

Algonquins elect representatives

By Nate Smelle

After a long campaign, members from the Algonquin Nation recently elected nine Algonquin Negotiation Representatives (ANRs) to represent their communities' interests during treaty negotiations between the Algonquins of Ontario and the governments of Canada and Ontario.

The Algonquin communities that held elections on July 7 included Antoine, Bonnechere, Greater Golden Lake, Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini (Bancroft), Mattawa/North Bay, Ottawa, Shabot Obaadjiwan, Snimikobi and Whitney and Area. Along with the Algonquins of the Pikwàkanagàn First Nation these nine communities will continue working toward the settlement of their ongoing treaty negotiations. The candidates elected as ANRs by their communities included: Stephen Hunter (Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini/Bancroft), Connie Mielke (Greater Golden Lake), Doreen Davis (Shabot Obaadjiwan) and Robert Craftchick (Whitney and Area). The five other candidates acclaimed as ANRs by their communities were: Davie Joannis (Antoine), Richard Zohr (Bonnechere), Clifford Bastien Jr. (Mattawa/North Bay), Lynn Clouthier (Snimikobi) and Randy Malcolm (Ottawa). As the newly elected ANR for Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini (Bancroft), Stephen Hunter said he is looking forward to representing the community he and his family have called home for countless generations. Recognizing the weight of the responsibilities he has taken on, he is eager to get started.

"I am really honoured to have the opportunity to hopefully do some really great things ? not just for the Algonquin community but all the community at large," said Hunter.

"We have momentum, and the people are willing to get involved. People are wanting to know the history and to share in a lot of our traditions and our values. We are so close to the land, and we really do share this intense sense of responsibility with the land, the water, the animals and all of that. I think it's nice to see not only our own people but all people starting to re-appreciate these things and the importance of these connections ? be it bees, bats, Blanding's turtles or whatever. It's a very exciting time."

During the first two weeks of August, Hunter will be continuing his campaign to educate people about Algonquin culture by helping to build a birch bark canoe at the museum in downtown Bancroft. As a child, he said he remembers there being many people in the Algonquin community who knew how to build a birch bark canoe. Now, unfortunately he said he is the only person locally who knows how to craft such a vessel. Hunter sees this example of dwindling Indigenous knowledge as a sign that more needs to be done to rejuvenate and preserve Algonquin cultural awareness. Having played such an instrumental role in founding this country, he considers the birch bark canoe as an important part of history, that carries with it even more important lessons.

"This country was founded in that canoe. It speaks a lot to our sense of community, our sense of sharing and compassion and all these things that are true and inherent in Algonquin values. I realize these values reach across all peoples in many ways, but the canoe really does speak to that. It's an important part of our history. We need to be stewards of our culture, language, tradition and craftsmanship because they have value and they tell a story that's much bigger than just building a canoe. It's awesome to see one being built. It speaks to the perfection of how nature is, and the marriage that different elements can have."

For many years, Hunter has been actively involved in educating the community about Algonquin culture and values. Recently he has been acting as a consultant on behalf of the Algonquin Nation with the Bancroft and Area Stewardship Council's (BASC) Eagles Nest Park Trails initiative. He has been working with BASC and other community partners to ensure that the new trail system respects the land and accurately reflects Algonquin history and culture in the interpretive signage which is to be installed to help guide visitors through the park. On Saturday, July 22, Hunter along with Christine Luckasavitch from the Algonquins of Whitney and Area will be leading a Nature Discovery Tour that focuses on the cultural and spiritual significance of the park ecosystem. Registration for the tour takes place this Saturday at 9 a.m. in the Bancroft and District Chamber of Commerce across from Tim Hortons on Hwy 62 North. From there the group will head up to the Eagles Nest Park at 9:30 a.m. to begin the tour. Tickets cost \$10 for people 17 years old and older, and \$6 for seniors and children under the age of 16. Hunter believes the Eagles Nest project is a great start in terms of establishing meaningful consultation and engagement between the Algonquin Nation and the Bancroft community as a whole. It's a good example of how much the world has changed in the past few generations, he said.

"We've come a long way from where we were 30 years ago when I was a little kid with my grandfather. It was best to pull your hat down and not necessarily go around saying you are Algonquin. I feel awful lucky... that there is a chance for us to celebrate things that not long ago we weren't very comfortable celebrating. Because of that fact we lost a lot of things and we are at risk of losing a lot more. So, I think this is a pivotal time and an important time where we are going to define who we were, who we are and what we intend to be."