**Your Friendly Neighbourhood Airport**

If you asked the average person how their airport supports their community, they may talk about economic opportunity. They most certainly would talk about transportation. It’s unlikely that they would think about advance voting.

But, Winnipeg Richardson International Airport did.

“At Winnipeg Airports Authority the focus is always on enhancing the customer experience. The advance polling booth was a way to help travellers exercise their democratic right, albeit in a very unique setting.” Said Barry Rempel, president and chief executive officer of Winnipeg Airports Authority. “We are always looking for new ways to showcase our community and augment the travel experience.”

Helping travellers exercise their right to vote is only one of dozens of examples of how Canadian airports reach out to support and enrich their communities in ways that have little or nothing to do with travel. The activities reflect the needs of each community, but taken together, a bigger picture begins to emerge. It’s one of a deeply proud, engaged and uniquely Canadian airport community.

Business-speak may call it civic engagement. Airports call it being good neighbours and friends.

And like any good neighbour, airports welcome newcomers. Halifax’s long tradition of receiving new Canadians was given a 21st century twist when Halifax Stanfield International Airport hosted a public citizenship ceremony in its main lobby as part of Canada’s 150th celebrations.

 “We were honoured to have been chosen to host this special event for Canada’s newest citizens,” said Joyce Carter, president and chief executive officer of the Halifax International Airport Authority (HIAA). “We welcome new Canadians at our airport every day and we’ve come to think of the airport as the modern-day Pier 21. The ceremony provided us with a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our nation’s 150th birthday and to show appreciation for our great country.”

The ceremony struck a deep chord for at least one member of the board. “I know first-hand what a momentous day this is for these new citizens,” said Wadih Fares, HIAA chair and an order of Canada recipient who became a Canadian citizen in 1980. “I first came to Canada as a teenager when I was escaping the civil war in Lebanon. I believe strongly in celebrating the unique talents and contributions everyone brings to this country and today we celebrate these new Canadians.”

Canada’s airports celebrate peoples and cultures, from the newest Canadians to the first nations. Vancouver Airport Authority recently signed The Musqueam Indian Band - YVR Airport Sustainability & Friendship Agreement, a 30-year agreement based on friendship and respect to achieve a sustainable and mutually beneficial future for the community. Vancouver International Airport (YVR) and Musqueam Indian Band are located in the same community on land that is Musqueam traditional territory. Musqueam have historically played an integral role in many areas of YVR’s business and operations, from noise management and environmental advisory to development planning and cultural engagement.

“This marks the evolution of our relationship with the Musqueam people. We are proud to look ahead to a future where we continue to learn and grow together for the economic and social benefit of the region,” said President and CEO Craig Richmond of the Vancouver Airport Authority. Being able to celebrate this new and exciting way forward with our friends is not only good for our business - it is the right way for YVR to move forward in the community we serve.”

Details of the Agreement include a path of education to employment with a number of scholarships and new jobs, one per cent of annual revenue from YVR, identification and protection of archeological resources and support for ongoing operations and long-term development at the airport.

Other airports focus in on mental and physical wellbeing.

The Victoria Airport Authority knows that flying is only one way to get around and encourages residents and travellers to get heathy while experiencing the natural beauty of the Saanich Peninsula by running, walking or biking its 9.3 nature trail called The Flight Path. Combining spectacular scenery with historical sites and quiet contemplation, the airport’s Flight Path offers a unique experience for everyone.

“The Victoria Airport Authority (VAA) is one of the first airports in the world to develop this type of recreational facility,” said President and CEO Geoff Dickson. “The Flight Path is one part of our commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship that also includes, among other practices, protecting our forests, rehabilitating our airport creeks to remediate previous pollution and improve aquatic health, harvesting our farm fields and providing airport lands for play grounds and sports fields.”

Airports lift the Canadian economy and connect Canada to the world, but they are more than that: they are good neighbours and collaborative community partners.