

Culture Builds Community! Engage

SPRING 2017
VOLUME 7, ISSUE 2



Workshops Create Connections in the North

Youth Learn Traditions of the Land

Camp Brings Together Community

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Engage

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Recreation.



ON THE COVER:

Culture camp takes kids on South Saskatchewan River to explore their heritage.

Photos by Rod Desnomie.

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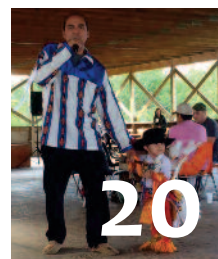
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Message from the CEO

Welcome! As you look through this issue of *Engage* you will find a number of articles that highlight cultural programs in Saskatchewan's north. The northern part of Saskatchewan, that which extends north of La Ronge, is beautiful and vast. It's made up of boreal forest, rocks and lakes. The people that live in the northern part of Saskatchewan are much more isolated than those in the south.

Communities are numerous but far apart, making it often too far to travel between communities with ease, and at certain times of the year, travel may not even be possible unless by small plane.

This isolation gives the north its own unique culture that is very closely linked to the land and its history. The various types of culture camps that teach and honour northern traditions, such as the stories of the river while travelling by boat or canoe, or learning traditional languages, are all opportunities for young people to connect with their heritage, bring that heritage into their present and gain a sense of pride in their culture.

In many ways the cultural projects in this issue of *Engage* are part of the area's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). As I mentioned in the Fall/Winter 2016 issue, "Intangible Cultural Heritage contributes

to societies maintaining their unique identities." The traditional practices and skills of trapping, fishing, bannock-making, beading, jigging and cultural understanding, under the tutelage of Elders, are an important part of cultural activity and experience in the north, providing residents, particularly youth, the opportunity to learn and grow in the rich cultural history of their communities.

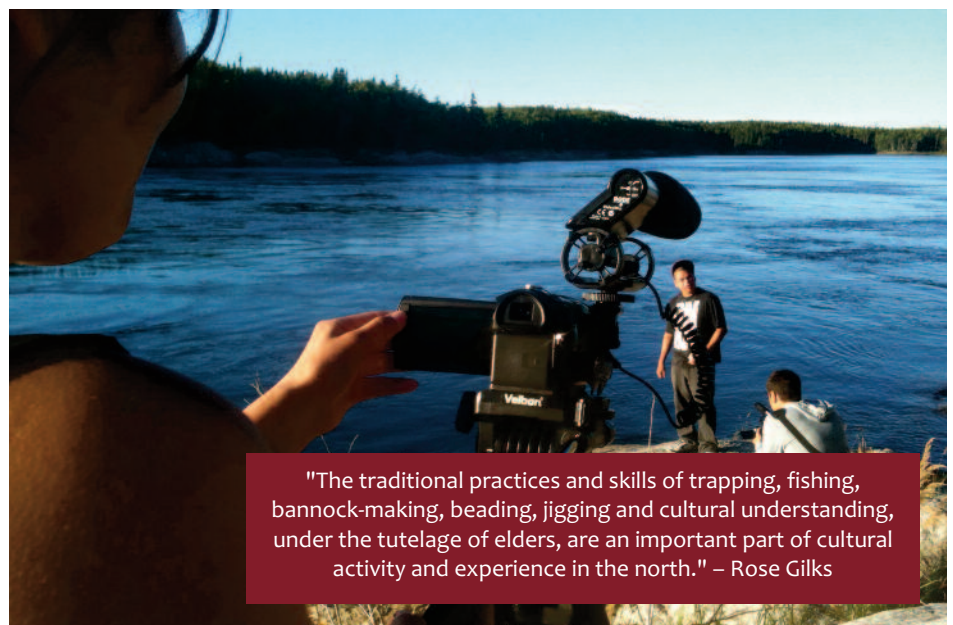
Other articles in this issue highlight some of the many cultural activities underway, thanks to programs such as the Aboriginal Arts and Culture Leadership Grant, Culture Days Funding Assistance, or the Métis Cultural Development Fund, supported by the Culture Section of the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation. These activities, such as Culture Days in Creighton, the SCES Workshop Tour, culture camps at Pinehouse and Dillon, meme-making workshops, along with the many other programs facilitated by the Northern Sport, Culture and Recreation District (NSCRD) and the 22 Northern Community School Coordinators (which receive 30% of their funding from the Culture Section), are good examples of the work already underway in northern Saskatchewan. And, thanks to Cameco, the programs supported through the Cameco Creative Kids Northern Cultural Fund, bring cultural opportunities to many more northern youth each year.

