

Algonquin Peoples 29th annual All Nations Gathering coming up Aug. 12 and 13



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Algonquin Peoples' 29th annual All Nations Gathering will be happening at Whitefish Lake, Centennial Ridges Road (at kilometre 38) in Algonquin Park on Aug. 12 and 13, from sunrise to sundown. This year's celebration's theme is "Rebuilding our Nation through our Ancestors, Elders and Children." Admission is \$8 each day and they ask that attendees bring a feast bag (plate, cup, bowl, utensils). Whitney and area Algonquin members Robert Craftchick and Margaret Haskin talk about this upcoming Pow Wow in Algonquin Park.

Haskin says the impetus behind the Algonquin Peoples' annual All Nations Gathering was that the Algonquin people wanted to see an Algonquin presence in Algonquin Park, so they decided to have a Pow Wow at Rock Lake 29 years ago. She says it was there for a few years and then they moved over to Whitefish Lake, where it is currently held, now celebrating its 29th anniversary.

"On both days, there is the Grand Entry [at 1 p.m. on Saturday and noon on Sunday], which is one of the highlights. Once the Grand Entry, all the prayers get said, there are different honour drum songs. We do have a lot of ceremonial dances and honour songs for our veterans. But we have fun too. We have candy dances for the kids that are done around the arbour as well and when the drums stop, they pick up candy. We have another fun thing called the potato dance. You choose a partner and you put a potato between your foreheads and you dance to the drum and he'll stop, he'll go slowly, and then really fast. You have to keep dancing around without dropping the potato until there's only one couple left," she says.

Craftchick says the best thing about winning the potato dance is that you win the whole 10-pound bag of potatoes it came in.

Craftchick says that the number of people that come to the Pow Wow varies each year and it's hard to keep track of how many people actually attend. He said probably the best way to gauge it is the number of people they feed on Saturday at the feast.

"What's so unique about our Pow Wow compared to the other ones is that from my perspective, the others are too commercialized and with ours it's a smaller gathering. And we always have a policy here and you could probably say this for everybody in Whitney and Madawaska; when we eat you eat. So, for our feast, we've been cooking for two weeks. We've cooked up a lot of moose meat, pork, turkey, beef, rice, meatballs, bacon, sausage, you name it," he says.

Haskin adds that they also have a lot of fish, venison, squash, beans, and corn as part of their planned feast on the Saturday.

Craftchick says that in the early years, it was a big struggle as they weren't able to get sponsorships for the event and when they start planning the event, they start with zero dollars.

?And every year, we have to start fundraising. This pow wow isn't even over and we're starting to fundraise for next year. Margaret looks after everything and that's right down to booking vendors. She gave us a number a little while ago and it's very close to \$10,000 for the drummers and dancers. So it's a bit of a struggle but we get such good reactions from people,? he says.

Craftchick says they may not offer the best honorariums out there, but it's getting better. But they treat all the performers well and feed them well. They also appreciate the peace and solitude they get from the pow wow site at Whitefish Lake.

?That's a very cultural sacred site to us. That upper part of the [Madawaska] watershed. There's a lot of archaeological stuff being found there and evidence that's where our people were,? he says.

Haskin says they wanted to do an all-nations gathering because in their community there's all nations so they wanted everyone to feel welcome to come out. They'll also have an MC and an arena director there both days to advise people of proper Pow Wow protocols and when to take photos.

Craftchick says it's nice to be able to showcase Algonquin in Algonquin Park.

?That's one of the big questions of people who drive through here in Algonquin Park; where are the Algonquins?? he says.

This year, as in previous years, Red Hawk, Broken Arrow and the Red Tail Singers, will be performing. According to Craftchick and Haskin, Red Hawk is the Pow Wow's host drums, and consists of Mark and Wendy Phillips. Once Red Hawk wants to retire or stop performing, Broken Arrow, which is Trevor Pearce, will be their host drummer. The Red Tail Singers are the children of Mark and Wendy Phillips, who wanted to branch out and do their own thing.

Craftchick says that every part of the day during the Pow Wow has something interesting and valuable to see and experience.

?You have the Grand Entry at 1 p.m. and then you have the feast at 5 p.m. But in between you have times when people mingle, get their pictures taken, or the candy dances. You can even go out at 6 a.m. For the sunrise ceremony if you want. The Grand Entry is very cultural and the feast is very social. It's in the middle when you have to enjoy yourself. So I'd be hard pressed to pick a specific time of day during the Pow Wow,? he says.

Haskin says they should have around a dozen vendors there during the event, and they have about 16 draw prizes available, ranging from a generator, to various photos, to a chainsaw carving, to an antler carving, to gift certificates and much more. She wanted to point out the Mad Musher Restaurant that had been really good to them this year for photographs (taken by owner Steve Dunsford) and gift certificates.

Haskins and Phillips wanted to thank a great many people who provided food, personnel, logistical and financial support for this year's Pow Wow on Aug. 12 and 13; Ontario Parks, the Clear Water Shoppe in Bancroft, Obaadjiwan First Nation from Sharbot Lake, Killarney Lodge, Camp Pathfinder, Harkness Laboratories, The Bancroft Stewardship Council, and The Algonquin Stewardship Authority. Haskin said she hopes that once they re-activate their incorporation status, they can also start applying for grants to help for these gatherings as well.

Christine Luckasavitch is a woman of the Madawaska River Algonquin people, and belongs to the Crane Clan, and is of mixed settler ancestry including Irish, Polish and Swedish. She is the owner/executive consultant with Waaseyaa Consulting, Indigenous Culture and Heritage Consultants, and tells Bancroft This Week she plans to attend the Pow Wow.

?It's a great opportunity to come together within our unceded territory, especially after a few years of pause due to the pandemic,? she says.

Craftchick points to this year's theme of the All Nations Gathering; ?Rebuilding our Nation through our Ancestors, Elders and Children? to Bancroft This Week.

?That's a big message in and of itself,? he says.

Haskin agrees.

?As we rebuild our nation, keeping our youth and elders close and keeping our ancestors close to our hearts, that's the goal,? she says. ?It's a task.?

Christine Luckasavitch, owner/executive consultant at Waaseyaa Consulting, Indigenous Culture and Heritage Consultants, and a member of the Madawaska River Algonquin people belonging to the Crane clan, with mixed settler ancestry including Irish, Swedish and Polish, tells The Bancroft Times she'll be attending the gathering that weekend.

?It's a great opportunity for community to come together within our unceded territory, especially after a few years of pause due to the pandemic,? she says.