

Author wants to keep Wolf Man's legend alive



By Nate Smelle

Author and historian Suzanne F. Charron added the Bancroft Public Library to the list of venues on her book tour on Saturday, June 21. Charron is currently touring her book *Wolf Man Joe LaFlamme: Tamer Untamed*. Her first book, Charron says she didn't know what she was getting herself into when she started writing it.

"It took me four years of hard work to get the research and the writing of the book in both languages done," said Charron.

"You have to trust life and trust the process. I knew I was called to write it because I had the notion when I was 21 and just learned of Joe. It was sitting in the back of my mind for a long time but I was too young to do that kind of research."

She became enthralled with the iconic Canadian after learning of his legend while playing cards in a house where LaFlamme had once lived with his wolves and moose in Gogama, Ontario. Impressed by his seemingly impossible list of experiences, Charron started to research LaFlamme. The more she looked the more she found. Right away she knew that she would one day help to tell LaFlamme's story.

"I collected articles from Northern Ontario to Louisiana, from California to Newfoundland," she said.

"He was known all across North America. The legend was dying so I am trying to bring it back to life with this book."

LaFlamme's legend is quite remarkable. Born in Quebec in 1889, he is said to have held more than 40 different careers throughout his lifetime. He was a trapper, a zookeeper, a police officer, a politician, a bootlegger and a professional wrestler.

His career of living with four-legged animals began soon after he moved to Gogama in 1920 and started raising Alaskan Huskies. The dogs were used to pull his sleigh full of merchandise between the two lumber mills in the area at the time.

When he lost most of the dogs on his team to distemper in 1923 LaFlamme started to split his time between trapping and bootlegging. Accidentally catching a wolf in one of his leg-hold beaver traps he decided to rebuild his depleted dog team by harnessing and training the wolf. When he made it home in record time he realized he was onto something.

Charron told her audience at the library that as soon as LaFlamme realized how good of a runner the wolf was he started to pad his leg-hold traps in case he accidentally caught any more wolves. Soon he had a team of almost all wolves. That was until 1940 when he was forced to get rid of most of them when his health began to prevent him from safely caring for the animals. Instead of packing

it in with wildlife and leashing up a poodle or a kitten LaFlamme began raising moose.

?In 1947 he moved to Montreal, but he couldn't get away from the animals so he started a zoo,? Charron said.

?He had bears, a wolf, alligators and crocodiles. He even set up his favourite bear and the wolf to have boxing matches which was apparently a big hit with the sportsmen.?

He was reported to have taken his entourage of wildlife, which included, moose, bears, wolves, deer and other creatures on tour with him all over North America. Flying the whole crew across the continent from New York to California to appear on radio and eventually television.

?I am still interested in the subjectbecause there are a lot of holes in his story,? she said.

?We have a good picture of Joe with the book, but there are still things that I don't know about him; questions about him that I might never have answers to. His character will be with me until I die.?