

Pikwakanagan reps part of official opening of new Lansdowne Park

Chief Kirby Whiteduck and other members of band council will be among the special guests

By Terry Fleurie
Staff Writer

Pikwakanagan -- When the official opening ceremonies for the new Lansdowne Park in Ottawa take place on Friday, August 15, the Pikwakanagan First Nation from Golden Lake will be well represented.

Chief Kirby Whiteduck, members of his band council and the Bear Nation drum group have all been invited by the City of Ottawa to attend the official opening ceremonies on Friday prior to a Community Day event on Saturday.

Chief Whiteduck said he was delighted his community will be represented at the ceremony, saying he and council and the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) have been involved in some of the planning aspects of the Lansdowne revitalization project for some time.

"We've been consulted on the development by the City for while through the AOO because it's on Algonquin territory," he said. "We've had some input into the development (of the new park) in terms of the Algonquin elements."

"They gave us a presentation on their proposals and we had input into the design of the walkway into the park from Bank Street. They put in a basket design and a placard will say that the basket represents the design used by Algonquins when making ash baskets."

Chief Whiteduck said several other Algonquin elements are featured in the design of the revitalized park including a teaching circle surrounded by the seven trees of significance to the Algonquins and an etho-botanical garden.

The AOO said the teaching circle will offer a special opportunity to connect visitors across generations and between cultures.

"It will provide visitors with a space within Lansdowne Park to reflect upon the presence of the Algonquins, past, present and future," an AOO release noted.

"Views from the teaching circle will extend in all directions including the children's garden, the central skating court, the Aberdeen Pavillion and the Rideau Canal."

The etho-botanical garden will feature plants significant to the Algonquin people either in ceremonial, medicinal or practical uses.

"There will also be a public area which will be open for events like pow wows," Chief Whiteduck noted.

"We're very happy because this is still Algonquin territory and we're still here, we've never disappeared," he added. "There has been very little literature or knowledge of the Algonquins, so we're trying to change that and the city we're happy the city is being receptive to that and encouraging us to provide input."

He said the First Nation's involvement with the city was recognized last year when both he and Chief Gilbert Whiteduck of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabag First Nation met Mayor Jim Watson for a special flag raising ceremony of the two First Nations at City Hall.

"We've kind of continued to develop a relationship and have been working on a civic protocol," he said. "We have draft for the protocol and are supposed to be meeting on that soon."

Chief Whiteduck said the chief from Kitigan Zibi has also been invited to the ceremony on Friday.

Chief Whiteduck said the city has

been very open to their involvement and just recently officials from Pikwakanagan were invited to be part of the official opening of Nelson Mandela Square in the city.

Chief Whiteduck said while he is not part of the official ceremony, the Bear Nation drum group will be performing a drum song as the delegates take to the stage.

They have been invited to set up some displays for both days however because the ceremony coincides with the pow wow at Pikwakanagan, they are doubtful what resources would be available.

Other Involvement

Aside from their involvement in Lansdowne, Chief Whiteduck said they have also been in consultation and have had input in the ongoing light rail transit project in the city. He said one of the proposed stations at Labreton Flats is being designed with a special Algonquin theme to it. The station will be named *Pimisi*, which means eel in Algonquin and it will feature artwork dedicated to the snakelike-fish, an integral animal in the Algonquin culture which has become nearly extinct locally.

"The reason we proposed the eel is because we are hoping to restore the American eel populations in the Algonquin territory," he explained. "They actually found some eels there last summer."

"So there will be some Algonquin artwork art there proposed by Algonquin artists," he added.

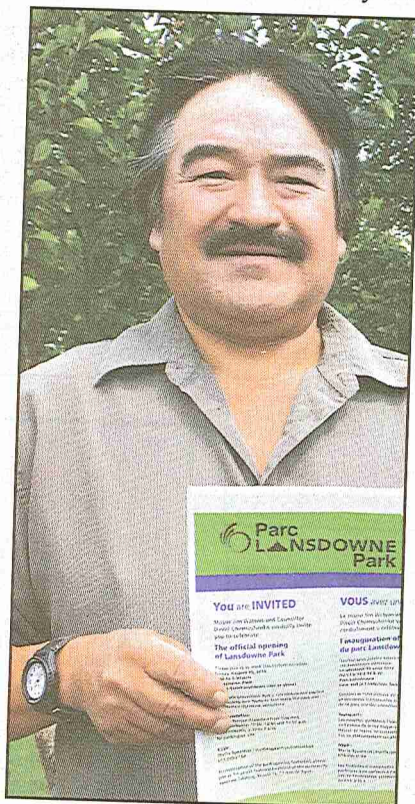
The eels were an important food staple to the Algonquin people in the past and the restoration of the eel population has been a focus the past several years. Eel passages have been installed in some hydro dams to allow the eels to safely navigate the rivers.

"They were a major food source for us," Chief Whiteduck noted. "The Algonquins would net them or spear them."

The head artist for the project is from Kitigan Zibi and she has forwarded her ideas to Pikwakanagan for review. Local artists may be involved in the actual work, he noted.

The First Nation is also involved in preliminary discussion with the Heritage Canada on the redevelopment of the Rideau Canal Promenade, he said.

"They're looking for input with respect to Algonquin references and statements at the sites," he explained.



Chief Kirby Whiteduck will be one of the participants in the official opening of Ottawa's new Lansdowne Park.