



Arts & Entertainment



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Janet Napash sold some of her paintings and other items.



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler bought some tamarack geese.



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Bob Thibodeau sold some of his scroll saw work.

Christmas Aboriginal arts show celebrates 23rd year

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The coordinator of the 23rd Christmas Aboriginal Fine Arts and Crafts Gift Show and Sale plans to hold next year's event in a larger venue at the Canadian Lakehead Exhibition (CLE) in Thunder Bay. This year's Gift Show and Sale was held from Dec. 2-3 at the CLE's Heritage Building.

"We're moving into the Coliseum at the CLE next year," says John Ferris, coordinator at the Aboriginal Artworks Group of Northern Ontario. "It's a larger venue and we'll have more room for artisans. We had about 40 artisans that wanted to come in on the first day but everything was booked already. So this gives everybody an opportunity to show their artwork and sell their artwork."

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, who bought some tamarack geese on the second day of the Gift Show and Sale, looks forward to the new location.

"I was talking to John yesterday and he said they were booking the bigger hall for next

December, which will mean more artisans coming out and selling their incredible crafts,” Fiddler says.

Janet Napash says this year's Gift Show and Sale was busy and steady all day on Dec. 2.

"It's been great," Napash says. "I'm surprised how many people are coming through today, and people are buying gifts for Christmas. I sold a few of my original paintings so I'm very grateful for that. I like to paint traditional activities so I transfer my work from digital media to fabric art or anything that people could use around the house."

Paul Francis says he sold about 25 of his sweetgrass dreamcatchers on the first day of the Gift Show and Sale.

"Today was super, I did really well," Francis says. "I've been selling my sweetgrass dreamcatchers, I use a full braid of sweetgrass and make dreamcatchers out of them. The braids of sweetgrass have been moving pretty good too and I sold a few of my bone chokers."

Jennifer Bissaillon says the Gift Show and Sale was busy for

her as well.

"I love coming to Thunder Bay, I know a lot of Anishinabe people from the northern communities that I ship to all year long," Bissaillon says. "I do embroidery on ladies boots with Anishinabe floral designs. I do matching purses, small, medium, large, I do matching jackets, t-shirts as well, and I customize jackets for First Nations with their corporate logos on them."

Bob Thibodeau says the Gift Show and Sale was pretty good for him, noting that he does scroll saw work with wilderness scenes and Indigenous patterns.

"I started scroll sawing about 35 years ago just doing craft-work," Thibodeau says. "And 22 years ago when John started doing these shows he saw what I made and he was really intrigued in my style of work so I've been participating almost every year since then."

CJ Sagutch says she was selling items made by her family, including her sister, brother, mother and father, at the Gift Show and Sale.

"I have beaded jewellery,

necklaces, earrings and other stuff," Sagutch says. "I'm doing good so far, this is my first time here."

Candace Wesley says she and her husband Peter Wesley, who both work at Wolf Tracks Gallery in Thunder Bay, were selling clothing with his designs and her beadwork and appliqué on pillows.

"The sales have been great, we enjoy coming here every year and we are always prepared for this," Candace says. "I started sewing about two months ago and I sold a lot. This work has been passed down to me through my mother-in-law, who does these beautiful wall hangings."

Calvin Redsky says the Gift Show and Sale was pretty good on Dec. 2.

"A lot of the Elders came by that make the moccasins, the mitts and things like that, and when they came here to buy some beads I threw in some leather for them because they are our residential school survivors, so I kind of gave back a little bit too," Redsky says. "They were really happy, they bought



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Candace and Peter Wesley sold some of their clothing and appliquéd pillows.

my beaver fur and they bought some leather. The beads went for half price. I sold my jingles for half the price, 50 per cent off, so it was a good day."

Audrey Derooy says the Gift Show and Sale was really good for her.

"The last couple of years I've had best time of my life, just

being able to see old friends and family and to see all the vendors here," Derooy says. "It just powers me up, the show really does. People from way up north, as far as the land reaches, the people are here with all their hand-crafts that they've been preparing for months."

Thank You, Airlines!

Your fast, courteous delivery of Wawatay News to our northern communities is appreciated.



Arts & Entertainment

ONWA holds 8th annual poetry night

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Ontario Native Women's Association's 8th Annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night concluded with a round dance after poetry readings by a variety of poets and songs by musicians Sara Kae and Susan Aglukark. ONWA held Poetry Night in observance of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and to launch the United Nation's 16 days of activism against gender-based violence #orangetheworld campaign.

"It was just a great way for community to come together here tonight and celebrate each other with our children, our loved ones, our family," says Cora McGuire-Cyrette, CEO at ONWA. "And after especially talking about such a heavy subject, this is what we do as Indigenous people, we celebrate and we dance and that's what healing looks like."

McGuire-Cyrette says she loved hearing the community poems read by poets from the community during Poetry Night.

"I love when women are reclaiming their voice for the first time and being able to share their poetry and their vulnerability in such a safe space," McGuire-Cyrette says. "It means that we've been successful in creating this safe place where women are able to share their voice."

Lac Seul Elder Catherine Everson stressed during her closing remarks that she enjoyed participating in the round

dance, which was done during one of Aglukark's songs.

"I just enjoyed the round dance," Everson says. "(At) every powwow I go it always makes me feel so proud."

Fort William Chief Michele Solomon also enjoyed participating in the round dance.

"It was really fun, really uplifting and just really good energy," Solomon says.

Solomon adds that Poetry Night provides an opportunity to listen to people who have written songs and poems and stories about their experiences in life.

"Oftentimes those experiences are related to trauma or healing or love," Solomon says. "Jana-Rae (Yerxa, one of the poets) is an amazing storyteller and poet and her poems are always so impactful."

Solomon says the poems by Cher Obediah, an author, filmmaker, artist and speaker from Six Nations and Alderville, were really impactful as well.

"You could really relate to the story that she was telling in her poetry," Solomon says. "I really appreciate and love this event that ONWA hosts every year, it really kicks off the 16 days of activism in a good way and highlights the experiences of violence that Indigenous women have felt and been through."

Obediah says she was grateful to be able to read her poetry at Poetry Night.

"I'm really passion driven, by sharing my messages today based on what I now refer to as my beautiful disaster, I really feel purposeful about turning

pain into purpose and sharing my story and really working hard towards eradicating shame for others to help normalize those kinds of conversation and events like this really aid in that," Obediah says. "I started to write poetry because my partner at the time was not really able to accept or hold space for my emotions so I was left invalidated. He would always take everything as criticism so just by nature I started to write poetry to sort of get those emotions out, to sort of self soothe."

Obediah says her book, Shame to Shine, is her diary in poetry.

"It is my collection of poems that I wrote while I was in the cycle of domestic violence," Obediah says. "There's 20 poems in each chapter, it's a bit of a sad read in the beginning but you get to the end it's really powerful stuff and I know it's really needed out there."

Kae, a Red Rock Indian Band citizen, says she always loves Poetry Night.

"It feels so great especially on nights like this when there is so much women in the room and so much support and love," Kae says. "It feels great to be able to play my music around other people who create poetry and other types of spaces of creation."

Kae says she sang her recently released song Constellations during her performance.

