

Eagles Nest Trail tells an Algonquin story



Bancroft's acting mayor Paul Jenkins presents Eagles Nest Trail Committee co-chair Peter Whitehead and his wife Janis an artist's rendering of the Eagles Nest. The gift was a token of appreciation to the couple for their many years of service to the community. / NATE SMELLE Special to This Week

By Nate Smelle

The sound of drumming echoed through the trees lining the trails stretching throughout Bancroft's Eagles Nest Park on Saturday afternoon, welcoming a crowd of 100 plus to the official grand opening of the park's new Indigenous-themed interpretive trail system. Bancroft's acting mayor Paul Jenkins encouraged those in attendance to explore the trails and take a peek at the new interpretive signage placed strategically throughout the park.

Atop Eagles Nest, Algonquin negotiation representative Stephen Hunter shared his perspective on what the project signifies to the people of the Algonquin Nation. He said he believes the trail shows the community's willingness and eagerness to learn about Algonquin culture, history and beliefs.

'This signifies some forward momentum that is a long time coming,' said Hunter. 'It signifies a new relationship and the start of some real healing and growth for our community. I think that it's important because for a community to be whole as a community, a community has to have an accurate recording of their history. I think that in Bancroft there is a big gap of knowledge regarding the history of this area, and I think that it's a beautiful thing when people start to recognize and to realize that before settlers came here there was a very rich and deep history with the Algonquin people.'

Hunter said projects like the interpretive trail in Eagles Nest Park represent 'a new day for the Algonquin people.'

He added he'd like to see public education initiatives regarding the area's Algonquin heritage expand beyond the trail system. These types of opportunities are an essential step towards reconciliation, he suggested. Being an educational initiative immersed in nature, Hunter explained that the trail is also 'a fantastic example of *ginawaydaganuc*' which means 'we are all connected.' This is a great opportunity for us to share some of our beliefs and to show people that we all have a responsibility to one another and we all have responsibility to all things on earth.'

The 'Eagles Nest ? An Algonquin Story' Interpretive Trail project is the result of a network of partnerships between the Algonquins of Ontario, the Bancroft and Area Stewardship Council, CESCO, Bancroft Field Naturalists Club, the Town of Bancroft and several community members who stepped up to make the project a success. Earlier this year, the project received funding through the federal government's Canada 150 fund in the amount of \$67,300. In recognition of his assistance in securing the funding for the Canada 150 project, Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio, was invited to cut the ribbon at the ceremony and officially open the new tourist attraction.

'This is a fantastic project for the community,' said Bossio. 'Bancroft has such an impressive landmark in the Eagles Nest, and I am thrilled that we are finding ways to bring our Indigenous and settler communities together to learn more about each other and celebrate our shared heritage for Canada's 150th birthday.'

Kicking off the celebration back at the Club 580 after the ceremony, Jenkins took time to personally thank each of the community members and organizations who contributed to the project in one way or another. He described the initiative

as a 'true community collaboration' and 'community development at its best.' Jenkins also highlighted how the project helped those involved develop relationships which will foster more effective opportunities to work together in the future.