

## Political graffiti sends the wrong message, says Hunter



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By Nate Smelle

In the past week political graffiti has been popping up at various locations throughout the Town of Bancroft.

The messages, which have been spray-painted on both public and private property, appear to be in support of Indigenous rights and the Black Lives Matter movement. Although whomever is painting the graffiti is likely doing so to help raise awareness of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism, Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin negotiations representative Stephen Hunter believes the messages actually do more to divide the community than bring people together.

“It takes the racist on the fence and pushes them off the wrong side of the fence,” he explained. “The damage caused goes beyond the damage to the property that was done. It directly works against the efforts of the Algonquins of Ontario.” According to Hunter, it is through fostering inclusion, that the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation will become an important and valued part of the broader community. That is the direction the Algonquin community has been, and continues to be headed, he said. Hunter said going around town damaging people's property is counterproductive to what they have been aspiring to achieve, and it is not the Algonquin way.

“The Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin community works hard to support our membership, the broader community and the natural environment which we highly value,” said Hunter. “We do so by way of the many local programs, workshops and training opportunities we administer as a First Nation community, and through the successful partnerships our community has developed with others. We continue to find creative and sustainable ways to improve the quality of life within Bancroft.”

By working diligently to “heal the wounds of the past” and build relationships with all levels of government, Hunter said as a community they have achieved several milestones. Pointing out that the Algonquins are poised to become an influential part of the economy in North Hastings, he said they look forward to that day when Algonquin people are treated with equity and respect for the culturally unique perspectives, and traditional knowledge they have to share.

“Our community does not support criminal activity and we would ask that whomever is responsible for the graffiti placed on town and private property, find alternate and appropriate ways to express themselves,” Hunter said. “The Algonquin people work toward a time when we are valued for our unique perspective and traditional knowledge by all people in the communities we live. We continue to build upon the relationships we have with the general public, local organizations and all levels of government and we

continue to negotiate in good faith as the Algonquins move toward becoming major landowners and important contributors within the local economy.?