"It's about finding yourself and wanting to be with someone but realizing that it should not work out and it's good that it didn't," Kae says. "It's a song of healing for me and that's why I shared it."



Seasons Greetings

from Mayor, Councillors and the Staff of the Municipality of Sioux Lookout, and best wishes for 2024!



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Commentary

I'm Dreaming Of A Safe And Happy Christmas



**Xavier
Kataquapit**

UNDER THE
NORTHERN SKY

Holiday Season is here and you can see everyone is excited in the annual high of getting ready for Christmas. Different religions and cultures celebrate this period and some don't at all. I grew up in the remote Indigenous community of Attawapiskat on the James Bay coast and through colonization and the invasion by Christian missionaries my people for many years ended up becoming swept up in either the Catholic or Protestant religions depending on who was doing the the invading. We all became part of this religion and managed also to incorporate some of our own original traditions and culture. However, most of our traditions and cultural practices were banned and considered evil by these new religions.

We all enjoyed Christmas for the excitement of this time and the various celebrations that went on during festivities. This included of course Christmas trees, gift giving, midnight mass at the local church and home visits with family and friends. Along with this time and also as part of the colonization process we became introduced to alcohol and that ended up producing an epidemic of alcoholism and tragedy for my people.

Too many of us recall difficult times during Christmas. Yes there was some fun and joy in celebrating this time of the year but once the drinking started many became helpless and all kinds of terrible tragedies occurred. There were all sorts of accidents, violence, crazy situations where people sometimes died, were injured or became incapacitated and ill over time.

The alcohol was impossible to contend with and then in the 1970s and 1980s drug abuse became more prominent. Many of our Indigenous communities became dysfunctional and unsafe as alcohol and drugs took over the lives of people. In particular this became a generational process with the young pick-up up these addictions in their teen years and even as children. Thankfully, today we have made a lot of progress in dealing with the terrible results of colonization and my people are returning to our traditions and culture. We are helping each

other in terms of dealing with alcohol and drug addictions through treatment programs, traditional healing and education on how addictions work.

These days we have to deal with new and deadly addictions involving opioids. Alarmingly, more than 40,000 people have died of opioids in Canada since 2016 when records first started to be kept. The worst part of this is that prescription drugs produced by big pharmaceuticals and their promotional relationship with the medical community had a lot to do with making these dangerous opioids available to many thousands of people. A great documentary series called 'Pain Killer' on Netflix provides an insight on how this epidemic was manufactured.

We are still dealing with this crisis as it now involves Fentanyl, a very powerful and potent opioid and too many people continue to die, are hospitalized and injured by these devastating drugs. This opioid crisis has dealt a great blow to the public's trust in big pharmaceuticals who are often more concerned with making billions of dollars on drugs and less for the care of patients. Medical professionals were also caught up in the vast marketing scenes run by these drug companies and thankfully due to some good reporting by journalists, awareness campaigns by activists and the strength of our health care professionals we are now in a more informed and enlightened state when it comes to opioids.

My hope is that you and your family and friends have a wonderful, safe and happy Holiday season and that you are watching out for those around you. If you think you have a problem with alcohol or drugs then please for the sake of yourself and your family and friends reach out for help. You can contact people in your community who are working in drug and alcohol treatment and prevention as well as local health professionals with addiction knowledge and of course the traditional people that are dedicated to healing our people. This is the time of the year to celebrate this holiday season in any way you desire but make an effort to put smiles on the faces of your children, family and friends and give them a safe and comfortable Christmas. They don't need or deserve the terror of a drug or alcohol fuelled Christmas.

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Musselwhite connects to power grid



submitted photo by Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler joined with First Nation leaders and representatives of Newmont to celebrate the connection of the Musselwhite mine to the Wataynikaneyap Power system. "The vision of our leaders and Elders was to bring clean reliable power to our communities," said Grand Chief Fiddler. These are opportunities to help our communities grow and become more sustainable, he added, but we (First Nations) need to be in the driver's seat. Our communities need to be in control of what happens in our territories.

Details about Winter Weather



**Graham
Saunders**

WEATHER

November is technically the final month of the fall season, but usually introduces winter weather. A transition from one season to another implies variety - certainly this was the case last month. Cooler than average conditions prevailed across Northern Ontario in the first week of November.

The second week featured winter storm conditions in most parts of the region. A combination of snow and freezing rain forced the cancellation of school buses in the Northwest and from Cochrane to North Bay in the Northeast. Sections of Highway 17 and other roads north and east of Lake Superior were closed to travel because of major snow amounts. These winter-like conditions were followed by rain and then unseasonably warm and some record high temperatures during mid-November. Snow on the ground was reduced to zero in the same areas.

Later November brought colder temperatures and moderate snow to the Northeast. In the Northwest at month end Thunder Bay had zero snow on the ground. Minor snow amounts were reported in other areas.

Overall, in the Northwest region, average temperatures were one to two degrees Celsius

warmer than usual. November was another relatively dry month, especially in the Thunder Bay area. Average temperatures in the Northeast were slightly cooler than average and precipitation was near average.

The first half of December has featured a continuation of warmer and dryer conditions in the Northwest and warmer and near normal precipitation amounts in the Northeast. The most notable warmth took place in Thunder Bay in mid-December. On December 14 the maximum temperature was 14°C. This was 22°C above average and for most of the day Thunder Bay was the warmest location in Canada. A number of new daily maximum records were set across the region in mid-December.

El Niño and Winter outlook

I have been mentioning this meteorological process for several months in this "Weather" column. It is one of my favourite topics: how change in the temperature in the tropical Pacific Ocean, 12 thousand kilometres away, can have profound effects on seasonal weather in Ontario. The temperature cycle includes El Niño, the warm phase, and La Niña, the cool phase. This change or oscillation in sea surface temperatures (SSTs), contributes to weather and severe weather around the world. It influences drought conditions, floods, hurricane and typhoon formation, wildfire seasons and even details of winter in Northern Ontario. These changes in SSTs influence large-scale atmospheric circula-

tion patterns, including the placement of jet streams that transport weather systems.

Typically, a moderate or strong El Niño results in milder temperatures and less snowfall than average in Northern Ontario. Generally, the warmer the SSTs are in the tropical Pacific, the warmer the winter in Northern Ontario. Usually, as has happened this year, the Northwest tends to be warmer and dryer than the Northeast.

It is almost certain that El Niño will continue to play a major role in the coming winter. A substantial area in the Pacific Ocean has continued to warm since last month and is presently 2°C degrees warmer than average. This qualifies as a strong El Niño. The usual pattern is to continue to strengthen for the rest of the winter and into early spring. Previous winters associated with very strong El Niños were in 1997-98 and 2015-16. These winters were at least 5°C warmer than average. This is my prediction for the coming winter but we have to wait until March 1, 2024 to find out - "yes" or "no" for this precise forecast!

Of course, a warm winter helps with heating costs but, as talked about last month, there are implications for ice roads and delivery of supplies to isolated northern communities.

When winter begins

The date for the first day of winter our calendars is Thursday, December 21. Some calendars will indicate the time: 10:27 EST or if you live west of

Thunder Bay, 9:27 CST. This is yesterday if you are reading the most recent edition of Wawatay! Of course, if you happen to be in the Southern Hemisphere, or like me have the calendar published by the Australian Weather Bureau, it is not winter at all, it is the beginning of summer with the summer solstice occurring at 2:21 PM Australian Eastern Daylight Time (AEDT).

