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Obama dines on Northport potter's plates

ADAM BRAMBURGER
STAFF WRITER

Commissioned to create a set of dinnerware for Rideau Hall in 2005, Northport potter Bill Reddick knew he was working for a very select audience.

He didn't expect his place settings to be placed before the world's most powerful man, however.

Reddick recently discovered his 45-piece set had been shipped from the Governor General's residence to the Senate Speaker's suite for a luncheon between U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

A photo, showing the politicians with the plates – each with a green rim and red centre with a maple leaf shape formed from a real leaf on it – appeared on the White House web site after Obama's first international visit in Ottawa last week.

Reddick was quite pleased when a friend informed him of the photo.

"When I first saw the photo, I couldn't believe it, I was so excited," he said. "Later, after I had seen the photo, my wife Danielle and our eldest daughter Alice arrived home. From inside the shower, I heard their sustained screaming resonating through the walls."

Reddick's middle daughter is on an exchange in France, where she brought a similar Maple Leaf Service plate to her family as a gift – she and the family were quite proud, while his youngest daughter Sylvie, 11, said "Oh Daddy, I'm so proud of you."

The significance of the plates being used at Obama's visit, compared to the many other state visits they might have been set for, wasn't lost on Reddick.

"That it is Obama and not any other head of state or former president is what gives the photo its power," he said. "We have entered a new era and the world is very hopeful. Historically, it can only be compared to when JFK first assumed the presidency."

Reddick said he was impressed with the way the plates were coordinated with flowers and Inuit soapstone carvings to make a beautiful table setting for the important meeting.

In addition, the event is a reminder to Reddick that hard work and persistence can pay off.

"The effort to create the plates was incredibly challenging at many levels, but underlying was the hope to make them the best they could possibly be," he said. "I made about 300 to get the 45 that ultimately arrived at Rideau Hall. I am proud that my own pursuit of excellence has been rewarded in such a resounding way."

Reddick said, to him, Obama defines excellence and obviously, many in the world share that opinion.

The original pieces were designed in consultation with John Ralston Saul, whose original design was to use the plates used in the Rideau Hall hallways. Instead, the 45 plates were



PROMINENT PLACE SETTING When U.S. President Barack Obama met Prime Minister Stephen Harper last Thursday, Northport potter Bill Reddick's Maple Leaf Service dinner plates were set on the tables for their luncheon. This is a screen capture from a White House photographer's online slideshow. (Adam Bramburger/Gazette staff)