However, there is always more to do. Like many others, SaskCulture is concerned about the youth in these communities. Suicides and at-risk lifestyle choices are not to be ignored. We are very interested in ensuring that opportunities are available for youth in these communities to see a brighter future – including cultural experiences that help them explore their identity, build confidence and uncover their potential. Cultural programming – such as preserving and teaching traditional languages, arts and creative expression – is an important part of addressing several of the Calls to Action outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report, which serve to build a better future for Indigenous peoples.

Going forward, we will continue to visit and share resources with communities in the north. Most recently, SaskCulture's Consultant Dominga Robinson held several well-attended grant-writing workshops in three northern communities – Buffalo Narrows, La Ronge and Creighton. As with other areas of the province, northern communities in Saskatchewan have a rich culture to preserve, celebrate and share either among themselves or with others, adding to the vibrant cultural diversity of this province.

Sincerely,

Rose Gilks



"The traditional practices and skills of trapping, fishing, bannock-making, beading, jigging and cultural understanding, under the tutelage of elders, are an important part of cultural activity and experience in the north." – Rose Gilks

Culture Synk, a 2012 program, brought artists, filmmaking and creativity to the northern community of Sandy Bay. Check out *Sandy Bay In Motion* on YouTube.



Creating Connections in the North

Workshop tour creates an inspiring experience for both artists and students

BY MIRANDA HANUS

A workshop tour has been on the move to several rural and remote communities in the north, whose student populations may not otherwise have an opportunity to experience this variety of arts programming.

Pinehouse, Saskatchewan has been a stop on the tour over the last few years. "[The workshops] give us different experiences to remember," says Jane Laxdal, Grade 4 teacher, Pinehouse School. These workshops are put on by the Saskatchewan Cultural Exchange (SCES) Workshop Tour, which has been creating art interactions between students and artists for over 30 years.

Students from kindergarten through high school have participated in the tour's workshops, which include dance, art, music, drama, visual art, and writing. The teachers sign up their classes for the one-hour workshops. The students can participate in one or more workshops, and learn from experienced artists.

Laxdal is also a drama instructor and says one of her students is inspired to travel to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCES

TOP: The 2016 Workshop Tour artists: Lacey Eninew, Danica Lorer, Alex Hartshorn, Josh Goff and Nathan Coppens.



"I think the workshops are great for any community, any school. But it's really valuable for northern, remote, or rural communities." – Jane Laxdal

New York to do her art, because she participated in the visual arts workshop with graffiti artist Josh Goff of Regina. Goff started out as a graffiti artist in his youth, then turned to murals, many of which can be seen in Regina's Cathedral area along 13th Avenue.

"He's really helped her and inspired her. She's interested in graffiti art now and she looks up [his work] all the time," says Laxdal.

Goff says he really enjoys the tour because artists get to go to communities that are often isolated. "[The residents] don't always get to see public art or art in general, from a professional standpoint."

He adds that as well as sharing his art with the students, he also learns a lot from the students who live in these communities.

"When you talk about graffiti, there's that stigma around it," says Goff referring to the illegality of tagging buildings. "I shared with the students my experience doing illegal art, and then coming into working in legal art and street art, and how I've built a career off that."

But it was working with the other workshop artists as well that made the tour really worthwhile.

"In my field I'm always working with visual artists. And so, on the tour, you have a



storyteller, you have a dancer, you have a musician, a drama person. When you're in that troupe, you really get a feel for everybody's kind of craft," explains Goff. "I see the tour as something that really builds not only the communities that it goes to, but also the artists within the troupe. So it's beneficial on both sides. It's really positive for everybody involved."