Another choice is December 1st. Meteorologists and climatologists start winter on the first day of December and end it at midnight on the final day of February. Hmmm, 2024 is a Leap year. We have an extra day of winter on February 29, 2024.

More predictions and a wish

The global temperature in 2023 will be the warmest on record. There will be many headlines in the first weeks of January either raising the alarm or downplaying this record.

A few headlines will say that the global temperature in 2023 was effectively 1.5°C warmer than the pre-industrial global average temperature and an increase which countries had agreed in Paris, 2015 to try and avoid.

Other headlines and stories will explain that this threshold of 1.5°C was close but we still have more time.

May you and your families have a good and safe holiday and the best of times in the coming year.

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Commentary

NAN Congratulates Cindy Woodhouse as Newly Elected Assembly of First Nations National Chief



photo submitted by NAN

“On behalf of the people of Nishnawbe Aski Nation I am pleased to congratulate our friend Cindy Woodhouse on her election as our new National Chief. Cindy is an accomplished leader who will bring new ideas and perspectives to the Assembly of First Nations and will be a strong advocate for our members and First Nations across the country,” said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler.

Protecting Our Elders Should Be A Priority



Xavier
Kataquapit

UNDER THE
NORTHERN SKY

I think most of us feel like we have been through several very weird years with the Covid19 pandemic, climate change events like the recent forest fire summer and of course the terrible wars raging in Ukraine and Gaza. I wish I could be more optimistic in looking towards the future but it is not easy. The best we can do is just put one foot in front of the other and go on with our lives while being as kind and consider-ate of others as possible. Personally, my big focus is with one day at a time, staying in recovery and main-taining my sobriety.

I am looking at the coming winter with some concern as I hear reports of Covid variants in another wave of this pandemic and of course the flu as well as other sickness. My partner has a critical lung disease and was severely hit when we both got Covid last year. He is still recovering very slowly and will never be the same. I have what they refer to as long Covid which has triggered arthritis that flares up from time to time now and it is thought to be connected to having had Covid or possibly the vaccine.

Myself and my partner are isolating as much as possible

while this period of sickness moves through our area once again. We have lost many over the past years to Covid and other diseases and we are fearful that we will lose many more family and friends this winter. However, we have all just been through a few years of figuring out just how serious Covid and the flu can be and so we should know how to stay safe. Part of keeping safe would have to do with vaccines but at this point I am not suggest-ing what individuals should do as there are still lots of concerning data we don't know about yet in regards to all these vaccines. It is best to check with your doctor.

We also know that being careful, having a good diet and getting regular exercise certainly helps in dealing with any disease that is circulating. It is important to realize that when it comes to Covid19 there are some good solid facts to know. According to the World Health Organization a little more than 53,000 Canadians have died from Covid19.

We also know that most of the deaths overwhelmingly have been in older people and those with comorbidities. There have been very few deaths in younger people and most of the pass-ings occurred in the 65 years and over age category. There is also some thought that a certain amount of herd immunity is now in place and even with new variants serious disease is not being experienced with the young, middle aged and healthy individuals.

With all that information we should understand that if we

care about our Elders and older people then we should be careful not to bring them in touch with Covid19.

Even if we are only talking about the seasonal flu we have to realize that it kills mainly the elderly and those with health issues. Depending on the gov-ernment of Canada statistics from past years the flu kills at least 3,500 people a year that we know of and most of these people are elderly. The thing is that we know it is important to keep Elders and all older people safe from dying of the flu by simply making sure they are not put in situations where they can pick up this contagious disease. That means staying away from Elders and older people and those who have health issues if we are sick. It is up to us during the flu season or a Covid wave not to sponsor and run events that draw Elders and older people together with the larger community.

It might seem like a nice or kind idea to create social gather-ings for Elders and older people but really is it worth taking the chance if it puts them in danger? Wouldn't we all want to have a few more good years with these Elders and older people so we can benefit from their wisdom and share their time with grandchildren and family and friends when it is safe to do so? Keeping our Elders safe should be the priority.

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2024 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will meet to conduct **Pre-Budget Consultations**.

The Committee intends to hold public hearings in Oshawa on Tuesday, December 12, 2023, in Markham on Wednesday, December 13, 2023, in Mississauga on Thursday, December 14, 2023, in Oakville on Tuesday, January 9a, 2024, in Hamilton on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, in Welland on Thursday, January 11, 2024, in Chatham on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, in London on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, in Cambridge on Thursday, January 18, 2024, in Brockville on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, in Downtown Ottawa on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, in Cornwall on Thursday, January 25, 2024, in Moosonee on Monday, January 29, 2024, in Sudbury on Tuesday, January 30, 2024, in Thunder Bay on Wednesday, January 31, 2024, and in Dryden on Thursday, February 1, 2024.

Interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation to the Committee are required to register by:

- **12:00 p.m. (EST) on Monday, December 4, 2023** for Oshawa, Markham and Mississauga;
- **12:00 p.m. (EST) on Wednesday, January 3, 2024** for Oakville, Hamilton and Welland;
- **12:00 p.m. (EST) on Monday, January 8, 2024** for Chatham, London and Cambridge;
- **12:00 p.m. (EST) on Monday, January 15, 2024** for Brockville, Downtown Ottawa and Cornwall;
- **12:00 p.m. (EST) on Monday, January 22, 2024** for Moosonee, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Dryden.

Those who do not wish to make an oral presentation but wish to comment on the issue may send a written submission by **7:00 p.m. (EST) on Thursday, February 1, 2024**.

To register or send a written submission, please visit the following link: ola.org/en/apply-committees.

The Committee will stream live from location when available. For the link to the webcast, and to find times and availability, please visit the Legislative Assembly website at ola.org.

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Happy Holidays!

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all residents of Northern Ontario the
best of the holiday season and a
prosperous New Year



A man with a mustache, wearing a white button-down shirt with a large, colorful, abstract patch on the chest and blue jeans, stands in a room. He is gesturing towards a display of items. The display includes a large, bright pink feathered object, a black bag with gold patterns, and other miscellaneous items hanging on a rack. The background shows a blue wall with some decorations and a doorway.

Calvin Redsky had a variety of regalia pieces for sale.

"I started at 11 and I've been at it ever since because I loved it and didn't want to give it up," Friday says. "I started doing anime when I was in Grade 5 because as a kid it was what I was interested in. People like (my work), they've been looking through my portfolio."



