In a historic visit to Atlanta, His Excellency The Right Honourable David Johnston, Canada’s head of state, discussed success in innovation and the strength of Georgia-Canada relations. The World Affairs Council hosted Governor General Johnston at the Georgia Hotel and Conference Center on May 25.

The Consul General of Canada in Atlanta, Louise Blais, said of the special occasion, “What an honor for me to introduce His Excellency David Johnston! No other sitting Governor General of Canada has ever visited the southeast United States.” Speaking on the theme of partnership across borders, Governor General David Johnston said “no two nations in the world [Canada and the U.S.] have benefited so enormously from working with one another.”

A combination of anecdotes and research was used during his keynote address that highlighted: the strength of the innovation partnership between Canada and Georgia; why Canada is such a great innovation partner; and how Canada has encouraged innovation in Canadian companies.

Governor General Johnston explained that “Canada is Georgia’s top export market and its fifth largest source of imports.” Georgia-Canada bilateral trade in goods equals US$10.6 billion. Also 330,600 jobs in Georgia depend upon trade and investment with Canada. Recent examples of how innovative technologies have crossed borders include Gwinnett County’s partnership with Canada’s Ostara Nutrient Recovery Technologies. The collaboration saw the opening of a 12,000 square foot nutrient recovery facility at the county’s largest wastewater treatment plant, the F. Wayne Hill Water Reclamation Center. Also, “Delta Air Lines recently purchased 75 C- Series jets from Montréal-based Bombardier, with options on 50 more.” The C-Series’ geared turbofan is considered the first big innovation in the aeronautics
industry since the 2011 introduction of the Boeing 787, with a modified composite structure for the fuselage of the airplane.

With an illustrious career in academia, Governor General Johnston noted the importance of learning institutions in propelling innovation. He spoke of his tenure as Principal of McGill University in Montréal where, along with regional universities, businesses and the local aerospace industry, he oversaw the development of a professional master’s degree program in engineering. Through the university-community-business collaboration, they were able to address the shortage of Canadian workers in the aerospace sector. “This was a key component in the remarkable success of Quebec’s aerospace industry.” The Canadian aerospace industry is now the third largest in the world.

“I see something similar happening here in Atlanta with Tech Square, which brings all of these players together in the same space. You are blessed to be at the center of so much creativity and innovation.” He expressed his interest in extending collaboration across international borders for the benefit of both Canada and Georgia. “Last year, the Consulate General of Canada partnered with educational groups in Atlanta to celebrate science, technology, engineering and math programs for girls, and to link young women from Georgia and Canada by videoconference to allow them to learn from each other’s experiences.”

As to why Georgians should work with Canada, Governor General Johnston listed five attractive features:

1) Canadians believe deeply in the value of hard work;
2) Canada has deepened its talent pool by making quality education more affordable to all;
3) Canada has been successful in combining accessible education and excellence;
4) Canada promotes diversity, “from diversity comes curiosity and from curiosity comes discovery and innovation,” and
5) Canada has made substantial investments in research and innovation in areas of information and communications technology, energy, life sciences and the environment.

The gregarious Governor General took time to answer audience questions after a discussion with World Affairs Council President Charles Shapiro regarding social and economic inclusion in Canada and North American competitiveness. President and Chief Executive Officer of the Metro Atlanta Chamber, Hala Moddelmog offered the afternoon’s closing remarks.

Governor General Johnston encouraged a spirit of collaboration and innovation, “the relationship between Canada and Georgia will be enhanced as the sharing of knowledge collectively enlightens us.”

The World Affairs Council of Atlanta is affiliated with the Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University. It is an autonomously run non-profit associated with the World Affairs Council of America.

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