

## MRS. MARY VANDENHOFF, HEAD OF MISSION: HELSINKI, FINLAND

After 15 years of serving the Federal Civil Service with Industry Trade and Commerce and the Department of External Affairs as a Commerce Officer, Mrs. Vandenhoff accepts her first assignment as Head of Mission to Helsinki, Finland. We talked to



Mrs. Vandenhoff about her new role and changes in non-rotational staff policy for trade commissioners.

*Your first assignment abroad is as Head of Mission. How does this assignment impact on you professionally and personally?*

From a career perspective the timing was right and it fortunately was a Head of Mission assignment, which not only gives me the experience on a mission, but also gives me the experience of the other aspects of foreign relations and Canadian interests abroad. As Director of Export Finance, I was obviously getting some valuable experience dealing regularly with posts abroad, but still it is important to get the experience first hand. From the family perspective the timing was right, as well.

*As a female Head of Mission, do you see that impacting on your duties and your profession? Canada has more female Heads of Mission than any other developed country, and that is a very healthy sign. Although I can't predict the kind of reaction I'll receive as Head of Mission, I believe it will be positive. Based on my experience, having come through the trade side and having been the lone female at business school, in the final analysis, being a woman has very little impact. At first they may react that "oh, you're a woman", but it is very quickly forgotten, and they deal with you as a professional. When you are working with people, you quickly forget that they are female, and I expect that to be the reaction in Finland. It won't make my life any more difficult or any easier. In the end it balances out the same as it does for my male colleagues.*

*What are the major issues and challenges facing you on your mission?*

Finland looks particularly interesting to us because it matches so many of the interests of myself and my husband. From a trade

perspective it focuses a lot on investment in Canada. I think there are a lot of good straight trade development opportunities in terms of promotion of exports abroad. Also, the aspect of bringing investment into Canada is new and important. Because of our commercial

relationship with Finland, I find it a very interesting challenge.

On many issues we are like-minded. Both countries have particularly strong forest industries. We share striking geographic similarities; both are nordic countries and have particular problems with the cold climate which leads to joint research. We both lie north of large industrial areas with inherent environmental concerns. Both our countries share a long border with a super power, however the similarity ends there, Finland having been invaded 42 times by her neighbor. Our two countries share the concern of being smaller countries vis-à-vis our large neighbors, but we are seen as major players in peace keeping roles around the world because of our perceived neutrality.

Finland is also a challenge from a political point of view, since it is recognized as a political listening post for the Soviet Union. While it is still a western democracy, it has a special relationship with the USSR, so from the perspective of east-west relations, the political situation is of considerable interest.

*Is one of your challenges and initiatives to create a higher awareness of the importance of the valuable relationship between our two countries?*

Yes. We have enjoyed good relations with Finland, and I am pleased that the decision to close our embassy in Finland was subsequently overturned. By nature the Fins are fairly reserved. They don't talk about their qualities, advantages, and accomplishments. The Canadians and Fins are compatible and do business quietly and therefore don't get the recognition.

*What factors caused decision-makers to reconsider the closure?*

The Finnish community in Canada and the Finnish people were shocked and brought