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MERRY *Christmas* AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

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Community

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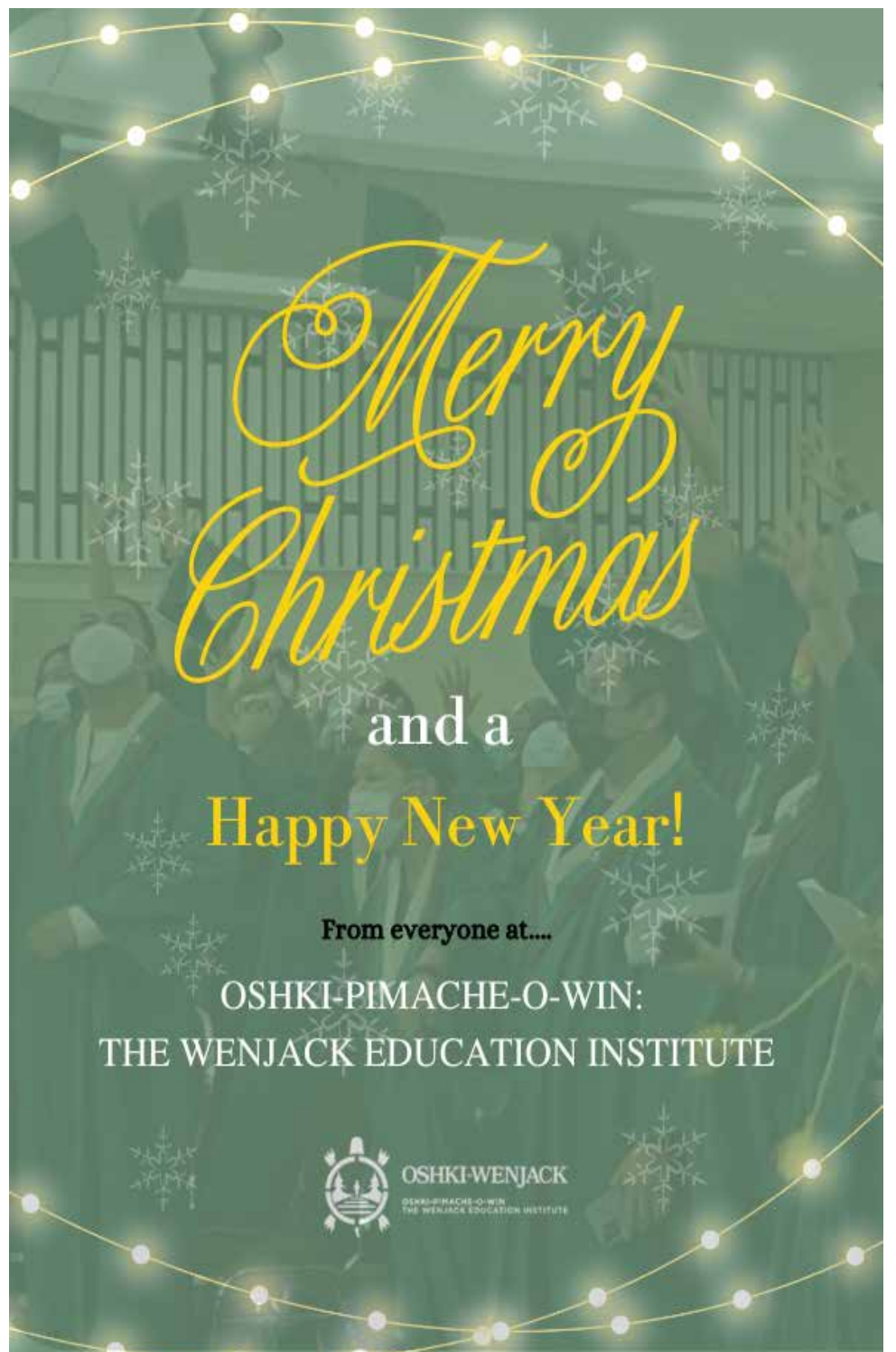
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Community

One City Many Voices aims to decrease racism in Thunder Bay



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

ONWA's Krista Sergerie delivers the Decrease in Racism Especially Targeting the Indigenous Community report at Diversity Thunder Bay's One City, Many Voices A Community Conversation on Diversity gathering at the Oliver Road Community Centre in Thunder Bay.

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Diversity Thunder Bay's One City, Many Voices A Community Conversation on Diversity included a report on Decrease in Racism Especially Targeting the Indigenous Community on Nov. 15 at the Oliver Road Community Centre in Thunder Bay.

“ONWA (Ontario Native Women’s Association) has 50 years of experience navigating the racism that Indigenous women face at all levels of society, individually in their daily lives, collectively as a community and structurally through systemic processes,” says Krista Sergerie, health project lead for anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination at ONWA, during her delivery of the Decrease in Racism Especially Targeting the Indigenous Community

report. "Health care in Canada is a colonial institution and it's evolved in a racist system which historically has placed Indigenous peoples in Indian hospitals where they have often experienced abuse and experimentation. So racism is deeply entrenched in health care settings that often even health care workers are not aware of the ways that it manifests and continues to be perpetrated."

Sergerie says one in three Indigenous adults in Thunder Bay reported that they were treated unfairly by health care professionals because of their Indigenous identity.

“And 66 per cent of Indigenous adults (who) reported experiencing racism from health care professionals said it prevented, stopped or delayed them from returning to those health care services,” Sergerie says. “In all, Indigenous women experienced discrimination differently than Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women due to their intersectional identities, both being a woman and Indigenous. So Indigenous women have experienced both racism and sexism in accessing medical care. The racism Indigenous women face in health care systems directly contribute to poor quality care, of complete lack of care resulting in poor health outcomes or even death.”

Sergerie says ONWA has engaged community members and has heard countless stories about stigmatization and individual and systematic racism that Indigenous women have experienced and witnessed in health care settings.

“This can discourage Indigenous women and their families (from) accessing the care they

need in the future,” Sergerie says. “The death of Joyce Echaquan (a 37-year-old Atikamekw mother of seven who died in a hospital in Quebec in 2020) is a testament to the deadly consequences of sexism, racism and discrimination in health care.”

Sergerie says ONWA maintains that Indigenous women have the right to safety in the

health care system and the right to high-quality health services throughout their life.

“Some of the solutions that we can discuss today is we need more health services in Ontario that are designed and delivered by and for Indigenous women such as ONWA’s Mindimooyenh Health Clinic in Thunder Bay to provide safe spaces for Indigenous women and their families, and we also need sustainable funding so they can continue to offer those safe spaces to women,” Sergerie says. “Health system partners must also increase their capacity to create safe and inclusive health services for Indigenous women, so this can be done by acknowledging the racism and discrimination that Indigenous women uniquely experience and providing training on anti-Indigenous racism and bias with a gendered lens delivered by Indigenous women’s organizations, developing anti-racism strategies and standards and recruiting and supporting Indigenous health professionals and collaborating with Indigenous partners such as ONWA, listening and learning to Indigenous women’s stories and their experiences and establishing accountability mechanisms such as tracking and responding to racist and other discriminatory behaviour.”

Sergerie says they also need allies in making the systemic changes that are required to end racism in health care.

“Indigenous women cannot do this alone, so we encourage all to read ONWA’s report on Reconciliation with Indigenous Women and journey to safe spaces to learn more about Indigenous women’s experiences and recommendations we have,” Sergerie says.

The Reconciliation with Indigenous Women report is posted online at: www.onwa.ca/reports.

The One City, Many Voices
A Community Conversation on
Diversity also featured reports
on Overview of the Community
Safety and Well-Being Plan by
Lee-Ann Chevrette and Anti-
Racism and Inclusion Accord by
Norm Gale.

