

Algonquins hold 30th Annual All Nations Gathering



By Chris Houston

The Algonquin Peoples 30th Annual All Nations Gathering kicked off on Saturday, Aug. 10 at the Whitefish Pow-Wow site in Algonquin Park. At 1 p.m. some 200 people watched as elders carried Eagle Staffs and flags towards and around the circular wooden arbor. Drum groups Red Hawk and Broken Arrow played from within the arbor, as dancers from Indigenous nations followed the elders. The dancing was led by lead dancers Lisa Eagles and Jamie Lindsay. They were followed by around two dozen dancers of all ages who wore regalia that incorporated impressive eagle feathers, brightly coloured ribbon skirts, jingle dresses, beaded belts, and deer skins. The All Nations Gathering was organized by head elder Margaret Haskin who led the Grand Entry Ceremony alongside Head Veteran Wendy Jocko. Haskin carried the Community Eagle Staff, while Jocko carried the Veteran's Eagle Staff. Gary Fennel carried the Fennel Family Staff. Eagle Staff bearers were followed by Franco Salmeri, who carried the Prisoner of War Flag, Derek Lavallee carried the Algonquin Community Flag. Kaden Currins held aloft the Canadian Flag while Robert Craftchick carried the American flag. Theresa Eagles carried the Mi'kmaq flag next to Daryl Boldt who carried the Every Child Matters flag. Mike Boldt was the Fire Keeper for the event. Red Hawk drummed for the Grand Entry song followed by the Flag Song played by Broken Arrow. The crowd surrounded and appreciated the glorious sun, in contrast to the heavy rain that punctuated the morning. All visitors were provided with food. The atmosphere was friendly and community-oriented. The Pow-Wow incorporated fun, food and music between the sacred parts. Photography was prohibited during the most sacred parts of the ceremony, drugs, alcohol and dogs were also forbidden. The theme of the event, "Rebuilding Our Spirit", featured throughout. During the Grand Entry, Wendy Jocko spoke first and started with a prayer. Her words touched on the need to respect the land and for kindness. Margaret Haskin spoke next, a member of the Bear Clan, Haskin spoke of the spirit in plants, animals, rocks and mountains, trees and water and the need for all people to work on themselves and to show kindness. Anyone needed healing was invited to offer tobacco to dancers during a healing dance. The Pow-Wow paused a few times for short bursts of rain, but the sun kept returning and the event kept going. Caterers were kept busy by the crowd, who sat around the arbor. Robert Craftchick, a forrester by trade, told Bancroft This Week that visiting nations included: Ojibwe, Cree, Haudenosaunee, Mississaguas, Mi'kmaq, and Algonquins. He expressed gratitude to the many sponsors, that included local businesses, organizations, cottage associations, children's camps, and the logging industry. Craftchick singled out Ontario Parks for their collaboration and thanked volunteers as well as participants. Craftchick was joyful at the event, but he also spoke of anti-Indigenous racism that he experienced in younger years. He was forgiving to those who hurt him years ago, and spoke of looking to the future. "We're all in it together," Craftchick said as he smiled. Craftchick spoke of the importance and relevance of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, which were noted in the event agenda as: Honesty, Humility, Respect, Courage, Wisdom, Love and Truth. Margaret Haskin spoke to Bancroft This Week of the unanimous agreement from elders when the theme of "Rebuilding Our Spirit" was proposed. She spoke fondly of the younger generations dancing for the first time,

and of the many people who were visiting the gathering from far north and west of the Algonquin Nation's territory. She spoke of the need for people to find peace within themselves and of her pleasure that the event gave a space where Indigenous peoples can be who we are, and celebrate our culture. Fifteen vendors had small booths selling art, jewelry, carvings, food, clothing and crafts. The Ministry of Nature Resources were present to share information about Algonquin fishery projects. The two day event was hosted by the Whitney and Area Algonquins with assistance from Ontario Parks.