

Pacific Canada Heritage Centre - Museum of Migration Society

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 25, 2023

HEARTS OF FREEDOM in BC
Out of the Museum into the Community

The national travelling exhibition entitled "Hearts of Freedom: Stories of Southeast Asian Refugees" that was launched a couple of months ago in the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau has just arrived in Vancouver. It is to be mounted in various locations throughout BC by the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre – Museum of Migration Society (PCHC) in collaboration with its local partners from now until early July before it travels on to the East Coast.

This travelling exhibition is an extension of a national research project that has documented an oral history of Southeast Asian refugees from 1975 to 1985 – the longest and largest migration and settlement of non-European refugees in Canada. Curated by Dr Stephanie Stobbe, one of the principal researchers of the project, this pop-up style exhibition made up of 6 panels (in English and French) will be available to visitors daily this week at Simon Fraser University's Downtown Campus at Harbour Centre. PCHC volunteers will be on hand from 12:30pm to 4:30pm to interact with visitors. Guided tours will be given by the curator and another principal researcher of the project Michael Molloy on April 28 & 29 as well as on May 1 about an hour before the special events commence.

Pat Parungao, President of PCHC, is amazed at the rich programming ideas the volunteers have come up with to animate the exhibition. Special events offered at the Harbour Centre include "PCHC Film Night: A Smorgasbord of Refugees Stories", a fireside chat entitled "Open Doors, Open Hearts" and the BC premiere of the accompanying film *Passage to Freedom* in French and English. "This project is partially funded by Canadian Heritage," Parungao says, "but we are able to make everything free to the public mainly because of the generosity of our volunteers and sponsors."

Winnie Cheung, Co-founder of PCHC who also co-chairs the committee that leads the Hearts of Freedom in BC project, explains: "By taking the exhibition out of the formal museum setting into the community, we hope to engage more citizens in conversations about Canada's role in today's complicated world where over 100 million people are displaced, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)."

Statistics are cold and sterile, but storytelling is not. By sharing the stories of these Southeast Asian refugees, and the stories of Canadians who assisted them, PCHC wants to demonstrate that behind the statistics are the human stories of ordinary people engaged in extraordinary acts of kindness and ingenious problem-solving to overcome

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unprecedented challenges. "The Private Sponsorship of Refugee Program", Stobbe remarks, "is one of those brilliant ideas spawned around that time to help settle 60,049 refugees within 1979-80 alone." After over four decades, this program is still in place and has been emulated by several countries in refugee resettlement.

At the end of April, the Hearts of Freedom exhibition will be moved to Three Bentall Centre (595 Burrard Street), just a few blocks away. It will be on display in the lobby from May 1 to 12 and open to visitors Monday to Friday from 6:00am to 6:00pm. On May 1 from 5:30-8:00 pm, there will be a reception to kick off the exhibition and mark the beginning of Asian Heritage Month. From catering to the cultural performances on the program, guests at the reception will get a taste of the talents embedded in the local Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese communities.

"We are proud to cohost this educational exhibition, and to celebrate Asian Heritage Month publicly at the Bentall Centre campus in the business core of Downtown Vancouver," affirms Chuck We, Executive Vice President, Pacific Northwest/Canada, Hudson Pacific Properties, operator and co-owner of Bentall Centre. "What a wonderful opportunity," he continues, "for all Canadians to understand better the diversity of the Asian presence and contributions in BC!"

The Hearts of Freedom exhibition will be moved next to UBC's downtown campus and then onto its main campus before it travels to Surrey, where it will be cohosted by St Matthew's Parish from June 9 to 16. Its last leg in BC will be on Vancouver Island. For further updates and detailed programming information, please visit www.pchc-mom.ca

Pacific Canada Heritage Centre - Museum of Migration (PCHC-MoM) Society was incorporated in 2011 as a non-profit society in BC. We aspire to build a physical museum as a hub for all people to reflect on Pacific Canada's past and present, and to envision a more unified country in which everyone is welcome and respected. Meanwhile, we work as a "museum without walls", offering educational programs and history projects, primarily through the efforts of dedicated volunteers. We partner with diverse communities to amplify their voices, and with organizational partners in Canada and beyond, to leverage resources so as to maximize our outreach.

Hearts of Freedom – Stories of Southeast Asian Refugees was created by the Hearts of Freedom Museum Exhibition Committee, in collaboration with the Canadian Mennonite University, Carleton University, Canadian Museum of History, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Canadian Immigration Historical Society, Vietnamese Canadian Federation, Lao Association of Ottawa-Valley, Cambodian Association of Ottawa-Valley, Pacific Canada Heritage Centre – Museum of Migration Society, and Manitoba Museum.

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