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Community

Survivors Secretariat gathering focused on healing



Tanya Talaga, founder and leader of Makwa Creative Inc., delivers her Personal Narrative presentation on the second day of the Survivors' Secretariat Knowledge is Sacred, Truth is Healing gathering.

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Survivors' Secretariat held its Knowledge is Sacred, Truth is Healing gathering from Nov. 28-30 at the the Best Western Plus NorWester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

"The key point is healing, healing doesn't have to be therapeutic interventions all the time — it has a place, but for survivors the healing is truth telling and taking action to get truth for the children who never came home, the disappeared and those who are now in unmarked burials," says Laura Arndt, secretariat lead at the Survivors' Secretariat, who delivered a Knowledge is Sacred, Truth is Healing presentation during the gathering. "The responses (from the participants) were unbelievably generous and kind, sharing their own healing path, the difficulty that is involved in healing and that healing takes place over time. The other part that is important is that the survivors talk a lot about: 'That's in the past,' and trying to leave it in the past but get the healing that's needed so they can do what they need to do."

Lac Seul Elder Fred Thomas says some of the keys from the gathering were Ryan Shackleton's comments on data and how to do research on missing children during his Truth and Ownership presentation and Tanya Talaga's comments on her family's history during her Personal Narrative presentation.

"Those are the two key areas and also our people disclosing their experience, storytelling about their experience that was really a mover for them to heal," Thomas says.

Shackleton, CEO at No History, says he was honoured to hear what participants had to say about his presentation.

"It's been a real struggle to get this story documented through the archival record," Shackleton says. "As I mentioned in the presentation, the archival record's only a piece of the whole thing, the real thing that we need to do is document these stories and share them widely in Canada. It's a way of combatting denialism, which is growing currently, and I think that more Canadians need to hear these stories."

Shackleton also highlighted comments by former Attawapiskat chief Theresa Spence on his presentation.

"Everyone's comments were

meaningful but when she tells those personal stories about not having love in the institutions — I have a young family and it makes me think of my family so it hits pretty hard," Shackleton says.

Roberta Hill, a member of the board of directors at the Survivors' Secretariat, says the loss of learning how to express love to family was one of the cruellest things that was inflicted upon the children who were sent to residential school.

"They really didn't care about our emotional well-being," Hill says. "We had parents that loved us, that nurtured us and that's what was missing at the Mush Hole (Mohawk Institute residential school). They really didn't care about that, you weren't there to be loved and nurtured. It was just a cruel place to have children."

Hill says her children told her when they were older that she didn't treat them the way she should have.

"I can only say that as a parent, those were the skills that we learned, to be cold, to be distant, to not be loving, so that's where it is," Hill says.

Talaga, founder and leader of Makwa Creative Inc. and author of Seven Fallen Feathers, says her mother was raised on Fort William's traditional territory where Treaty 9 meets Treaty #3 during her presentation.

"My mother is a status Indian, I am a status Indian and that's important to acknowledge, it's important to say that," Talaga says. "I learned that from Elder Claudette Commanda, she started to say that at her speeches every time she gives the keynote and I think we need to say that because we are the people that are the descendants of what has happened in this country, the truth of what has happened in this country, and we need to acknowledge that."

Talaga says her mother was raised by two residential school survivors, but she did not go to residential school.

"She went to school on a train, this train that was in Nakina, was in Sioux Lookout and was in Graham," Talaga says. "There were 14 stops on this train and only one of the 14 stops are part of the (Federal Indian) Day School Class Action, my mother's stop was not. It is important that we acknowledge all of those people that went to the schools, those schools that were recognized by the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and those that were not recognized by the

TRC, day schools and residential schools."

Talaga also highlighted the importance of her search for her great grandmother Annie Car-



Ryan Shackleton, CEO at No History, delivers his Truth and Ownership presentation on the first day of the Survivors' Secretariat Knowledge is Sacred, Truth is Healing gathering

penter.

"When you look for one person, you start finding others," Talaga says. "It's like so many of our family members, they're

all just waiting there, waiting to have their stories told. I hope you tell your stories in order to stop this narrative of Canada that is being taught in

our schools, where we don't talk about residential schools or we don't talk about the Indian Act."

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Community

Dilico Christmas Wish 2023

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care's 2023 Dilico Christmas Wish Campaign was a success with more than 800 Christmas Wish bags filled for children, youth and babies, exceeding this year's campaign goal. Since the campaign's launch in 2008, more than 9,000 Christmas Wish bags have been filled with essential items, learning tools, warm clothing, books and toys.

“Thunder Bay has once again demonstrated unparalleled compassion, surpassing all expectations and filling over 800 Christmas Wish bags this year,” says Sarah Pelletier, assistant director of child welfare at Dilico. “This achievement is a testament to the unwavering support we receive year after year from incredible individuals, community members and various businesses and organizations in our community. Their generosity knows no bounds and (their) overflowing spirit of giving warms our hearts. Being able to not only reach our goal, but exceed it, is truly incredible.”

Meredith Francis, integrated services team case manager at Dilco and a participant in all 15 Christmas Wish campaigns, says she looks forward to the Christmas Wish campaign year after year.

"It's one of the highlights of what we do, to be able to deliver these bags to children and families is such an incredible experience," Francis says. "These Wish bags are responsible for hundreds of smiles and

so much joy during the holiday season. Bags are delivered to children that would not receive gifts otherwise."

Francis says the evolution of the Christmas Wish campaign over the past 15 years has been nothing short of extraordinary.

“From bins to boxes, and now the iconic red Wish bags, our community’s response has grown, with the increasing needs we strive to fulfill,” Francis says. “I love seeing the Wish bags bringing so much happiness to so many families.”

This year's Christmas Wish campaign was supported by Sovereign Dental, Cheadle's Lawyers, Pradal Construction, Unifor, OPG, Creekside Nursery and Garden Centre and Milne Aggregates.

"We're so appreciative of all of these amazing contributions that you could see bought all kinds of extra items," says Blythe Haynen, assistant director of communications at Dilico. "We spend every last one of those dollars that comes in to make sure that kids get a wish this Christmas. We also want to say meegwetch to Goods and Co. for hosting our Christmas Wish tree this year and to Tbaytel for the amazing surprise of filling 50 Wish bags and also to Westland Insurance, LCPS Chartered Professional Accountants and iOptic for joining our 15-year challenge, each filling 15 bags."

Dilico launched this year's Christmas Wish campaign on Nov. 16 with the unveiling of the Dilico Christmas Wish Tree at Goods and Co.

“What sets our campaign



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Dilico Anishinabek Family Care kicked off their 2023 Dilico Christmas Wish Campaign

apart is the customization," Haynen says. "Each bag is customized for a child featuring a special tag detailing their age, interests and Christmas wishes."

The Christmas Wish bags are delivered to children across the Thunder Bay district, including 13 First Nations.

“These expressions of kindness filled with essential items such as warm clothing, books, educational supplies, toys embody the true spirit of giving,” Pelletier says. “As our Dilico elves prepare to deliver these gifts throughout the region, we celebrate not just the numbers but the countless moments of joy, hope and smiles we share throughout this Christmas season with children and families. Here’s to 15 years of making wishes come true and to the continued legacy of compassion and care in our community.”

Pelletier says the children and youth have been extremely happy to receive the Christmas Wish bags over the years.

