

## Forward-thinking milestones

by BROCK WEIR

Even though they weren't playing in the Greater Toronto Area at the time, apparently it was a celebratory atmosphere in the GTA last week when Team Canada won its first-ever World Cup game.

The game may have been played in Vancouver, but it seems geography didn't dampen anyone's enthusiasm as I heard from no less than three people that at the precise moment the game was sealed in Canada's favour, pockets of cheers could be heard all around ? and even from a great distance. In fact, one highly informal correspondent of mine reported that they could hear the commotion from the FIFA Fan Zone at Fort York clearly on the far side of Toronto Island, almost as if the party was happening right next to them.

In the interests of full disclosure, I've never quite been bitten by the bug that's resulted in the ?Football Frenzy? so many people are experiencing right now (I'm saving my personal ? and limited ? sports-fan energy for Wimbledon over the next coming weeks) but I'm thrilled that so many people, some of whom would never have deigned to even consider watching a soccer match previously, are catching the fever and going all out in celebration.

Only time will tell whether the significant costs of bringing the World Cup to Toronto and Vancouver will have been worth it from an economic perspective, but if it's engagement the powers-that-be are after, it seems the return on investment has been pretty swift.

Of particular interest to me has been reading accounts of individuals, families, and groups from so many parts of the world that have made the pilgrimage here to catch their home team on our soil. It has been not only a chance for them to enjoy the game and maybe even enjoy some extra cachet among their fellow sports fans, but, for many, to explore a new city, country, and region for the very first time.

For residents of this country who were born abroad, it's also been a great opportunity to see those who now call this country home celebrate the successes of their homelands on these soils.

Overall, it's been a great opportunity to see Canada through a fresh lens ? even if briefly borrowed.

As I wrote in this space last week, it is an invaluable reminder of how people from the outside looking in view this country, and it's provided some valuable food for thought on just what it means to be Canadian, how we go about celebrating it, and how we define ourselves moving into the future.

Those are often front-of-mind thoughts around this time of year with Canada Day just around the corner ? and perhaps even more so now as this Wednesday's celebrations lay the groundwork for a milestone Canada Day next year, marking the 160th anniversary of Confederation.

Now, a 160th anniversary is not usually seen as a major milestone. Unlike a 150th anniversary, otherwise known as a Sesquicentennial, there isn't an obvious tongue-twisting alternative name for a 160th, but it's still a significant milestone ? and opportunity ? to take stock.

A May survey published by Strategy Online suggests Canadians are getting ready to celebrate the nation by getting out and exploring it, the pollster noting that Canada Day is ?forecasted to be one of the least homebound major holidays this year.? But the same poll finds that the passionate ?Elbows Up? mentality of supporting the country through our spending habits so ably demonstrated last year might be on the wane.

?The consumer insights and data company's 2026 Annual Holiday Preview, fielded among more than 5,000 consumers, found that only 48 per cent of respondents plan to celebrate at home on July 1 ? the lowest tally among major holidays tracked by the firm. By

comparison, 73 per cent celebrate Halloween at home, while Christmas sits at 64 per cent. Overall, 61 per cent of Canadians surveyed said they intend to celebrate Canada Day in some form, trailing Christmas (86 per cent), New Year's Eve (70 per cent), and Easter and Thanksgiving (67 per cent). The data suggests Canada Day celebrations remain centred around communal and outdoor activities. Nearly half of respondents (46 per cent) said grilling or barbecuing are part of their plans, while 42 per cent expect to spend time with partners or family and 31 per cent plan to celebrate with larger groups.

A separate Numerator poll of roughly 1,800 people suggest consumer patriotism and its effect on purchasing seems to be cooling. May's Tariff Statement Tracker includes a monthly survey of roughly 1,800 Canadian consumers. And the number of respondents who 'strongly agree' with the sentiment, 'I intend to buy only products made in Canada' has hit its lowest point since Donald Trump began imposing tariffs last winter at 17 per cent. That number was 26 per cent in February 2025 and 29 per cent the following month.

While Canadians are spending next week's holiday in the great outdoors, I hope some take the time for a bit of reflection on what it means to carry the badge of Canadian.

By this time next year it will have been 10 years since the Canada 150 celebration and, so many years on, I still even hesitate to use the word 'celebration' as it was a rather fraught occasion in this country and, at the time, there didn't seem to be much to celebrate.

Politics were becoming ever-more polarized, the country was grappling with its complicated history of colonialism and the treatment experienced by First Nations people, and these two factors, coupled with myriad others, added layers of anger and frustration to what was, previously, a joyous celebration of red and white, of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

But a lot has happened in the ensuing decade.

The polarization of politics has continued apace, we've seen changes in leadership, we've seen a change in reign after 70 years, we've seen both action and inaction on the First Nations file, we've weathered a pandemic which exposed frays in our national fabric we had never seen before, (or, at least, were comfortable turning a blind eye to) which, in many cases, are still un-mended, we've seen Western separatism gather steam, threats to our national sovereignty, and we've become a reluctant player in a trade war in which there are no winners.

Maybe getting outdoors and experiencing the natural wonders of this country is one unifying factor on an ever-shortening list of things that seem to bring us together, along with hockey, more recently soccer, and even coming together to complain about everything we might feel is wrong with the country.

But, I hope many of you take next week's holiday as a chance to get out, explore the celebrations and activities our communities have to offer, reacquaint yourselves with friends and neighbours, and realise our commonalities are still more numerous than our differences, that the benefits of being Canadian far outweigh the cons, and maybe even try to look at this country through the lens of those visiting right now for whom Canada remains a land of promise, acceptance, and forward-thinking.