

Jim Thorsell Speaks at The Banff Centre, May 2007

Jim Thorsell, internationally renowned for his work with UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, was an early pioneer of sustainable development and natural conservation. Thor is a long time resident of Banff and shared some of his reflections on his relationship to this place, its world heritage site designation and some personal observations after forty years of living, working and enjoying Banff National Park.

In his presentation at The Banff Community Foundation's Spring Luncheon, Dr. Jim Thorsell related how he arrived in 1962 as 'the first Park Naturalist at the University of Lake Louise'. Years later, working for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 1984, Thor had the pleasure of presenting the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks dossier to the IUCN Committee that granted it World Heritage Site status in that year.

During his presentation, Thor' opened and closed his remarks by referring to three events that took place in 1962, the year he came to the mountain parks.

Firstly, Thor' reminded the assembled group that Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" was released in 1962, and became a key document for raising awareness of environmental concerns. Thor reminded the audience that "Climate Change" and global warming issues must be addressed on an international scale.

Also in 1962 the Trans Canada Highway was completed. Forty-five years later, the TCH is carrying 4 million visitors to Banff annually, but the volume and mix of recreational, residential and commercial traffic pose serious concerns – for a variety of reasons. Thor' urges that creative and assertive management techniques be implemented along the mountain park transportation corridors with a goal of avoiding serious conflicts of interest.

Thirdly, Thorsell related that 1962 was the year that Norman Luxton died. Luxton was a local leader of private initiatives that supported the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Thor' concluded his remarks by pointing out that Luxton's private initiatives and his influence helped to spawn an awareness of Banff's mountain culture heritage – an awareness that continues to grow today. Banff was dubbed 'the place where man and mountains meet' and although the region's history of parks service, skiing, climbing, exploring and adventure seeking is rather short, Banff, with its population growth controls, is in a unique position to strengthen its blessing of great natural wonders and rich cultural history.

The Banff Community Foundation thanks Jim Thorsell for generously sharing his insight and wisdom during our second annual 'friend raiser'. The foundation supports Dr. Thorsell's view that residents of Banff National Park have a unique opportunity to celebrate our culture of mountain traditions - a culture inspired by our location inside a World Heritage Site.