"They're smiling, they're very thankful," Pelletier says. "Lots of the gifts are really awesome and the children are just really happy when they get them."

The poster features a green background with a blurred image of evergreen branches. At the top left is the Lakehead University logo, which includes a red shield with a white book icon and a yellow sun rising over three blue wavy lines representing water. To the right of the logo, the words "Lakehead UNIVERSITY" are written in a serif font, followed by a vertical line and the words "Indigenous Initiatives" in a sans-serif font. The central text "Happy Holidays" is written in a large, elegant, white cursive script. Below this, the Ojibwe phrase "ᑲᐃ• ᓂᑦ ᐱᑦᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ" is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath the phrase, the text "from the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Lakehead University" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the poster is a horizontal strip containing five small photographs: a person in winter gear standing next to a large, light-colored animal skin hanging on a wall; two women smiling, one holding a wooden bowl; a group of people gathered around a table, working on a craft project; and two women standing side-by-side, wearing traditional patterned skirts and cardigans. At the very bottom, the website "lakeheadu.ca" is on the left and the slogan "EXCEPTIONAL. UNCONVENTIONAL." is on the right, both in a bold, sans-serif font.

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Four Rivers celebrates mapping day

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Matawa First Nations' Four Rivers Environmental Services Group celebrated Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapping Day 2023 with the sharing of a Water is Life video on Youtube. The Water Is Life - Empowering Indigenous Knowledge Through GIS video, developed in collaboration with Esri Canada, Global Water Futures and Wilfrid Laurier University, is posted online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6Oq1QU87iM&t=294s.

“We are pleased to share this collaborative video and are looking forward to celebrating GIS Day with our member First Nations,” says Sarah Cockerton, managing director at Four Rivers. “Four Rivers has been working to support our member First Nations in environmental stewardship, including through valuable tools and technology like GIS for over 12 years.”

Cockerton says the video captured the essence of Matawa's Water and Environment Gathering, which was held on June 13-15 at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay. It weaves Indigenous and Western science into innovative solutions for natural resource management and empowers Indigenous wisdom with GIS technology telling a story of sustainability and knowledge.

“The gathering itself was kind of the final piece of the Matawa Water Futures project,” Cockerton says. “A big piece of that is about celebrating our communities connection to water, wanting and supporting our communities to really lead environmental conversations, kind of lead environmental and science research and (having) community values, community processes and community priorities being at the forefront of all of that.”

Cockerton says they also participated in GIS Day at Lakehead University, where they highlighted the use of a Wingtra drone for collecting information that the communities need to make informed decisions.

"We have a fleet of a number of different drones that we're using to make some huge strides for our communities in mapping, it's really a game changer," Cockerton says. "Yesterday at GIS Day there was a lot of students who were pretty excited about seeing the drone there and they were pretty excited about that at the (Water and Environment Gathering) in June as well."

Cockerton says the Wingtra drone is a fixed-wing drone that employs a vertical takeoff and landing.

"It's awesome — because it's fixed-wing, it's a lot faster, it gets the mapping job done much quicker," Cockerton says. "One of the big quad copters we have can maybe do a little

A person wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, a high-visibility yellow safety vest, and a camouflage baseball cap is standing in a grassy field. They are holding a small, black drone in their hands. Several orange traffic cones are scattered across the field. In the background, there is a body of water, a blue tent, and a hillside with trees.

submitted photo

Matawa First Nations' Four Rivers Environmental Services Group demonstrated the use of a Wingtra drone for collecting information for mapping during Matawa's Water and Environment Gathering, at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay.



bit more adverse weather, but anytime we can run the fixed-wing that's our preferred drone for mapping."

Cockerton adds that Four Rivers is the first Indigenous distributor of the Wingtra drone in the world.

"We loved it so much that we

kind of developed a partnership with the manufacturer and that way we can control our own supply line on parts and things we need related to it," Cockerton says.

Four Rivers uses GIS to empower the Matawa communities by facilitating community-

led research and decision-making; supporting research and field work for Environmental Guardians; fostering collaboration among Indigenous groups; and advancing environmental stewardship initiatives.

"We know that our communities are already experiencing a lot of change, a big thing driving that change as we know is climate change, but we anticipate a lot more change in the future," Cockerton says, noting there is always ongoing talk of the development of the Ring of Fire and other mining and resource projects across northern Ontario. "Having the ability

to collect environmental information so that you can quantifiably know and have documented how things are right now and then the ability to continue to collect that so you can monitor change over time becomes very important. To adapt to change, to be able to plan for the future, there needs to be a good understanding of what we've got and how it's changing so that communities can really lead those conversations and make the decisions that they need to be able to make related to their homelands."

A Christmas message from our Executive Director Thelma Morris



Our children are sacred gifts

One of our nine values at Tikinagan is spirituality. From our Indigenous culture and traditions, this value was taught and passed down by our Elders who believed that all people are spiritual beings and that our children are sacred gifts from the Creator. Tikinagan respects all spiritual beliefs, and we believe everyone has the right to choose their own spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices.

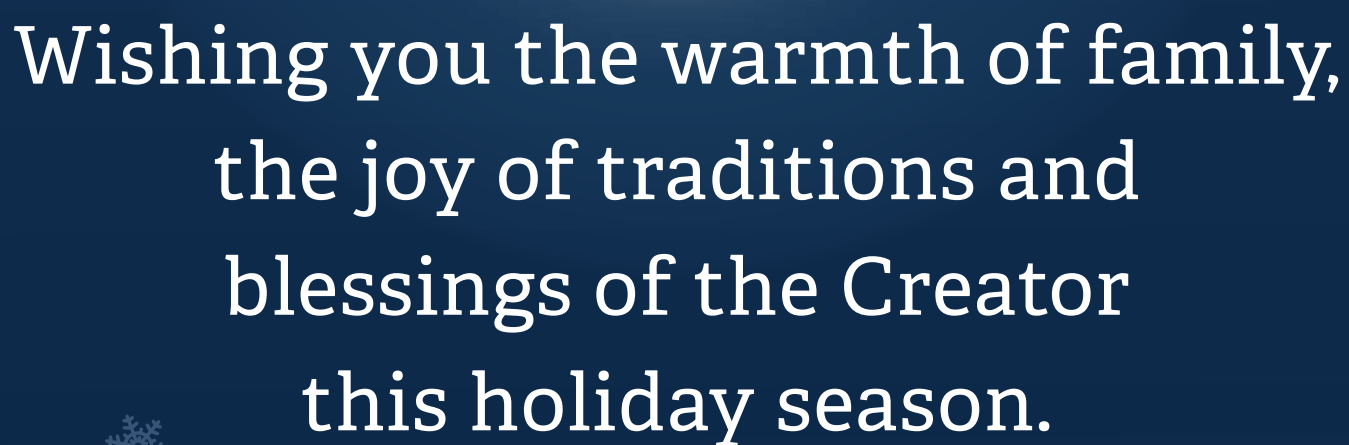
This Christmas season, I reflect on my own spiritual traditions, the birth of Jesus Christ. I think about Mary, a young woman who was not only given the task to birth this holy baby, but to become a new mother. Standing by her side was her partner Joseph, who would become a step-father and role model to the boy. These two humble individuals raised a child who would change the world.

