

NV Museum plans major new exhibit

Federal funds will help showcase Maisie Hurley/Squamish collection

Benjamin Alldritt

balldritt@nsnews.com

SOME of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives' most significant pieces, which have never been shown publicly, will finally be exhibited thanks to some help from the federal government.

North Vancouver MP Andrew Saxton was at the museum Tuesday to announce that Ottawa was contributing \$74,500 towards two important projects.

The first is the staging of an exhibition titled *Entwined Histories*. The exhibition is a joint project between the museum and the Squamish Nation and features many of the pieces in the Maisie Hurley collection.

"It's a collection of First Nations art and artifacts that were all given to Maisie Hurley, who was an early activist for aboriginal rights in B.C.," said museum director Nancy Kirkpatrick.

"She had always hoped there would be an aboriginal museum in North Vancouver. She died in the early '60s and at that point Irene Rogers, of the Rogers family, purchased the collection and then it was donated to the City of North Vancouver. It's a really rich collection. Everything was given to Maisie Hurley, so it does include things the average collector would not be able to purchase. It's not just things made for the collectors' market. It includes a number of Squamish, Coast Salish items — we're focusing on those — but it also includes things from the Arctic, northern B.C., the Skeena River area and from the plains. Because we are collaborating with the Squamish Nation we're particularly focusing on the Squamish artifacts and looking at the Squamish notion of gift giving."

The costs associated with displaying these pieces safely has always been a barrier to showing the Hurley collection, said Kirkpatrick. But with the federal grant, experts can be called in to get some of the most delicate and damaged pieces ready for show. One of the foremost examples, according to Kirkpatrick, is a blanket made of both mountain goat wool and another, more mysterious fibre.

"It's a little hard to date something like that blanket and know the symbolic value of it. Now anything made with mountain goat wool is something a very high-status individual would have worn because it's very difficult to collect enough mountain goat wool to make a blanket. So we had a lot of fibre testing done at the University of Victoria and not only does it include the mountain goat wool it also includes a fibre from a dog that the Coast Salish peoples — this is before contact — raised for wool. They're called wool dogs and they raised them specifically to incorporate the hair into the blankets."

The wool dogs interbred with the canines that showed up alongside other European arrivals, and the distinct breed had vanished by the 1860s. "So we know our blanket dates from before the main period of contact. It's a very old blanket."

An extremely delicate cedar bark mat and a beaded leather moss bag are other examples of pieces that have languished in the museum's vault without the public's knowledge. Not only will



NEWS photo Paul McGrath

MAGDALENA Moore (left), North Vancouver Museum and Archives collection manager, and guest curator Sharon Fortney display some of the First Nations items that will be shown in an upcoming exhibit in January 2011. Much of the collection has never been on public display.

they be available for viewing, but co-curators Sharon Fortney and Damara Jacobs also plan to incorporate oral history interviews and videos with Squamish Nation elders into the exhibition, which will likely tour the province after closing in North Vancouver and also form the basis of a book to be published by the Squamish.

The second project to be funded is a new piece of software to help the museum build an online database of its collection, including photographs and descriptions of the many, many items not on display. The database will also be a tool for the museum as it looks to find a new home in the coming years.

"We are working towards a new museum and we want to be thinking about making a relevant and contemporary style museum that is going to have meaning for people now. So we're really looking at weeding our collection and paring it down so only the

most significant and important and relevant pieces are included."

Joining Saxton at the funding announcement was his father, also named Andrew Saxton. Saxton senior was there to donate a few personal and business mementoes from the time he was the owner of Grouse Mountain Resorts. Along with photos of notable figures visiting the mountain, Saxton passed on the skis that his son learned to ride the snow on.

"We needed a child's pair of skis," Kirkpatrick said. "We haven't got any in our collection and to have the skis that the son of the developer of Grouse Mountain used to learn how to ski, who is now the MP, is great. That's the thing with artifacts; it's not just about the thing, it's about the story and the context."

Entwined History opens at North Vancouver Museum, 209 Fourth St., in January of 2011.