Laxdal recommends the workshops to other schools. "I think the workshops are great for any community, any school. But it's really valuable for northern, remote, or rural communities."

She adds that the variety of the workshops offered appeal to the different interests of the students. "[The workshops] are all really popular and they're all really excellent [instructors]."

As for the kids who participate, "It's a very, very good experience. They get to try a lot of different things throughout the day," she continues.

Schools are invited to book their spot on the tour with SCES by June 1st.

TOP: Actor Lacey Eninew conducts a workshop on forum theatre with students at the Preeceville School during the Fall 2016 Workshop Tour.

A close-up photograph of a young girl with brown hair, looking through the viewfinder of a black video camera. Her hands are visible, holding the camera. She is wearing a pink shirt. In the background, another person is blurred, also appearing to be part of the scene. The overall tone is educational and creative.

New Skills Help Northern Youth Share Stories and Culture

Creative project provides technological opportunities

BY SARAH FERGUSON



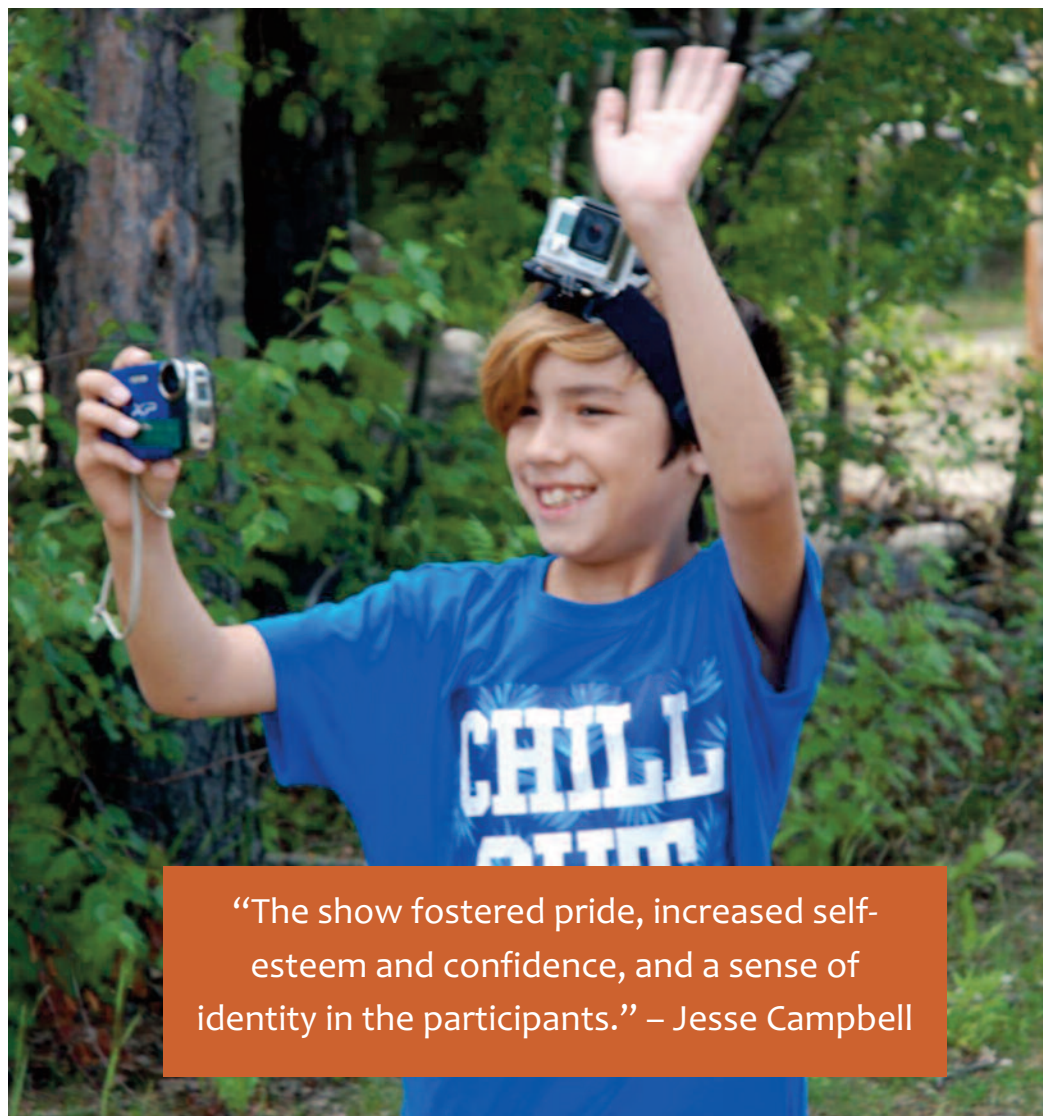
A media arts project gives a voice to youth in the North. The Northern Indigenous Media Art Project (NIMAP) attracted over 130 First Nations, Métis, newcomer and other youth from ages 7-17, providing them opportunities to explore oral storytelling, photography and videography through contemporary technology. This project was made possible through SaskCulture's Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Leadership Grant.

