

A Golden Moment for Canadian Trade

By Patricia Elliott, Duncan Wright and Danielle Sabourin

Who knew that being a liaison officer for DFAIT's Global Business Leaders Initiative would include sourcing yoga studios, meeting private jets on the tarmac, and providing impromptu city tours to investors and speakers? While not as glamorous as attending receptions, conferences or sporting events, the role of accompanying foreign CEOs was an important part of DFAIT's investment-promotion efforts during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

Nine trade commissioners from the Vancouver Regional Office escorted 35 international business executives visiting the city for the Olympic Games, providing a range of services and promoting Canada's advantages as a business partner of choice. Working closely with the Invest in Canada Bureau at Headquarters, the office matched the CEOs from Europe, Asia and the United States with trade commissioners who had suitable sector expertise and language capabilities—French, Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin and German were all on offer.

The liaison officers were easily identified by their dark blue Vancouver 2010 jackets, white-and-red scarves and highly sought-after red Olympic mittens. Dressed this way, we were often mistaken for volunteers or security officials and asked to provide tourist information, hand out mascot tattoos and pins, conduct crowd control or defuse tense situations.

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Yasuchika Hasegawa, President and CEO,
Takeda Pharmaceutical Co.

The challenges—and triumphs—of acting as liaison officers were many. The endurance medal goes to Duncan Wright, who spent 19 straight days escorting CEOs from Belgium, the Silicon Valley and Japan. Transportation around the Olympic host city was always a challenge, requiring a combination of public transit, taxis, buses and rental cars to ensure that all the visitors could maximize their time on the ground.

There were firsts, such as the fact that our team rode in four sleek, high-tech General Motors hydrogen fuel cell prototype vehicles while accompanying the CEOs. We also chauffeured rental cars when the fleet from GM was unavailable or overcommitted.

Celebrity and medallist sightings were frequent—and a welcome distraction. We encountered such personalities as Wayne Gretzky, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, U.S. swimming medallist Michael Phelps and California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

For DFAIT, the business program was a resounding success. The CEOs told us they appreciated the seamless organization of the Global Business Leaders Initiative and the information they received on the advantages of investing in Canada. "We were deeply impressed by Canadian hospitality," said Yasuchika Hasegawa, President and CEO of Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. "We found everything that happened during our stay in Vancouver to be intriguing and fascinating."

Sharing the podium are our office colleagues. While not directly involved in the business program, they continued to provide client services in their usual friendly and professional way.

Experiencing the 2010 Winter Games as liaison officers was an unforgettable privilege. It reminded us of what a great team we have in Vancouver, representing Canada "with glowing hearts."



Taking a break by the Olympic Flame cauldron (left to right): Terri Lee Edward, Adeline Leung, Rosina Neves, Quatchi, Meera Bawa, Patricia Elliott, Mukmuk, Anita Pan, Duncan Wright, Miga, Sumi, Wendy Trusler and George Jung.