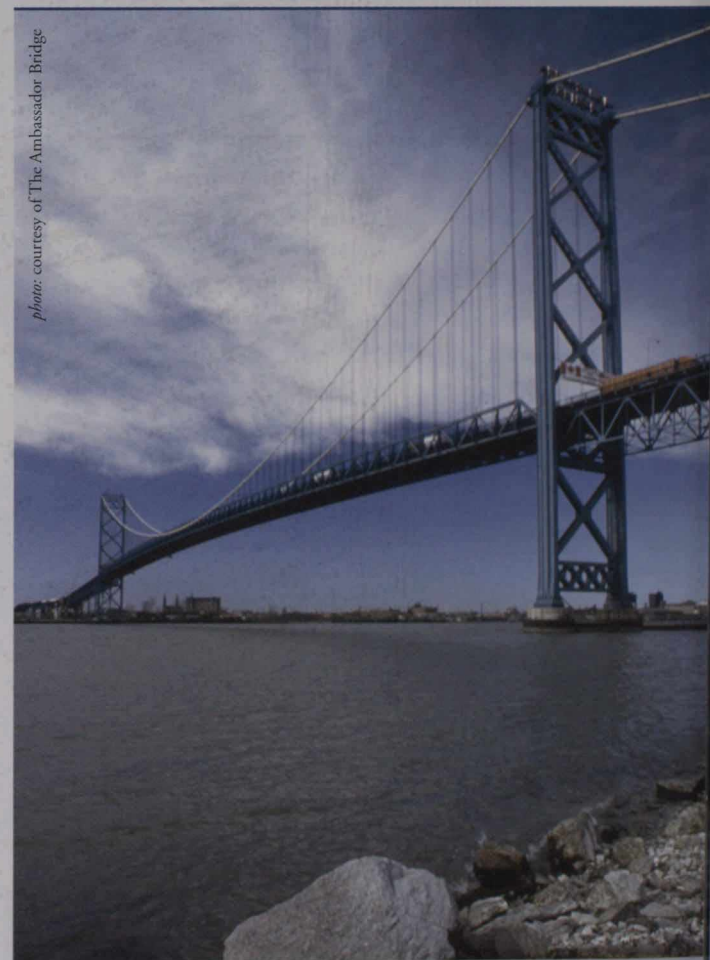


photo: courtesy of The Ambassador Bridge

The stately Ambassador Bridge linking Windsor and Detroit is a powerful symbol of the geographic and economic ties between Canada and the U.S.