

Meet Our Neighbours

Every year, Parliament Hill hosts the biggest birthday party in the country. As hundreds of thousands of people flock to the Hill for Canada Day, it's easy to overlook the mountain of work behind the festivities. *Our World* recently took an inside look at how the National Capital Commission, along with its many partners and sponsors, pulls off Canada's grandest celebration.

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175 tons of steel,

500 sheets of plywood and 400 light fixtures. Now, imagine 6 km of cable, 15,000 connection points and 300 construction workers, and you'll get a sense of what's involved just to assemble the main stage for the Canada Day shows on Parliament Hill. If you stop to consider the planning and organization behind the shows and the multitude of other attractions on the Hill that day, the workload seems practically insurmountable.

But every year, the National Capital Commission (NCC) tackles this monumental challenge, in close collaboration with Canadian Heritage and many other departments and agencies, including the RCMP, Public Works and Government Services Canada, and the Ottawa Police Service, to name just a few. The NCC plays the vital coordinating role in ensuring that the celebrations go off without a hitch.

"It takes us about 10 months to prepare for Canada Day," says Christian Fauvelle, the NCC's manager of logistics. "We actually start discussing it while planning Winterlude. Then, come March, we shift into high gear and go full throttle right up until July 1."

The Hill on Canada's Birthday



With months of work and a cast of thousands, Parliament Hill celebrations are the epicentre of Canada Day.

The lengthy preparations pay off in exciting fashion. Canada Day celebrations on the Hill last year included performances by Canadian headliners Barenaked Ladies and Andrea Lindsay, winner of the 2010 Juno Award for Francophone Album of the Year. Many other top artists also took to the stage and entertained the giant crowd—and roughly 75 percent of the Canadian population via TV, radio and the Web.

Attractions also included the traditional flypast of CF-18 aircraft and the Canadian Forces Snowbirds, a visit by Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, and a spectacular fireworks display. This year, royal newlyweds Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and his wife Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, are expected to attend Canada Day celebrations on the Hill.

"We try to surpass ourselves every year," says Guy Laflamme, vice-president of the NCC's Capital Experience, Communications and Marketing Branch. "In fact, the acid test we give ourselves focuses on goosebumps—making sure that our audience gets them at least every 5 to 10 minutes."

Delivering these thrills while maintaining airtight security, safety and crowd control requires the NCC to conduct a huge orchestra of different organizations and hundreds of volunteers. In the case of emergency services, for example, the NCC leads a committee of emergency services experts from the region who, on Canada Day, sit together in a control room, ready to respond at a moment's notice. A few years ago, Fauvelle recalls, severe weather on the Hill caused several large branches to fall on celebrants, causing injuries. Within eight minutes, emergency services responders were on the scene and transported the injured to the on-site first-aid tent, where health-care professionals immediately administered treatment.

"I was very proud of our response that day," says Fauvelle. "It was a strong example of how we plan for everything down to the last detail—both in moments of crisis and grand celebration."