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## Olympic torch fires emotions

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By J.P. Squire

Gayle Voyer's job is to get people excited about the 2010 Olympic torch and torch relay. She hasn't escaped its magic herself.

The torch relay celebration co-ordinator in Kelowna admits that the first time she saw the torch four weeks ago, it was an emotional moment.

"It was kind of overwhelming. It was really neat to see it up close and personal. It's a really sleek, kind of cool shape. It just has that sense of flame. Everybody just seems to love it. They hold it and they go: 'Wow, it's really cool,'" she said Saturday during a daylong session at Orchard Park mall.

Local organizers took photos of mall visitors with the torch and handed out distinctive Olympic red mittens through a draw and trivia contest.

"We've had the torch up at Big White, at sporting events, hockey tournaments and the curling club. We've been doing a Sportfit program through the schools as part of a lead-up to the torch relay. We've been bringing the torch to the schools, letting the school kids touch it and take photos with it," Voyer said.

"It's amazing because the kids' eyes get very big," Voyer said.

"We've had people crying. We've had students go: 'Is it real? Can I touch it? Can I hold it?' That's the biggest reaction."

Voyer admitted she gets emotional at schools, since "you see it through their eyes."

Children also want to know if they can light the torch, but Voyer has to explain that it can't be lit until the relay, and then the flame will be passed by one torchbearer to the next.

"That's kids, right? They want to see it lit. Our torch is a teaser. We tell them you can see it lit, but you have to come down to City Park, where you can actually watch the passing of the torch and the lighting of the community cauldron, and to be part of it," she said.

"That's what people really want to see, and we may never see it again in our lifetime. It really will be magical, and we try to explain that to the kids. That's really what we're trying to do is to get people to come out to that torch relay and show their true Canada spirit.

"Nine more sleeps. That's my big thing: I'm counting down the sleeps."

The celebrations in City Park are 5-8 p.m. Jan. 25, with the torch expected to arrive between 6 and 8 p.m. Finding a parking spot downtown could be a challenge, so there will be free public transit service from 4 to 10 p.m. Everyone is encouraged to wear red to show the Canadian Olympic spirit.

Kelowna is the final stop in the Okanagan for the torch on Jan. 25. The torch starts the day in Osoyoos after its arrival there Jan. 24 and then moves north through the South and Central Okanagan.

On Jan. 26, the torch visits Lake Country and communities in the North Okanagan.

Olympic organizers in Kelowna will repeat Saturday's red mittens booth today when the torch moves to Big White Ski Resort. The Kelowna Art Gallery also has Olympic stickers, tattoos and Canadian flags for children involved in art projects 1-4 p.m. today.