

# Local potter, partner take Canadians to see the North

By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD-DANBY  
Columnist

"We are really interested in taking Canadians and, especially people in the area, to the northern wilderness," says Al Pace, the well known potter who lives just inside the Hockley Valley. "This was our 18th summer doing canoe trips, taking people of all ages to experience the far north."

This year, he and his wife, Lin Ward, were thrilled to receive a grant from the government of the North West Territories to help in the expansion of their business in the north.

When Al Pace says the far north, he is not kidding: the base for the expeditions he and Lin do is at Norman Wells, a remote town on the Franklin River in line with the Great Bear Lake at the western edge of the North West Territories. Norman Wells is only accessible by

airplane, usually from Yellowknife.

The couple own the Farmhouse Pottery studio on Hockley Road, where they have been building the business of Mr. Pace's pottery.

Some several years ago, they took a trip to the Yukon with their young son, Taylor, and had a wonderful time. Mr. Pace had been in the habit of sending studio newsletters out to his regular clients and that year, he decided to write about the trip. The response to this newsletter was enthusiastic appreciation for the story.

The following year, they went north again and, again, with family. Once home, Mr. Pace spread the story of this journey again in his newsletter. However, the response this year was not only of interest in their adventure but interest in going with them.

In truth a little hesitant-

ly at first, since their travels had so far been with family, they decided to form a company, Canoe North Adventure and began to organise guided canoe trips in the northern regions of this vast and beautiful land.

After the first trip with a group, their excitement blew away any doubts they may have had about travelling with people they did not previously know. The real treat to their system is that they can take any aged person. They have "vintage tours" with folks over 60 - over 70. There are trips that cater to teenagers; and, of course, adventures for everyone in between.

Over the last 18 summers, they have taken some 700 people to the north, on a collection of trips that vary quite a bit in the challenges they present.

In the course of their routine as far as the needs of the company are ful-

filled: the provision of basic needs, the storage of equipment, the place to act as a centre, they developed a plan to build a "home" for the northern and business end of Canoe North Adventures.

Naturally, they have built up relationships with associates in the north who facilitate the success of their tours, especially North Wright Airways.

North Wright was established in the north by Warren Wright who grew up in Dundalk. He did his training in this region but, having gone up north to work, fell in love with the north and has dedicated his life to training young men to fly.

Much of this is known about Alan and Lin, but the big news is their newly minted link with North Wright Air and the North West Territories. Ms Ward put together business plans for both Canoe North Adventures and North Wright Air, stunning

documents, carefully researched and assembled. These were submitted to the NWT government as an application for a grant to build a centre near Norman Wells, which they call the Wilderness Tourism Centre.

This year, they were granted a reasonable sum of money jointly with North Wright Air from the NWT government. The work on the log building, the future home in the north for both Canoe North and North Wright Air, was begun this summer.

What has been raised is as much a work of art as a building. The fabulous shaping of the logs to form the roof beams, the dove tail joinery, all the hand-crafted angles of the construction speak to the skill of the young workmen who have done the work.

The log building is up and ready for finishing. There will be decks outside, accommodation, hot

showers, an office and so forth inside. For Al and Lin, its main function will be as a jump-off point for their tours, a place to collect and make last minute adjustments to their preparations for each trip.

From there, equipment, canoes, supplies and travellers are flown through the mountains to the rivers on which they will all travel for the next 10 to 12 days.

The supplies are not mean: a full menu, wine, and many of the niceties travel with them to be consumed as they go along.

There is no portage, for the rivers run deep and wide enough to allow for steady paddling over 200 to 300 kilometres. Every night they find another place to camp.

It would be impossible to actually explain the liberation found in travelling in such truly pristine territory. The drama of the scenery takes a thousand pictures which can never

do it justice. Life's pettiness falls away and new understanding is born within the soul.

People who have only been on cruises, golf trips, resort vacations are overwhelmed by the power of their time in this huge environment. Their Blackberries are happily useless and they are thor-

oughly and therapeutically separated from their normal lives.

Mr. Pace is not shy about the skill he and Ms Ward have in matching travellers with trips and each other. Once in a while, Ms Ward takes a group of ladies on an

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