

For Americans, Chicago represents the heart of mid-America, the gateway to the Midwest.

For a Canadian, Chicago assumes a different but no less important perspective. Chicago is at the epicentre of North America, as prominent in its north-south situation as it is in its traditional east-west orientation.

Chicago symbolizes the "coming together" of the North American continent in the 20th century. The barriers of geography have been eclipsed by the bonds of friendship, shared values and, of course, economics.

Canada and the United States have long been the best of neighbours – allies in war, partners in peace.

And the depth and intensity of that relationship continue to grow as we learn to harness our collective strengths, while respecting our individual differences.

Despite our closeness, we are two separate nations. Even a top-rated, Canadian-produced television program like "Due South," featuring a Mountie roaming the wilds of Chicago, shows just how different we can be at times – and how much the same.

You're happy Michael Jordan is back, and so are we – especially with new NBA teams coming on board in Toronto and Vancouver next year.

You're happy the baseball strike is over, and so are we – especially with the unusual quirk that makes the Blue Jays the defending world champions over again.

The business of sports represents only a microcosm of our shared enthusiasm for common products and services, based on similar preferences and needs.

Our joint trading relationship is the largest in the world – and it continues to grow!

Merchandise exports from Canada to the United States rose 16 per cent to US\$129 billion in 1994. During the same year, your merchandise exports to Canada rose by 14 per cent to US\$114 billion.

Every day, Canada and the United States exchange one billion Canadian dollars' worth of goods and services.

The province of Ontario alone buys more from the United States than all of Japan.

And the state of Illinois exports more to Canada than the entire U.S. does to Spain.