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Vancouver's Chinese community gathers to celebrate Beijing Games

Nicole Tomlinson, Vancouver Sun

Published: Friday, August 08, 2008

More than a thousand people gathered at Richmond's Aberdeen Mall this morning to watch the Opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games - and eat pancakes.

As the ceremonies began and the mall doors opened, hundreds of people rushed from the parkade to catch the event on a giant inflatable TV screen.

Cheers and clapping came from enthusiastic locals as the Chinese flag was carried across the Birds Nest Stadium, as the ten volunteers tasked with preparing a pancake breakfast looked entirely spooked by the size of the crowd.

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Richmond Councillor Bill McNulty said, "I'm pretty sure there will not be enough pancakes for the crowd," as he poured batter furiously.

McNulty said the event, which included nearly 300 volunteers, was the perfect opportunity for the city and local corporations to mobilize for the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010.

"Children are coming out, families. This shows us what we can do," he said.

Mandy Lee, a spectator, wasn't looking forward to starting a long day of work at 9a.m., but the accountant says that it was worth it to be around other Chinese people for the Opening Ceremony.

"It was great and amazing. I didn't expect such a good performance," she said, adding, "This community is great. They share in everything."

Dave Semple, Director of Public Works for City of Richmond has lived in Richmond his whole life and says he loves all the changes that have happened over the years.

Semple, a 2010 Olympic volunteer, said events like this help integrate the city's large Asian population into the rest of the community.

"There are so many events going on all the time. I've developed relationships with lots of cool people."

Helen Fung moved to Richmond 10 years ago from Hong Kong and was surprised to see the mixed crowd.

"There's not only Chinese people but many caucasians," she said.

With the athletes making their way around the track to introductions in English and Cantonese, the crowd chowed down on their pancakes as dozens left for work. The majority of the crowd, however, would be sticking it out to the end, and happily so.



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