

# Bringing tradition to the Olympics

Fort Providence sisters part of territory's traditional games team

by Roxanna Thompson  
Northern News Services  
Deh Gah Got'ie Koe/  
Fort Providence

Robyn McLeod's journey to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics began 12 years ago.

When she was 10-years-old she discovered Dene Games when she tried the stick pull while at the Mackenzie Regional Summer Games one year in Fort Resolution. Robyn and sister Shawna's interest in Dene Games took off from there.

The McLeod sisters from Fort Providence have competed in Dene games in both the Arctic Winter Games and the Canada Winter Games. Next year they will be showcasing their sport at the ultimate venue- the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. It's a dream come true for me," said Robyn, 22.

Robyn and Shawna are part of the 16-person traditional games team that will demonstrate both Dene and Inuit Games in Vancouver. Jason Horesay who's also from Fort Providence is one of the team's four coaches.

Shawna, 18, said she tried

out for the team because she wanted the chance to represent her community and the territory at the Olympics.

"I'm really excited to go," she said.

The competition, along with the history and background of each event, are some of the aspects of Dene games that Shawna enjoys. Her favourite event is the stick pull.

Shawna said she is looking forward to meeting people and experiencing different cultures at the Olympics while demonstrating traditional games to the world.

For Robyn, seeing the performances, the venues and the cultural aspects of the Olympics are some of the expected highlights.

"It's a complete honour," she said about representing the territory.

Robyn said she enjoys all of the Dene Games but poll push is her favourite team event and snow snake is her favourite individual event.

"I like how there's a lot of technique that goes with it," she said.

Her opportunities to participate in Dene Games has improved over the years with

more demonstrations in the communities and greater accessibility, especially for women.

Traditionally women aren't suppose to do handgames or Dene Games but Fort Providence has had women's hand-games teams.

"It was interesting to see how people would react," she said.

Robyn talked with her grandparents who were supportive of her goals and gave her permission to practise the games.

### Getting prepared

As part of their preparation for the Olympics the McLeod sisters, along with the rest of the traditional games team, are learning how to teach the games to the younger generation. The team met in Yellowknife from Nov. 27 to 29 for a weekend training camp.

The camp focused on training the participants, building team cohesion and working on their performances of the specific games. The athletes also learned how to teach the games and talk about them.

On Sunday, the athletes ran a three-hour teaching session



photo courtesy of Rebecca Alt

Shawna McLeod, left, of Fort Providence and Shaylene Allen from Fort McPherson practise the finger pull during a training camp held in Yellowknife for the traditional games athletes who will be demonstrating for the territory at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

with students from Mildred Hall in Yellowknife.

"We had a lot of fun teaching them," said Shawna.

In Vancouver, the members of the team will be supporting each other as they demonstrate their specific sports whether they are Dene or Inuit, said Gary Schauerte, the acting director of the sport, recrea-

tion and youth division of the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

There will be approximately eight athletes and two coaches in Vancouver throughout the Olympics and Paralympics. The whole team will be there during the Northern Weekend from Feb. 18 to 20.

The athletes will be giving

performances at a variety of designated sites around the city and Whistler, said Schauerte.

In West Vancouver, they will also be working with a number of schools to provide camps that will teach students about traditional games.

"It's a tremendous opportunity for these young leaders in the North," he said.

# Focus on hockey in Fort Simpson

Instructor leads six days of clinics

by Roxanna Thompson  
Northern News Services  
Liidli Kue/Fort Simpson

Hockey players in Fort Simpson have strong skills to base the rest of their season on following a week of hockey instruction in the village.

Debbie Strome, a hockey instructor from Cranbrook, B.C., returned to the village for a fourth consecutive year to lead a number of sessions.

Between Nov. 28 and Dec. 3 Strome led a coaching clinic as well as off ice and on ice sessions for school students, minor hockey players and the Moosehide Mamas.

It's nice to be able to return to Fort Simpson because many of the young players know me now, said Strome. "You can see how

they've improved," she said.

While waiting for the ice to be ready Strome led off ice training sessions in the recreation centre's gym for three days.

With the students from Bompas Elementary School and Thomas Simpson School, Strome focused on foot speed and agility and a bit of core training. The Moosehide Mamas worked on stick handling.

After getting on the ice on Dec. 1 Strome moved the focus to skating skills and individual skills, like passing, with all of the hockey players. The youth in the village are really good about taking direction and not questioning why they have to do certain exercises, said Strome.

"I think all the kids really

enjoyed it from the feedback I got," she said.

The on and off ice sessions were really good for the Thomas Simpson School students, said Kristen Morrison, a physical education teacher at the school.

"She's amazing, the way she breaks down skating and breaks the skills down technically," said Morrison.

A lot of the students said they had a good time and their skating skills improved, she said. As a member of the team, Morrison was also on the ice with Strome during the Moosehide Mamas' sessions.

Strome finds out every player's strengths and weaknesses and gives them individualized drills to focus on those areas, she said.

"She's very easy to learn from," said Morrison.

"She makes the learning fun."

Strome also led a two-day coaching clinic over the weekend that focused on how to break down and teach skills. Three of the six participants at the clinic were high school students.

"I think it's really important for the community to get the older kids involved in helping the little kids," Strome said.

Gordon Thompson, 17, said he learned the basic skills needed for coaching during the clinic.

"(It was) good, lots of fun," Thompson said.

Having taken the clinic Rylan Hardisty-Gillis, 15, said he has a greater appreciation for the time that coaches have to dedicate to plan for practices.

"I learned a lot of new stuff about coaching," he said.



photo courtesy of Debbie Strome

Azayah Hardisty, 5, was one of the minor hockey players who participated in the hockey clinics that instructor Debbie Strome led for six days in Fort Simpson.

With his new knowledge Hardisty-Gillis plans to help coach minor hockey this year.

Strome's visit to the village was sponsored by Fort Simpson Minor Hockey and is part

of a larger tour that Hockey North has organized. In the course of five and a half weeks

Strome will lead hockey sessions in seven communities in the territory.

## CKLB Radio

**Sahtu Dene Morning** with Mary-Anne Williams  
7 10 a.m.



**Denesuline Program** with host Marlene Grooms  
1 p.m.



**The Raven Show** with host Clayton Bishop (C-Dog)  
5 to 7 p.m.



**Tlicho Yati Program** with host Eva Beaverho  
10 a.m.



**Denendeh Today** with Jim Hope news and commentary from the Deh Cho region  
3 p.m.



**Noon Hour Request Show**  
12 p.m.



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## SPORTS CARD HOCKEY

AGE: 9

Fort Simpson

Newmoon participated in the clinic for minor hockey players held in the village. "It was fun," she said. Newmoon said she learned a lot including how to jump on the ice and how to stop when she's skating.



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