

A Life at the Summit



Veteran summit organizer Jacques Joly: "The challenge right now is dealing with uncertainties."

[Muskoka] Did you know? —————

Muskoka stretches across 6,475 km²—as much as Luxembourg or Delaware.

Muskoka has 60,000 residents; in summer, the population more than doubles to 136,000.

The region's ecosystem embraces 600 lakes, wetlands, bogs and barrens.

Birdwatchers gather in Muskoka to see more than 200 species return in summer and leave in fall.

[Toronto] Did you know? —————

The Greater Toronto Area is home to more than 5.5 million people; it's North America's fifth most populous municipality.

More than 140 languages are spoken in Toronto.

Nearly half the city's population was born outside Canada.

Toronto produces almost 20 percent of Canada's GDP and is home to a third of the country's top 500 corporations.

For someone who was supposed to retire last fall, Jacques Joly is a busy man. A veteran of nearly three decades of organizing summits, Joly is director of conference facilities in DFAIT's Summits Management Office, overseeing the provision of facilities for leaders' meetings, dinners, receptions, telecommunications, translation and printing services. The work is intense, but so is his sense of satisfaction.

"As a public servant and as a Canadian, I've been blessed to take part in so many summits," he says. "I've had the chance to encounter many of the world's leaders, and in a small way I feel I've made my own contribution."

Joly is unusual in having worked only on summits during his long career at DFAIT. The first was the G-7 Summit in 1981 in Montebello, where he helped with the technical setup of meeting rooms and offices. Other G-7 meetings followed: Toronto in 1988, Halifax in 1995 and Kananaskis in 2002 (when Russia joined, and the G-7 became the G-8). There were more: a Commonwealth heads of government meeting, a summit of the Americas, several summits of La Francophonie, and an APEC summit, all in Canada. He has also helped to manage summits hosted by other departments, including the UN Climate Change Conference hosted by Environment Canada in 2005 in Montreal, and the XI International AIDS Conference in 1996 in Vancouver, partly hosted by Health Canada.

Joly was to retire last September, but he says that when Len Edwards, Sherpa of this year's summits and then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, asked him to stay on, he couldn't refuse. He has a long and successful history of working on summits with Edwards, who, he says, "runs a tight ship. He's been the backbone for G-8 summits in Canada."

This year, with both the G-8 meeting in Muskoka and, especially, the G-20 meeting in Toronto right after, Joly and some 100 DFAIT staff in the Office have more on their plates than ever before. When the G-8 meets, for example, the host government provides eight briefing theatres for journalists. For the G-20, a full 20 theatres need to be set up.

"The challenge right now is dealing with uncertainties," says Joly. He attributes the team's success to a core group of people who have long histories in organizing such meetings. "We've developed a real knowledge of how to make a summit work." Other nations recognize Canadian summit expertise, he says, and many—including the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Argentina, Chile, Denmark, and Trinidad and Tobago—have asked for advice.

Joly plans to finally retire after these summits are over. He leaves the door open to do a little consulting, although not too much. Three decades of summit work perhaps distracted him a bit from family duties, he says. "It's time, I think, to give my precious wife the time she deserves."