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## A rare and welcome mine opening

Near the end of August, I was one of about 250 guests who attended the official opening of the expansion of North American Palladium Ltd.'s Lac des Iles palladium mine in northwest Ontario (see *CMJ* August 2001). The guests were bussed from the

which was so well expressed by Thunder Bay mayor Ken Boshcoff. An operation of this size and the spin-off business that it will create is very meaningful for the people of Thunder Bay. This is the only mine from which most of the employees live in the City of Thunder Bay.

As an employee, it would not be a bad place to work. Although it is a "remote" operation with on-site accommodations, the shifts are one week in/one week out for hourly employees, and four days in/three days out for staff. Workers can drive to and from the site along the 85 km of highway and mine road from Thunder Bay, so they are not at the mercy of an airplane and the weather.

Unfortunately, since the summer the operation has been dogged by processing problems. However, once the

new mill gets up to speed, the expanded Lac des Iles operation will be good for this district. Not only will more people be employed, but Lac des Iles' economics are vastly improved. The expansion has tipped the scale in favour of the company, so instead of going deeper into debt, the capital costs will be paid off and the company will begin to earn a good income within a few years. Guaranteed price on contracts has sheltered the company from most of the effect of the dropping metal price.

Lac des Iles will be a mainstay of the northwest Ontario economy for at least the next two decades. It is now also a world-class player in the very small but strategic palladium business. Congratulations to the men and women at Lac des Iles. May you have many safe and prosperous years at the mine.

*M. Jane Werniuk*  
MSc geology



Thunder Bay airport and treated to speeches, lunch, a guided tour of the facilities and some spectacularly fine weather. Like a touring hockey team, we all went home with matching "North American Palladium Ltd." jackets and gym bags.

Keith Minty, the president and CEO of the company lives with his family in Thunder Bay, visiting the Toronto office only when he has to. Hosting the opening party in his checkered flannel shirt and blue jeans Keith looked like one of the Mackenzie brothers from Saturday Night Live, not an Ivory Tower kind of a guy. The fare was down-home, too, with hamburgers and veggie burgers as the main course, and no alcohol at all...a nice touch.

In the 1980s, mine openings were a common occurrence, but not so today. In fact, the last one I attended was the Red Lake re-opening over a year ago (see *CMJ* October 2000).

The local politicians were out in force at the opening. The mine is best known and best appreciated as a boon to the local economy,