

2010 WINTER GAMES

Torch welcome a golden moment

Cheering crowd of 5,000 on hand for Olympic flame's arrival in Penticton as relay passes through Okanagan

By JOHN MOORHOUSE
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The cheers were deafening as Susie Welch proudly marched the Olympic torch toward the stage outside the South Okanagan Events Centre on Monday.

A crowd of about 5,000 was on hand to catch a glimpse of the flame and enjoy the high-energy road show that has accompanied the torch relay as it meanders across Canada en route to Vancouver for next month's Winter Olympics.

Welch, 18, was among dozens of torchbearers who carried the flame from Osoyoos to Kelowna on Monday. However, it's doubtful many received as rousing a welcome from what organizers described as the largest crowd yet to greet the torch relay in B.C.

Premier Gordon Campbell was among those on hand for the ceremony, along with Okanagan-Coquihalla MP Stockwell Day, Penticton MLA Bill Barisoff and Mayor Dan Ashton.

Campbell quickly led the cheers among the enthusiastic crowd, which included hundreds of local students. He said the torch has won a special



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Susie Welch finds herself the centre of attention while carrying the Olympic torch through the crowd Monday at the South Okanagan Events Centre in Penticton. About 5,000 people turned out to cheer on the torch relay, making its way to Vancouver for next month's Winter Olympics.

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place in the minds of people across the country. "It has united our country. It has touched millions of hearts and inspired young people from

coast to coast to coast," he said.

"In just a couple of weeks, that torch will arrive in B.C. Place Stadium, it will be lit and, for the first time in history, Canadian Olympic athletes will win gold right here at home."

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The premier thanked the Penticton area residents for what he described as their own gold-medal performance.

Ashton said the city welcomed the flame with its own torch — the Okanagan sunshine.

"It's just unbelievable to have this opportunity on behalf of all the

citizens of Penticton," he said.

Commenting afterward, spectators described the event as fabulous.

Kurt Flaman of Penticton, whose 10-year-old daughter performed in a dance presentation during the celebration, noted the flame went right past them.

"I got a really good look at it," he said. "It came along right in front of us here, and there were some good smiles from the runner. It was pretty exciting."

Shorter "route community" celebrations were held in Oliver, Okanagan Falls, Summerland and other centres throughout the Valley on Monday as the torch relay made its way to Kelowna. It had arrived in Osoyoos on Sunday night.

No protesters were on hand for the Penticton ceremony, although one sign lamenting the high cost of the Games was spotted on Main Street as runners carried the torch through downtown.