

## **GEOGRAPHY AWARENESS WEEK AS AN AGENT FOR CHANGE IN CANADIAN GEOGRAPHY**

The Geography Awareness Week program hosted by the Canadian Association of Geographers is receiving much recognition for its rapid rise to prominence. It is appropriate to quickly acknowledge, however, that many of its roots reside in the *Symposium on Projecting Geography in the Public Domain in Canada*.

The symposium was sponsored by the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (RCGS), the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG), and the Canadian Council on Geographic Education (CCGE). It was held as part of the Canadian Association of Geographers Annual Meeting in May, 2005. Five position papers were commissioned, and I presented the report, *Geography and the Media: Strengthening the Relationship*. All the position papers can be viewed at:

[www.ccge.org/ccge/english/geoLiteracy/symposium\\_june2005.asp](http://www.ccge.org/ccge/english/geoLiteracy/symposium_june2005.asp)

While doing research for the media and geography report, the value of the symposium became very apparent to me. In brief, Canadian institutions, including universities, governments, businesses, and professional organizations needed to do a much better job of informing Canadians about the changing role of geography in the affairs of Canadian society. Further, they needed to significantly improve their communications to Canadians about advances in geographic knowledge, in geographic teaching and research methods and techniques, and in geographic information system (GIS) technology.

Coincidentally, as fate would have it, I retired from the University of Ottawa in June 2005. During that summer, I was heavily engaged in discussions about the symposium, and I was also receiving requests to continue my involvement in the mission of *projecting geography in the public domain in Canada*.

By the time of the May 2006 CAG meetings in Thunder Bay, it seemed to me that **Geography Awareness Week** (GAW) could be a very good means of projecting geography in the public domain in Canada. In search of sober second opinions, I had discussions with Chris Sharpe, president of the CAG, Bob Sharpe, president of CCGE, Louise Maffett, executive director of RCGS, and Stuart Semple who has a long record of involvement with the CAG, CCGE, and RCGS.

With their encouragement, I put together a very modest program for Geography Awareness Week 2006. The design plan was to promote Geography Awareness Week as part of GIS Day for 2006, and to create a much more detailed plan of action to present to the CAG Executive at the CAG annual meeting in Saskatoon.

At its May 2007 Board meeting the CAG Executive approved the plan, and Canada's Geography Awareness Week program was underway for a full-scale launch in November. Just two years later, it has become one of the most widely recognized Geography

Awareness Week programs in the world. Four features of the program are discussed here, and more can be found on the CAG website.

First, GAW in Canada is organized around **theme days**. In 2009 the theme days are Weather and Climate; Water; Energy; Transportation; and Food and Health. Each topic is of national interest, affects every Canadian every day, and involves many aspects of geography. The mission of Geography Awareness Week, November 16-20, is to illustrate how geographical factors shape and affect each of these critical aspects of life in Canada.

Second, GAW in Canada selects ten **Canadian websites** each year to tell the story about how geographical factors affect the theme day topics. To date 20 websites have been selected for each theme, and ten more will be selected for 2009. To visit the **Canadian websites** that do an excellent job of demonstrating how geographical factors affect the five topics of national, local, and personal interest, please go to:

[http://www.cag-acg.ca/en/geography\\_week\\_2008.html](http://www.cag-acg.ca/en/geography_week_2008.html)

Third, the **Applied Geography Showcase** was introduced in 2008, and continues for GAW 2009. This Showcase informs Canadians about the kinds of projects that geographers undertake for governments, businesses, and other enterprises. The reports that have been contributed to date can be viewed at:

[www.cag-acg.ca/files/pdf/GAW/Applied\\_Geography\\_Showcase.pdf](http://www.cag-acg.ca/files/pdf/GAW/Applied_Geography_Showcase.pdf)

Fourth, the **GeoSkills Showcase** was introduced in 2008, and continues for GAW 2009. This Showcase informs Canadians about the skills that geographers employ in education, government, business, entertainment, and recreation.

For illustrative purposes, twenty kinds of skills are identified in the GeoSkills Showcase for 2009, and each of them makes an important contribution to how we teach geography, learn about geography, do geographic research, and use geography in the workplace. And, I hasten to add, Table 1 is just a beginning, since there are other skills, and many ways to combine the skills.

**Table 1. GeoSkills Identified for Canada's Geography Awareness Week 2009**

<b>Cartography</b>	<b>GIS applications</b>
<b>Digital imaging</b>	<b>GIS fundamentals</b>
<b>Geocaching games</b>	<b>GIS principles</b>
<b>Geographic field methods</b>	<b>GIS science</b>
<b>Geographic research methods</b>	<b>GIS technology</b>
<b>Geographic research techniques</b>	<b>GPS applications</b>
<b>Geomatics</b>	<b>Mapping systems and applications</b>
<b>Geomodelling</b>	<b>Remote sensing</b>
<b>Geoscience methodology</b>	<b>Spatial analysis</b>
<b>Geostatistics</b>	<b>Spatial decision support systems</b>

The GeoSkills Showcase is an excellent means to communicate with Canadians and citizens of the world about the skills involved in being a geographer. To see the reports that have been contributed to date, please go to:

[www.cag-acg.ca/files/pdf/GAW/GAW2009\\_GeoSkills.pdf](http://www.cag-acg.ca/files/pdf/GAW/GAW2009_GeoSkills.pdf)

In addition, the GeoSkills Showcase makes important connections between geographic information systems (GIS) and geographic skills. Demonstrating how geographic skills contribute to GIS, and how GIS contributes to geographic skills, is a major goal of Geography Awareness Week, and the **GeoSkills Showcase** represents an innovative way to link geographical skills with GIS technology.

Readers are invited to visit the GeoSkills Sampler at regular intervals to see the new reports that discuss and demonstrate the significant achievements that are being made to more effectively combine advances in GIS technology with advances in the design, testing, and use of geographical skills.

To learn more about the Geography Awareness Week program of the Canadian Association of Geographers, please go to [www.cag-acg.ca/en/geography\\_week](http://www.cag-acg.ca/en/geography_week).

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Geography Awareness Week  
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