

April 23, Turkish National Sovereignty and Children's Day is Celebrated All Across Canada

LALE ESKİCİOĞLU

Turkish Canadians have been proudly celebrating their homeland's National Sovereignty and Children's Day, within their local communities throughout Canada for over thirty years. But this year the celebrations surpassed everyone's wish in scope, in magnificence, in publicity and in charitable acts.

When the National Grand Assembly first convened in Ankara on April 23, 1920, the foundation for modern, secular, democratic Turkey was laid down. This made it possible for the proclamation of the republic of Turkey three years later, on October 29, 1923.

Turks have always been rightfully proud of their April 23 - National Sovereignty and Children's Bayram because it is the first national holiday in the world that is dedicated to children. In a typical visionary move, the great statesman **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk** dedicated the opening of the first Turkish Parliament to the children, or as he called them, the future. By dedicating this important national day to children, **Atatürk**, not only entrusted the future of this young nation to her children, but also showed the world the importance he placed on the health and education of young people.

This uniquely delightful national holiday is the pride and joy of Turks all around the world. Every year, the children in Turkey celebrate the April 23rd National Sovereignty and Children's Day with guest children from all around the world. Some 50 countries send their children each year to Turkey for these celebrations. Schools participate in week-long ceremonies marked by performances in



Mr. Vellacott.

large stadiums. Children's representatives replace state officials and high ranking bureaucrats in their offices. The President, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers, and provincial governors all turn their offices over to the children for the day. These children, in turn, sign executive orders relating to educational and environmental policies. Children also replace the parliamentarians in the Grand National Assembly and hold a special session to discuss matters concerning children's issues.

This year in Canada, Turkish community celebrated April 23 Child-

ren's Bayram in the magnificence it deserves. While each town was celebrating within their own communities, bigger cities such as Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto organized larger events.

Ottawa:

Turkish community in Ottawa, in collaboration with the **Council of Turkish Canadians (CTC)** and the **Turkish Cultural Association of Ottawa**, held a fundraising gala dinner



Young talent Ayda Khan performed three songs, truly impressing the listeners with her powerful voice. Picture by Sinem Vardaryıldız.

for the **Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)**. The event that attracted 275 guests and raised \$15,000 for **CHEO** was regarded by both the organizers and the guests as a huge success. Many MPs, MPPs and diplomats were present at the dinner. Federal MPs Mr. **Rick Dykstra** and Mr. **Maurice Vellacott** from the Conservative Party, and Ontario MPPs Mr. **Phil McNeely** and Mr. **Yasir Naqvi** from the Liberal Party made brief speeches commending the Turkish Canadians for their efforts to give back to the community and to raise funds for **CHEO**, one of the most essential institutes on Ontario. Mr. **Vellacott** praised the Turkish community of Canada for being highly professional, responsible citizens who promote peace and harmony in Canada. "**Turkish Canadians do not put a strain on Canada's social services, never abuse the system, never make outrageous demands on the politicians, they are law-abiding peace-loving citizens.**" Mr. **Vellacott** said.



CBC's morning news reporter Nil Köksal.

these two high-end Ottawa boutiques, Mrs. **Semiha Cantas** put on a fabulous fashion show which was the highlight of the evening. Young talent **Ayda Khan** performed three songs, truly impressing the listeners with her powerful voice. The surprise of the evening was **Sophie Terrasse's Laughter Yoga** session which made the guests stand up, laugh, clap and chant. The evening was made even more colourful with the presence of **CBC's** morning news reporter **Nil Köksal** who once again secured her special place in the hearts of Turkish Canadians.

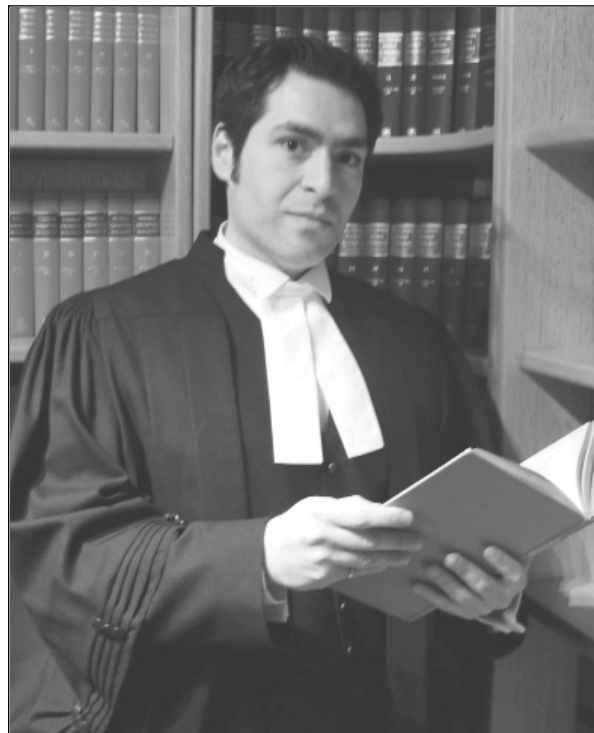
Ottawa's gala dinner for **CHEO** ended with a live auction conducted by Ottawa's very own **Dave Smith**, the witty philanthropist who is famous with his auctioneering skills. Mr. **Smith**, the founder of "**Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre**" was the natural choice for the live auction to increase the evening's contributions to **CHEO**. Turkish artists **Sevim Önen**, **Halide Akyürekli** and **Zeynep Nazan Ergincan** donated their paintings to the auction. Embassy of the Republic of Turkey made generous contributions as well as offering the delicious fruit desserts made by the resident chef of the embassy.

Embassies of many other countries including Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Kenya, Kuwait, Mexico, Pakistan and South Africa lent their support by purchasing tickets and donating gifts.

Toronto:

While Ottawa was planning their April 23rd celebration for that very day, Toronto was organizing a large scale children's festival for the weekend. On 25th of April, Saturday, the efforts of many of Toronto's Turkish organizations came together. **Turkish Community Heritage Centre of Canada**, **Ankara Library**, **Canadian Turkish Film Society**, **Turkish**

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Entertainment for the evening was provided by **Cantas and Ilkiz Boutiques' Fashion Show**. The owner of