"We have many issues in our northern communities, specifically on isolated reserves," says Aleya May Morin, cultural leader, NIMAP. "We can offer options for youth, by giving them voice through photography and video. The project was a unique way for people from all walks of life to connect through photos and video, while sharing stories about their communities."

According to Jesse Campbell, director, Mann Art Gallery, the exhibition portion of the project also held value for the community. "Participants shared and discussed their photo work with family, friends, Elders, and neighbours. Sharing generates support of local youth and citizens through history, culture and art."

Campbell also explains that while the program is geared towards Indigenous youth, non-First Nation and Métis

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANN ART GALLERY



"The show fostered pride, increased self-esteem and confidence, and a sense of identity in the participants." – Jesse Campbell

participants were also encouraged to attend. “Another goal was to generate intercultural learning opportunities.”

The NIMAP project took place in July and August of 2016, and revolved around a series of summer workshops held in Prince Albert, La Ronge, Muskoday, Beardy’s and Okemasis. Each workshop featured a sharing circle guided by an Elder, and lessons from cultural leaders about integrating photo media into everyday life. “During the workshops, youth were introduced to technical lessons in traditional photography, digital photography, Polaroid photos and media-related software,” she says.

The participants used what they learned to create video clips, ‘light drawing’ photographs, experimental Polaroid photos, digital photographs and light-sensitive photos. “They told stories, interviewed one another and took pictures while exploring their environment,” she further explains.

The project ended with an exhibition, which ran from August to October. “The show fostered pride, increased self-esteem and confidence, and a sense of identity in the participants,” says Campbell.

Campbell also stresses that cultural leaders were an important part of the workshops. “They guided participant discussions on community traditions and characteristics. By the end, participants had enough photographs to construct portfolios,” she explains. The final day of the workshop was used to prepare the pieces to be exhibited at the gallery.

“I was happy that the program was able to reach some of the older, disadvantaged youth,” adds Morin, who helped found the program, and who was overjoyed at the high attendance in the workshops.

Campbell also says that research showed that there were very few accessible media art programs for young people in northern locations, especially related to digital technology. “NIMAP’s value was in providing practical skills to youth, while promoting the importance of local history and heritage,” she says.

She adds that “The Mann Art Gallery is the northern-most public art gallery in the province. One of our biggest responsibilities is to provide excellent programs to northern communities.”



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“These practices are important to their understanding of their identity as Dene peoples.” – Laurette Chanalquay

attending a sweat lodge ceremony. Other activities included listening to Dene Elders share stories and participating in a sharing circle.

“The idea of culture camp is important,” says Chanalquay. “The youth learn traditional practices and can use their skills whenever they decide to go out on the land or fish. If they know those skills, they can be prepared for their future and hunt food for their families. These practices are important to their understanding of their identity as Dene peoples.”

She adds that during their time at camp, students overcame several challenges, including a “white out” snow storm with zero visibility, where temperatures dipped below 40 degrees Celsius. “The students were advised to stay indoors and it was a teaching moment from the Elders,”

Learning to Live on the Land

An important aspect of Dene culture

BY SARAH FERGUSON

As the saying goes, so much of the future lies in preserving the past, and recently a group of students came together to preserve the future of Dene culture in Saskatchewan.

