

## MP's campaign gets off to a cold start

By KEVIN COX

Friday, January 17, 2003 – Print Edition, Page A4

STELLARTON, N.S. -- Peter MacKay's bid to re-energize the Progressive Conservative Party got off to a low-key start near his Nova Scotia birthplace yesterday.

Fiddlers dressed in Nova Scotia tartan and a lone piper playing *Scotland the Brave* provided the fanfare as the 37-year-old Mr. MacKay announced his candidacy for the federal Tory leadership in a Stellarton museum.

It could have been the bitter cold or the early hour, but Mr. MacKay had a hard time warming up the crowd of 300 supporters in the riding of Pictou-Antigonish-Guysborough, which he has held since 1997.

His speech had the traditional Conservative themes -- the need to cut payroll taxes, end government waste, rebuild the military and end the Liberals' long reign.

"We can choose between the arrogant, corrupt politics of the Liberal Party or choose a new Conservative course based on sound principles reaching out to all Canadians," he said in a speech delivered in an earnest monotone.

He is running because, he said, "I have a burning desire to seek justice that embodies the type of fairness for all that was kindled right here in my hometown."

The predominantly middle-aged and older crowd applauded his call for more money for the military and "restoring honest and businesslike Canada-U.S. relations." There were a few chants of "Peter, Peter, Peter," as he received a standing ovation at the end of the address.

Mr. MacKay's father, Elmer MacKay, who was MP for the area for 22 years, beamed as he embraced his son after the announcement.

"To say I was proud would be an understatement," Elmer MacKay said, adding that he did not give his son any advice about vying for the party's top job.

But the kickoff lacked the fiery rhetoric and evangelical zeal generated by many East Coast politicians.

Mr. MacKay's supporters promote him as the youthful leader who can attract younger voters and restore the fortunes of the party, which -- with 14 seats, has sunk to a fourth-place tie with the New Democratic Party in the House of Commons. He entered the race after attempts to woo New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord into the contest failed.

He said he would distinguish himself with his energy and innovative policies and by presenting "a fresh face and a fresh generation of political leadership."