But they were never alone in their parenting journey. Even before he was born, others were there to help. The Inn Keeper gave them a place to stay, and the Three Wise Men and Shepherds were called to Bethlehem to witness and rejoice in the birth of Christ. As he travelled with his family and lived in his community, there were people who knew Jesus as a boy.

This biblical story is an example of our service model Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, which means “everyone working together.” Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin is rooted in our traditional customs of caring for children. In our culture, children are sacred gifts from the Creator, not only to the family but also to the larger community of extended family members. Everyone shares in the responsibility of protecting and caring for our children.

As I think about our children and youth in our all communities across Northwestern Ontario this holiday season, I am thankful for everyone who has a part in their lives. I'm thankful for all the parents, kookums and moshooms, aunties and uncles, cousins and siblings, our foster families, our staff, and Elders. On behalf of our Board, miigwetch for being present in the life of a young person, the sacred gift from the Creator. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and yours.

Thelma



**Deputy Grand Chief
Victor Linklater**

Merry Christmas

*from the Executive Council and Staff
of Nishnawbe Aski Nation.*



Sports

Constance Lake brothers making use of Underground Gym

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

A group of youth, including two brothers from Constance Lake, are enjoying boxing at the Underground Gym and Youth Centre at its new location on Victoria Ave. in Thunder Bay.

"I've been coming here since I was 12," says Christian Sutherland, a Constance Lake youth. "When I just turned 16 I came here, I wanted to compete competitively in the amateur division."

Sutherland says he will be travelling to Duluth, Minnesota with a group of youth from the Underground Gym for a boxing competition in early December.

"I have my first fight coming up next Friday (Dec. 1)," Sutherland says. "I've been working out constantly, like five times a week, 14 hours together, in the gym and just mentally preparing. I've been doing body workouts, cardio workouts and sparring."

Zander Sutherland, Constance Lake youth, says he began going to the Underground Gym after school when he was about 14-years-old at the previous Simpson St. site.

"It's pretty good now, there's lots of stuff going on every day," Zander says. "I'm supposed to be in a fight in Duluth on Friday but I couldn't find a match. I had to cut down weight to 200 pounds, I've already lost 21 pounds. I'm just

maintaining my calories, 1,700 per day, and training.”

Zander says some of the advantages of training at the Underground Gym include improvements in confidence and cardiovascular fitness.

"You'll build confidence and you'll get your cardio up," Zander says. "A lot of people come here nowadays, it's pretty good seeing a lot of people sparring."

Zander says Peter Panetta, founder and operator of the Underground Gym and Youth Centre, is a pretty good coach.

"He taught me the most that I need to know," Zander says.

"I'm preparing and ready for the amateur fight. My future goal is probably to hit the nationals."

Nicholas Rose Stolz, a Thunder Bay youth, says he has been going to the Underground Gym for more than a decade since he was eight-years-old.

"I went to the gym because I was originally bullied just to learn how to defend myself," Stolz says. "I came back and just did it as fun, and then I got really into it with my two friends."

Stolz says he's also looking forward to the boxing competition in Duluth.

"I've been training very hard, eating right," Stolz says. "At the start of the camp I was about 150, I didn't have to lose too much, probably about five-10 pounds. I'm very excited, this is my second match. The first time

I went to Orillia for the Winter Games, that one went very well. I didn't win but I learned a lot, I got a silver medal."

Panetta says the Victoria Ave. site is a fantastic location, adding that there is no cost for the youth.

"The only drawback about this one is we have no yard whatsoever," Panetta says. "This is not the safest area in town so we try to keep them inside doing something. There's a music (room), there's even a hairdressing salon."

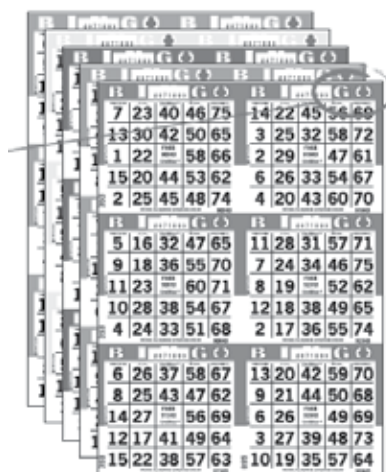
Panetta says some of the youth who used to train at the Underground Gym before the COVID-19 pandemic came back with some of their friends.

"They're extremely talented and it didn't take them long to get to the competitive level," Panetta says. "There's a club show going on in Duluth on Dec. 1 and we're heading out there, for most of them, their first match. They're very excited and I have every intention of taking them to a big tournament in Brampton at the beginning of February."

Panetta says they also have art classes, beading and a guitar instructor who has been helping the youth with their music.

"The opportunities are there, if you want it it's here," Panetta says. "I try to give them as much of a variety as I can and some of them excel at certain things and others excel at other things."

BINGO BLOWER



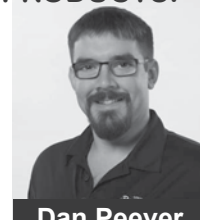
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Education



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

ABOVE: Eabametoong's Riley Yesno speaks about male and female identities being depicted as two points on a circle during her presentation.
ABOVE RIGHT: Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre's Logan McIvor and Jayal Chung delivered a presentation on Creating Safer Spaces: an Introduction to 2SLGBTQIAP+ Education.



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NAN education
partnership program
holds 2SLGBTQQIAP +
Allies gathering

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Eabametoong's Riley Yesno delivered a keynote presentation on Indigenous Queerness at the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Education Partnerships Program's Educators as 2SLGBTQIAP+ Allies gathering, held Dec. 6-7 at the Courthouse Hotel in Thunder Bay.

"We've always had a very expansive sense of what gender could be," Yesno says. "It's a very recent phenomena actually that we see pushback against with people saying there is only male, there is only female. But that's not representative of how we understood gender for most of the time."

Yesno says Nanabozho is often referred to as a shape-shifter in stories, including being referred to sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman or sometimes as an animal.

“So when I hear this and I think about this, I think about all the ways that gender for Nanabozho is not fixed,” Yesno says. “Part of that is what makes Nanabozho so sacred and so beyond us, so I think when we start paying attention to the way we tell stories, and some of our most revered figures in storytelling, we’ll start to see queerness come out.”

Yesno adds that University of Saskatchewan researcher Alex Wilson was taught that gender is like a circle.

"And that male and female are just two points on a circle," Yesno says, noting that the two points are not necessarily across from each other. "But they can

move and they're all valid and necessary but they are just two points on this whole picture. So the idea being that again this is not a binary world we're working in."

Yesno says the term two-spirit is attributed to Elder Myra Laramie, who proposed it in 1990 during the Third Annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference in Winnipeg.

“...Male and female are just two points on a circle...”

– Riley Yesno

“She mentioned that she’d had this dream where she had not one but was two-spirit, that represented to her femininity and masculinity and that she said they co-existed within her,” Yesno says. “We talk about the very practical need for it — it was a way to represent a specific experience that so many Indigenous people were having.”