Thirty students from Buffalo River School, in the community of Dillon, recently took part in an historic Dene cultural camp. The students, who ranged from grades four to nine, travelled 150 kilometres to a cabin at Vermette Lake for the three-day event.

“They experienced first-hand what it’s like to stay in the bush,” says Laurette Chanalquay, School Principal, Buffalo River School. “It is important, because not everyone gets the

chance to go out on the land.”

The camp, which took place from January 10-13, 2017, was made possible by Cameco Creative Kids Northern Cultural Fund, and was also supported by the Buffalo River Band. Cameco has provided \$90,000 over three years to Creative Kids for the Cameco Creative Kids Northern Cultural Fund.

According to Chanalquay, a group of six Elders (three male and three female) who were familiar with the area accompanied the students during their culture camp experience, which included setting and checking fishing nets, cleaning and filleting fish, snaring rabbits, cooking bannock and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAURETTE CHANALQUAY

Chanalquay explains. “They learned that whenever a snow storm happens, they must seek shelter and remain there. The time was well spent and everyone enjoyed their activities. Most said they wanted to stay another two nights.”

The school will continue to facilitate cultural camps in the near future, says Chanalquay. “We want to make sure all students get a chance to experience Dene culture and the great outdoors during the four seasons. It was a great trip—everyone was very thankful and felt good about it.”



Cameco Creative Kids Northern Cultural Fund





Creighton Celebrates Culture Days

How a community recognizes its local culture

BY SHELLEY FAYANT

When Culture Days was launched across Canada in 2010 as a way to get more Canadians engaged in the arts and cultural life of their communities, the town of Creighton, Saskatchewan knew immediately that it had to be involved.

“We jumped at the chance,” says Channa Senyk, who works for the Town of Creighton in the recreation area. “We saw an irresistible opportunity to not only take part in a Canada-wide celebration, but to also support, promote and showcase our local artists.”

The town also saw Culture Days as a way to honour its history as a mining town. “Back in the 1940s, people from all over moved to our area to find jobs in the mine, resulting in our town’s rich diversity,” she says. “Participating in Culture Days seemed like a great way to keep our town’s history alive.”

The community went all out with dozens of activities – from multicultural pavilions with foods, crafts and music, to storytellers in period costumes at the museum. Finding space to host all of the activities in the small community proved to be a challenge, but a decision to delay putting in the rink’s ice saved both the day and the community’s inaugural Culture Days weekend. It was a huge success and

thousands of people from the community and surrounding area participated.

“Of course we were operating under the belief that Culture Days was a one-time event,” Senyk chuckles. “So when we learned that it was actually going to be an annual event, we knew we had to come up with some creative solutions to be able to take part on an ongoing basis.”

One of those solutions was to form partnerships with neighbouring communities such as Denare Beach and Flin Flon, Manitoba, which shares the provincial border with Creighton. “This expanded the opportunities in so many ways, such as boosting the number of people that would help with the planning, as well as increasing the options for venue space,” states Senyk.

Another creative solution was to invite organizations outside the arts and cultural community, like the local business and sports communities, to play a part in the weekend. They are now all enthusiastic supporters of the initiative. For instance, the Flin Flon Bombers, the local junior



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FLIN FLON/CREIGHTON/DENARE BEACH CULTURE DAYS

hockey team, has been a regular Culture Days activity organizer, sharing the team's history with participants, as well as hosting pick-up hockey games. On the business front, many businesses offer discounts to Culture Days celebrants who flash their "Culture Days Passports", a fun way to track cultural activity throughout the weekend. At the end of Culture Days, people can then enter their filled-out passports to win prizes donated by the local business community.

The Culture Days weekend has continued to grow steadily in Creighton and area, and is now one of the most anticipated cultural events of the year. "We place an emphasis on school programming so that children and youth have the opportunity to engage in a cultural activity," says Senyk. She estimates that in 2016, nearly 6,000 people participated in their Culture Days weekend, while another 600 volunteered.

This success means new challenges: "The biggest issue we have now is that there are so many activities happening throughout the weekend, that people simply can't go to all of them."



