

Algonquin Water Walk fills walkers' hearts



By Michael Riley

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The Algonquin Water Walk around Lake of Two Rivers in Algonquin Park went very well on Sept. 7, despite the rainfall, which Algonquins of Ontario Community Liaison Support Margaret Haskin said was a good sign for the walk. Organized by the Algonquins of Ontario, the walk, now in its fifth year, was approximately 14 kilometres and was led by Indigenous women. These walks raise awareness of water issues and the importance of clean water for everyone, especially with many Indigenous people on reservations not having access to clean water. Bancroft This Week wrote a lead up article to this event called "Algonquin Water Walk coming Sept. 7" in the Aug. 30 edition. Haskin's daughter Joanne told Bancroft This Week on the day of the event that they'd begin with a song, a pipe ceremony, a water ceremony, and a smudging. "And then we leave from here and we go over to Mew Lake, park in the airfield at Mew Lake and the women will walk to collect the water and then the Water Walk officially starts. And then we'll walk from Mew Lake all the way down to East Beach and the water will continue because the water doesn't stop. So it'll go in a canoe and shuttles will take the women around to the other side of the lake. And then we'll walk back to Mew Lake and put the water back. And then we'll do our feast at East Beach pavilion," she says. The walk around the Lake of Two Rivers was a joyous experience, with the women carrying the water and singing Indigenous water songs, starting with the Strong Woman Song. The women also carried small copper receptacles filled with water around their necks as they walked, and they offered Semaa tobacco blessings to the water when they crossed over any bridges. A portion of the shoreline of the lake is on private property, so the water, which always has to keep moving, as noted by Joanne, was taken by Haskin into a canoe, paddled by David Craftchick, and taken along the shoreline to a point where the walk could continue along to the finishing point at Mew Lake. At this time, Haskin passed the water along to Dana Boldt, who took the water back to Mew Lake, where it was put back into the lake where it was taken from at the beginning of the day. Once that was done, the women congratulated each other on completing the walk with hugs all around and then went over to East Beach pavilion for the feast, prepared by the men. Amy Charbonneau is an Indigenous education consultant with the Renfrew County School Board and says it's her first time doing the walk. "I was working with Joanne and the Mashkiwizii Manido Foundation since stepping into the role so this is how I've become part of some of this work. So, I'm really excited to do it for the first time," she says. Lisa Eagles has been doing the Water Walk for about 15 years and noted that it's their responsibility as women to look after the water. "We also need to bring attention to water that's in trouble. And where we live has some of the most pristine water in Canada and we really need to protect it," she says. Becky has been doing the Water Walk for three years and thought it was a great day and a great turnout. "Every year I've been doing it more and more folks are coming. I thought there'd be

less people here because of the weather but I was wrong. It's a really strong group of folks," she says. Hope Ezerins was one of the women who walked that day and she says she felt that the walk was so important for Indigenous women because it's a ritual in walking with that sense of honour and self-respect, women being the water carriers. "I am not Indigenous, yet. It has been a journey for me in my own life as well to remember this and to walk this way. So, I walk for myself, for my friends and for the water. It is always an honor for me to be able to do the walk, and learn as I go. I never know who will be there to talk to or teach me something new and connection with women is always a powerful and beautiful thing. The water walk lessons of the water that Elder Margaret [Haskin] teaches have helped me in my own life, as I am reminded to look always ahead and because the water only flows in that one direction and to do my best not to get caught up in an eddy of thought or worry. That really has stuck with me as I walk my own life each day, that teaching. And I'm so thankful for that," she says. Haskin told Bancroft This Week that she thought it was an amazing walk and everything went well. "The feast was awesome afterwards," she says. "My heart is full."