

?Indigenous culture celebrated in Wilberforce



Elementary school students from Wilberforce and Cardiff participate in workshops including hoop dancing, traditional cooking, drumming and fur trapping. The day of Indigenous celebration was hosted at the Lloyd Watson Centre April 27. /SUE TIFFIN Special to This Week

By Sue Tiffin

Wilberforce and Cardiff elementary school students gathered in a circle at the Lloyd Watson Centre on April 27 to celebrate Indigenous culture through lessons, performances and workshops.



Parker Lovell (left) and Nikita Watson work with representatives from the Metis Nation of Ontario to create Three Sisters soup in a traditional cooking lesson on April 27. / SUE TIFFIN Special to This Week

?In circle, we're all equal,? said Elaine Kicknosway, a Swampy Cree elder of Pelican Narrows (Northern Saskatchewan). ?We are all at balance to share with each other. All of you are teachers. You all can share with us. And you can also understand.?

Elaine praised the school system for inviting her and son Theland, a Potawatomi Cree youth of Walpole Island First Nation (Southwestern Ontario), to teach and share.

?We're learning from each other,? she said. ?It's important to open conversation, to have a safe space, to talk about our histories and

our development together.?

Theland, a young teen who is a youth leader, the drummer who led Justin Trudeau and cabinet into Rideau Hall in 2015 and who, for the past several years has raised awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women through a 130-kilometre run, shared his style of hoop dancing with the crowd.

Elaine told the students he practises every day for 45 minutes and has been dancing for the past 10 years. Many students said later that they were amazed by the dance, in which Theland interacted with hoops that transformed him into animals.

An audible, 'wow,' was heard from the crowd when he danced using custom-made LED hoops in the dark.

'You never know where your voice, your song or your dance will take you,' Elaine told the students. She said the oldest hoop dancer is 92 years old.

'You never stop your dance,' she said. 'There's no time limit on your dance, on your song, or on your learning.'

While the Kicknosways engaged students in a workshop on hoop dancing, representatives from the Metis Nation of Ontario led students in a traditional cooking lesson to make Three Sisters soup and bannock.

Algonquin elder Ada Tinney with son Scott taught a drumming workshop back at Wilberforce Elementary School (WES), and the Minden District Fur Harvesters offered interactive demonstrations of pelt preparation.

'It's part of the curriculum, but it goes so much beyond the curriculum in that it is an opportunity to share in a living, breathing way, not in a textbook way, with the children when we talk about Indigenous culture, what are we actually talking about,' said Elaine Fournier, WES principal.



Theland (left) and Elaine Kicknosway engaged a circle of students gathered from both Cardiff and Wilberforce in Indigenous teachings on April 27. /SUE TIFFIN Staff

Fournier said the fourth annual celebration was funded by a Parents Reaching Out grant funded by the Ministry of Education and by TLDSB.

'When you work and live and teach in a community that on the surface looks like it is a homogeneous community,' said Fournier. 'When we talk about things like equity and inclusive education, how incredibly valuable it is that all educators in our community may not know, necessarily, if they have students that have Indigenous roots and they are then able to see themselves reflected in what's happening. That is so important.'