

Fur harvesters in Faraday



Re-purposed pelt products, made in Fenelon Falls by furrier Anne Kulmala, were just some of the exciting products showcased at the Faraday Community Centre on Saturday. This annual trapper's event has been occurring for over thirty years. SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

By Sarah Vance

As temperatures dropped below minus 40 degrees over the weekend, the North Hastings Fur Harvesters Workshop, held annually at the Faraday Community Centre, provided a warm space for celebrating local heritage. In fact it was so cold that the outdoor tomahawk throw was postponed until the afternoon.

The fur trade forms a way-of-life in North Hastings, and Saturday brought local harvesters together to show what they do, and promote the local trapping industry. Many vendors were on hand to sharpen knives and sell their goods, which included every kind of scent attractant from elk, fox, bear and muskrat.

Visitors could also enter a unique contest. Checking out a harvested beaver – the traditional backbone of the industry – they estimated its weight for a chance to win the 50/50 draw. “I was only three ounces off,” said Kaylee Jessup about the animal that weighed over 40 pounds.

Information was in ample supply. “A beaver's teeth will grow for its entire life and if it does not use them, they will lock together, ultimately killing the animal,” reported one trapper, as he pulled a beaver pelt wallet out of his pocket to show its durability.

North Hastings Harvester president Wayne Fransky demonstrated how a beaver pelt is skinned and then prepared for tanning. “Unfortunately, the price is down from \$30 to \$18 a pelt,” said Fransky as he nailed a skin to a board, stretching it and scraping off fat with his knife. Local pelts are taken to Toronto and North Bay where they are sold at international fur auctions, mainly to Eastern European buyers. “The Russian ruble and economic sanctions have led to a decrease in sales,” Fransky continued, “Russia is a big Canadian pelt customer.”

The Fur Council of Canada estimates that there are 60,000 trappers actively working in Canada. Muskrat represents 35 per cent of total wild furs profit, which in Canada contributes \$800 million to the economy each year.

It takes about 40 hours to make a fur garment after the pelt is prepared. Furrier Anne Kulmala drove from Fenelon Falls to showcase her many one-of-a-kind fur creations. These include hats, purses, and life-like puppets, such as rabbits, made with the fur of that animal.

“I come from a long line of furriers,” said Kulmala, who works with a variety of pelts from farmed and wild fur bearing animals such as mink, raccoon, fox, coyote and lynx.

There are over three million fur pelts produced annually in Canada. But furriers like Anne are finding a growing market from people who want to see older items, such as coats, repurposed into new products, like vests and purses. Trappers and hunters have been identified as conservationists by Andrew Houser, Director of the Fish and Wildlife branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources. He notes that they contribute \$40 million annually to sustainable wildlife management, through license fees paid to the province.