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"Participating in Culture Days seemed like a great way to keep our town's history alive." – Channa Senyk



PHOTOS BY ROD DESNOMIE

Living the River's Stories

Discovering our past down the South Saskatchewan River

BY DANICA LORER

Our lands and rivers hold many stories that are just waiting to be explored. An annual youth and Elder canoe trip takes participants on the river to learn from these stories and discover the past.

"It's not so much about the paddling as it is about the history, putting some type of spark in the imagination," says Leonard Montgrand, executive director, La Loche Friendship Centre, and coordinator, Youth and Elders Voyage – an annual canoe trip on the South Saskatchewan River from the Hague Ferry to Batoche, for Back to Batoche Days in July.

Montgrand explained to the voyagers

about the stamina needed, the gruelling stroke rate, and the hours spent each day working. The stories shared along the way outlined the perils faced by human and natural dangers.

"It's quite intimidating especially when we get out to the river, and the water is flowing, and it's rocky by the Hague Ferry. They're all looking at each other and the Elders say, 'Are you sure this is safe?' I tell them 'yes'. I wouldn't take anybody out there if it wasn't safe." Montgrand explains that the voyageur canoes are stable and that in preparation for the trip they do dry land training, practicing the proper technique for getting into the

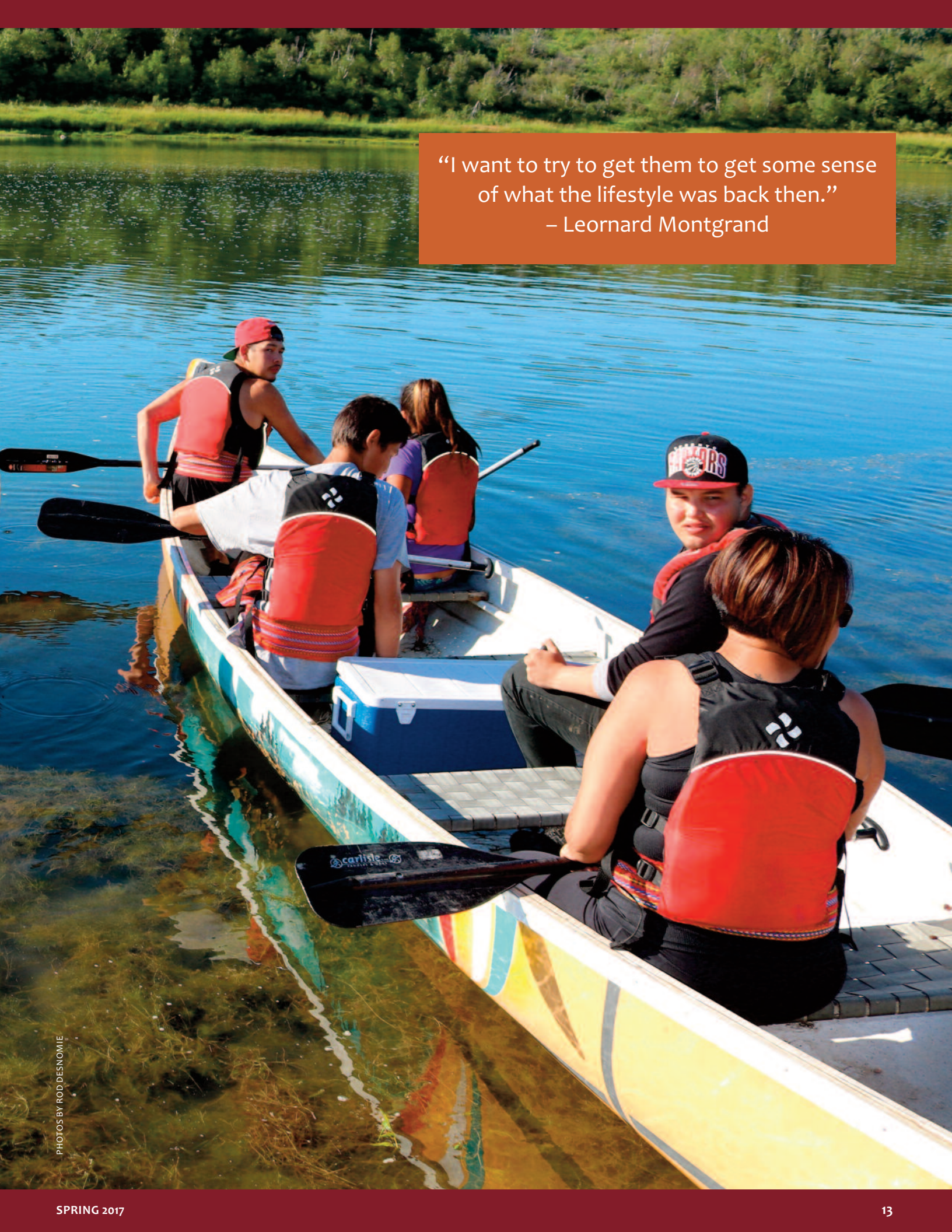
canoe and proper paddling switching mechanisms.