The first day of the gathering also featured presentations on Creating Safer Spaces: an Introduction to 2SLGBTQ-IAP+ Education by Logan McIvor and Jayal Chung, from the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, and Honouring Journeys: A Mental Health Approach to Supporting 2SLGBTQQIA+ Students in Education by Jennifer White, from Dorset Pier Mental

Health.

“What a lot of people are starting to be more aware of and being educated about is putting 2S at the front honours the fact that two-spirited people and Indigenous people were here first on Turtle Island,” McIvor says. “So it is important to put that at the beginning when you’re saying the acronym and acknowledging that our Indigenous people were here first.”

Chung says the Q stands for Queer and Questioning and the I stands for Intersex.

“Questioning kind of describes some of that process of maybe a young person is just kind of coming to awareness about their sexuality, how they identify in terms of their gender,” Chung says. “Intersex is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that didn’t seem to fit the typical definition of female or male, so may have mixed or mosaic kind of reproductive anatomy.”

The second day of the gathering featured a scheduled Student Panel led by emcee Sandi Boucher, a presentation on Navigating 2SLGBTQI+ Life and Creating Positive Safe Spaces by Ash Moreau and a Sharing Circle and Grounding led by Boucher.

The gathering also featured opening and closing prayers by Elder Sam Achneepineskum and opening remarks by Sherry Britton, director of education at NAN.

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For further information, visit <https://kmlaw.ca/cases/victims-ralph-rowe/>, call 1-888-353-6661, or email ralphroweclclassaction@kmlaw.ca.

You must submit your claim for compensation before February 27, 2025. If you do not submit your claim for compensation before February 27, 2025, you will lose your right to compensation.



Education

Teach for Canada launches northern educator webinar

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage held A Day in the Life of a Northern Educator webinar on Dec. 13 as part of its recruitment process for teachers who are interested in teaching in northern First Nations. Applicants must be certified to teach in a Canadian province or territory or graduating from a Canadian teacher education program by August 2024, and they must have legal working status in Canada for the two-year commitment.

“There is a major teacher shortage happening now across

Canada where there just simply are not enough certified teachers to fill the available positions, which is significantly impacting all school boards across the country,” says Robert Lanni, senior teacher recruitment manager at Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage. “On Nov. 2, the Ontario Principals’ Council highlighted the teacher shortage crisis. Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage stands in solidarity, emphasizing the alarming impact on First Nations schools. When it comes to First Nations schools and especially in remote communities like the ones we do serve, these issues exist and the crisis is even more severe.”

Lanni says Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage has released a full statement on the teacher shortage crisis on its Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/teachforcanada.

“First Nation schools we serve experience daily shortages, class cancellations, unqualified staff, 98 recorded mid-year vacancies affecting thousands of students, only half of last year’s vacancies were filled and 21 per cent of those were unfilled teaching positions,” Lanni says. “We outline in our statement a series of steps that we urge the federal and provincial governments to implement in order to combat this crisis. From a

recruitment perspective, this includes things such as fast tracking certification for new graduated and foreign-trained teachers as well, returning to one-year teacher college degrees and increasing the number of teachers being granted certification, creating secondment opportunities for public school teachers to go north.”

Lanni says Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage is a charity that was founded in 2015 to support teacher recruitment and retention in northern remote First Nations.

“One of the First Nations we served had not had in-person school for a number of years,”

Lanni says. "They simply did not have the teachers to operate, but we are happy to say that the last school year they were able to reopen the school as a result of working with Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage to have teachers to staff the positions."

Malcolm Payne, a Teach For Canada-Gakinaamaage alumni from the 2016 cohort who taught Grade 7/8 for two years in Ojibways of Onigaming, says the school had a big focus on traditional life and school and community working together.

"In the area we lived in, there was a lot of hunting tourism and I made friends with a

hunting guide in the community,” Payne says, noting that the guide donated two deer to the school. “So we pulled them in, strung them up and then we got the whole class involved. We skinned it, we kept the (hide) to make drums, we had someone in who knew how to do that (hide) treating process, and we butchered the meat and (donated) it around to community members.”

Payne says he also used beadwork and rabbit snaring to teach math skills in his class and volunteered with his students to repair the community's skating rink and flood the skating surface.

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Education

Police Chief Fleury gives lecture on mental health

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Thunder Bay Police Chief Darcy Fleury spoke about mental health in policing to kick off Confederation College's Lecture Series - Talking about the Tough Stuff on Dec. 5 in the Dibaajimogamig (Lecture Hall). The lecture series was presented by the Confederation College Alumni and Rotary Clubs of Thunder Bay.

“In the last 15 or 20 years police departments have really put an emphasis on mental health of their employees,” says Fleury, a Métis citizen from Manitoba who previously served with the RCMP for 36 years, most recently as RCMP district commander - chief superintendent for the Central Alberta District based in Edmonton. “Prior to that it never happened, it just wasn’t really something we ever spoke about, it wasn’t something that we ever really paid attention to.”

Fleury says that all changed about 15-20 years ago with the implementation of programs by police departments.

"We do pay attention quite closely to what our people are going through and we find ways to help them deal with the challenges that they have and if they are suffering through some form of mental health injury, to find the supports that they need to help them get better," Fleury says. "We never had that for many years, but one of the pro-

grams we have here in Thunder Bay, and this is likewise to many different departments across the country, is a peer-to-peer program.”

Fleury says the peer-to-peer program provides the employees with the supports they need, including nurses, physicians and psychiatrists.

"It's getting to the point that we want to expand it with other agencies because other agencies, they have some of the same sort of concerns that we do," Fleury says. "So we want to expand that a little bit so there's a wider range of people who can go to it if they want to look for some supports there."

Fleury says the Road to Mental Illness is one of the programs he has been interested in over the past few years.

"This program is probably one of the best days I've spent in all my time in the service," Fleury says, noting that participants learned the signals and signs of people who are going through some form of a mental struggle. "And to help them right off the bat so we can get them to the places they need. So I want to get that program and I want to kind of think about developing something like that here in our community with our officers. Over the last few years the PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) has skyrocketed, that's common across any police agency throughout North America."

Fleury says the number of

employees with PTSD has gone up at the Thunder Bay Police Service.

"The main goal is to get them back, make sure they are safe and that they come back to work," Fleury says. "When we talk about the cases in PTSD, it's a wide variety of the severity of the injury that that person has."

Sharon Hollinsworth, president at the Lakehead Rotary

Club, says the first lecture went very well.

"The series is called Talking about the Tough Stuff, and that's what we did tonight," Helmsworth says. "I think the citizens of Thunder Bay should feel very encouraged with the direction he is going in, looking after his staff, talking about mental health and just working with the other services in our

city to provide better support for not only the police officers but the citizens of Thunder Bay."

Kathleen Lynch, president at Confederation College, says it was important to talk about the tough stuff during the lecture.

“These kind of conversations are important now more than ever as people struggle with mental health and community

connections post-pandemic,” Lynch says. “Our college is trying to become a place that values community and connection. We seek to create an environment where everyone can thrive, and that often means addressing difficult topics like mental health, an issue that affects or will affect all of us directly or indirectly in our lives.”



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Thunder Bay Police Chief Darcy Fleury speaks with some participants after delivering the first lecture of Confederation College's Lecture Series - Talking about the Tough Stuff on Dec. 5 in the Dibaajimogamig (Lecture Hall).



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