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NEWS



If your three-line summation of the beauty of Vancouver's cherry blossoms impresses judges of the 2007 Haiku Invitational, your words will appear on 400 buses and SkyTrain cars. Photo-submitted

Express your feelings about our cherry blossoms in three lines

By Sandra Thomas-Staff writer

The city's spectacular cherry blossom trees are inspiring an international haiku competition that drew more than 1,000 submissions for its debut last year.

The largest number of submissions came from Croatia, said Linda Poole, creative director of the 2007 Haiku Invitational. The haiku competition is one of the events leading up to the second annual Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, which Poole also organizes.

"We had 1,000 submissions from 540 writers from 27 countries," said Poole. "But Croatia has a very strong haiku group."

Haiku is a form of plain-speaking poetry that captures an experience or image in three lines and 17 or fewer syllables. While some convey serious feelings, others such as one submitted last year by an 11-year-old boy from Quebec, show pure joy.

"Cherry Blossom

YAHOO!

It's spring."

Last year the festivals' haiku committee selected the top 30 poems, which were broken into categories of Best Canadian, Best American, Best International and Best Youth (age 18 and younger). Last year's winner for best Canadian haiku was Helen Baker from North Vancouver who wrote:

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"The long road

Boughs of white blossoms

Light the way."

Selected haiku will be featured on more than 400 TransLink buses and SkyTrains. Winning haiku will also be engraved on a new permanent haiku memorial stone, which will be placed at the Burrard SkyTrain station.

"Last year we planted a cherry tree at the station," said Poole. "But I don't think many people know why it's there. The boulder will give people something to read and explain its significance."

The engraved boulder will be unveiled at Cherry Jam Downtown, the festival's kick-off event and concert in mid-March. The event also includes a haiku performance by the festival's artistic director Christopher Gaze.

Poole's enthusiasm for everything cherry blossom is obvious as she chats about the haiku contest and festival. She can name the species of many of the city's 36,000 cherry trees, including one of her favourites, the largest of the spreading Yoshino located at the west side of Queen Elizabeth Park near 33rd Avenue and Cambie.

"It's the grandpapa of them all," said Poole, who can be seen standing under the large tree in a photo posted on the festival's website and shown on this page.

In March when the magnificent trees are in full bloom, families have picnics under the pink and white blossoms in the park. Poole notes that in Japan people applaud when pink and white cherry blossoms drift to the ground in clouds.

This year's festival includes a painters meeting at a selected location to paint or draw trees, a cherry blossom viewing map, the Cherry Jam concert, cherry blossom trolley tours, the Blossom Dragon Boat Regatta, banners on the Burrard Street Bridge, arboricultural and garden talks and tours, and the B.C. Blossom Watch photo contest. The winner of last year's photo contest won two tickets to Japan. The photo is posted on the festival website.

Poole said invitations to take part in this year's haiku invitational have gone out around the world.

"Our haiku committee is wonderful and they've done a good job of getting the word out," said Poole.

The deadline for haiku submissions is Jan. 11. For information, see www.vcbf.ca.

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