In Muskoka, where residents have expressed concern about protecting the pristine wilderness, the Office has studied how to lessen the effect of the Summit on the environment—even planting several thousand trees to offset the carbon it will produce.

The SMO opened in April 2009 under Gérald Cossette, now Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. While he recognized the difficulties of his assignment at the outset, he always anticipated a successful conclusion. "Organizing a G-8 event is like moving from a beast to a ballet—it starts as a beast, but by the time the Summit unfolds, it's a ballet."
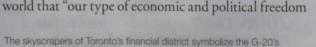
Last June, Cossette handed over the role of choreographer to Peter McGovern. As ADM of the SMO, McGovern expresses every bit as much optimism as his predecessor. "When we face these kinds of tasks, we at DFAIT, with the huge range of experience and abilities we can draw upon, always rise to the occasion."

McGovern muses that the sites chosen for the summits could not be more appropriate—the green of Muskoka reflecting the affirmation of life behind Canada's signature maternal and child health initiative at the G-8 summit, and the skyscrapers of Toronto's financial district symbolizing the G-20's financial concerns.

These substantive issues are being ably addressed on DFAIT's policy side. For G-8 policy development, Keith Christie, ADM of Global Issues and G-8 Sous-Sherpa, and his team have driven an ambitious agenda. On the G-8 foreign ministers track, Political Director Yves Brodeur has finessed compromise on complex issues, including the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea.

CANADA AT THE TABLE

Canada has long played a role at the summit table. The forebear of the G-8 was the G-6, which first met in Rambouillet, France, in 1975. France and Germany wanted to create an institution that could respond to fragility in the world's monetary system. Four other nations were invited: the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and Japan. Canada was asked to join the following year, for the San Juan G-7 Summit in Puerto Rico. At the meeting's conclusion, then Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau said G-7 summits would succeed if they could convince the world that "our type of economic and political freedom

The skyscrapers of Toronto's financial district symbolize the G-20's financial concerns.

1981: Leaders at the Montebello G-7 Summit

1960 External Aid Office (now CIDA) established

1961 Canada becomes founding member of OECD

1970 Canada becomes founding member of La Francophonie

1971 Canada attends first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Singapore

1973 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Ottawa

1973 Canada joins Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe process

1976 Canada joins G-6, creating G-7

1981 Canada hosts its first G-7 summit, Montebello

1982 External Affairs and International Trade department formed, uniting foreign policy and trade functions

1987 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Vancouver

1987 La Francophonie Summit, city of Québec

1988 Toronto G-7 Summit opposes South African apartheid

1988 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement signed