"The MCDF (Métis Cultural Development Fund) gives us the grant money, we appreciate that, without it we would probably have a hard time going each year," adds Montgrand.

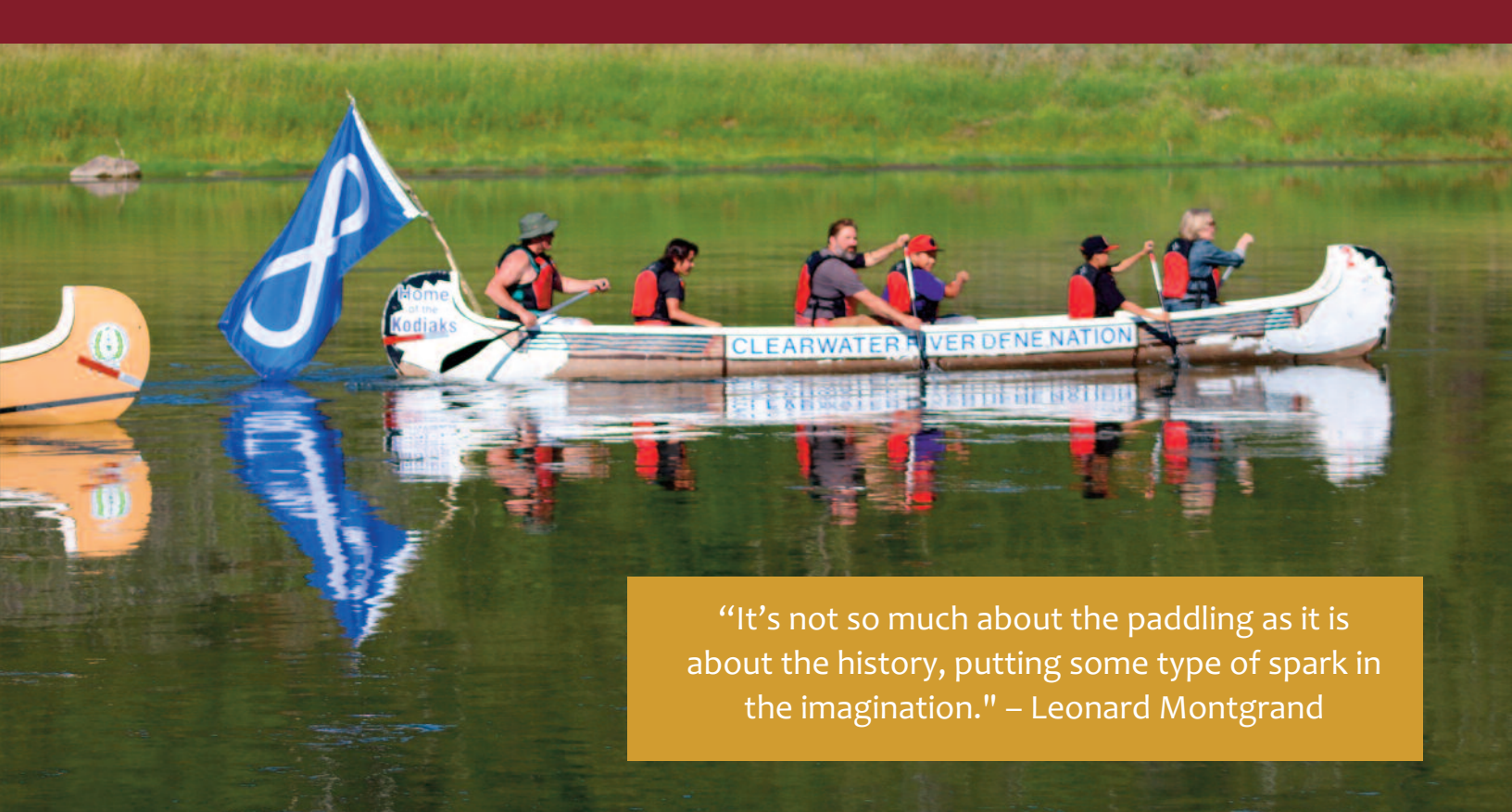
Elders were involved in the voyage in various roles. They were part of a drum ceremony when the canoes were put in the water. Some prepared the meals and taught the youth how to prepare the food, some rode in the canoes. "It is a bonding experience for the kids and the Elders, creating a connection," explains Montgrand.

