

Indigenous community celebrates solstice with students



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By Nate Smelle

Students from Bird's Creek Public School gathered at Bird's Creek Park on Friday, June 21 to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day and the summer solstice. The event was the second that day in a three-part celebration held at various locations throughout North Hastings in honour of the local Indigenous community. The gathering hosted by Hastings Trails at Birds Creek Park began with a Smudging Ceremony led by Algonquin Elder Dora Yateman. As Yateman made her way around the circle of students, parents, teachers and community members seated in the field the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers drummed and sang until the ceremony was complete.

Following the Smudging Ceremony, representatives from each of the groups responsible for putting on the event spoke on the significance of the National Indigenous Peoples Day celebration.

Chief Stephen Hunter of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation was one of the speakers to address the group. Thanking those in attendance for taking part in the solstice celebration, he reminded everyone how special they are, and how each of them has the potential to change the world for the better if they care for all living things. Explaining the meaning of the Algonquin word ?Ginowaydaganuc,? Hunter taught the group about how everything on Earth is interconnected. When people understand the all-encompassing nature of this interconnectedness, he said they also begin to realize that everyone and all living things have a valuable place on the planet.

?You are all the future of something that is really important to Algonquin people ? and that's the Earth,? said Hunter.

?Our language is centered around it. Our values are deeply entrenched in the earth, and we believe that it is our responsibility to be good stewards. That means to look after the place that we live.?

Expressing how important it is for people to learn about and celebrate Algonquin and other Indigenous cultures, he added ?We all have a responsibility to each other, and we all have a connection to each other. So, if you can spend today thinking about how important the person beside you is, you will have done a good thing for Algonquin people and all Indigenous people.?

Yateman spoke next, teaching the students about the cultural significance of the summer solstice to Algonquin people and Indigenous peoples around the globe. For the Algonquin community, she said summer solstice is more than just the time of year marking the transition from spring to summer. Yateman said it is a time of infancy and growth, as well as a time of adolescence and strengthening. She told the group that humans can learn a lot from observing these type of lessons in nature.

?If we look at our animal and plant relatives this is what we see happening in the natural world,? said Yateman.

?Our plants are gathering strength through their beautiful flowers to create what may be the best versions of themselves. Their flowers and their fruit in turn provide nourishment to insects, animals, people and other plants. The animal babies have been born and continued to grow. They are learning about the world around them, where they can find food and water, and where it is safe to

sleep. We can take inspiration for my plant and animal relatives and work to strengthen who we are as individuals.?
Throughout the celebration the Shawashkong Ikwe Singers continued to offer songs as prayers to the water, the butterflies, the earth and the Creator. Before hiking back to school for lunch the children also had an opportunity to spend some time doing arts and crafts outdoors. The National Indigenous Peoples Day celebration then moved up to Bancroft's Eagles Nest Park for a community feast.