Logan, a ten-year-old from La Loche, was the youngest participant on the journey. He says that enjoyed the trip and hopes to have other similar experiences in the future. He also found the paddling hard but enjoyed exploring new places and the views from the river.

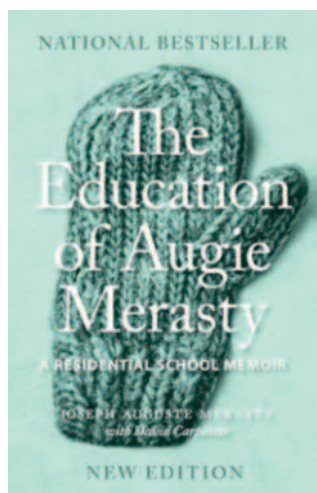
"I liked meeting new people, making friends, making a new friend with Minister Bennett," says Logan. A true adventurer,

A group of five people are in a canoe on a calm lake. The canoe is white with colorful stripes (yellow, green, blue) along the side. The people are wearing life jackets and caps. The water is blue and reflects the surrounding green trees. The background shows a dense forest on a hill.

“I want to try to get them to get some sense
of what the lifestyle was back then.”
– Leornard Montgrand



“It’s not so much about the paddling as it is about the history, putting some type of spark in the imagination.” – Leonard Montgrand



One Book One Province Campaign

Join the SLA in supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

As part of a province-wide community reading initiative this past March, the Saskatchewan Library Association asked Saskatchewan residents to read *The Education of Augie Merasty: A Residential School Memoir*, by Joseph Auguste Merasty with David Carpenter, published by the University of Regina Press. The month may be over, but Saskatchewan residents are still encouraged to read this and other publications that tell the stories of Indigenous peoples in this province. This reading brings awareness and can be the first step in everyone’s road to reconciliation.

Joseph Auguste (“Augie”) Merasty attended St. Therese Residential School in Sturgeon Landing,

Saskatchewan, from 1935 (when he was only 5 years old) to 1944. A retired fisherman, trapper, jack of all trades, and amateur boxer, Merasty rose to prominence in 2015, when at 86 years old, his first book, *The Education of Augie Merasty* (with David Carpenter) – a moving story covering his boyhood at the residential school. Merasty was one of an estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children who were taken from their families to government-funded, church-ran schools where they were subjected to a policy of “aggressive assimilation”.

While Merasty in his memoir documents the horrors of residential school, including physical and sexual abuse, his story is ultimately one of bravery and resilience. As he recounts, these schools did more than attempt to mould Indigenous children to white society – they were taught to be ashamed of their heritage. Merasty passed away in Prince Albert at the age of 87 on Feb. 27, 2017. *The Education of Augie Merasty* remains as a lasting testament of Merasty’s talent, courage and generosity of spirit.

To learn more about this reading initiative, visit saskla.ca.

Logan says he hoped they would tip the vessel and get a chance to swim. “There were so many rapids, we’d almost tip. That was scary.”

He goes on to explain a challenge they faced on the river. “The water was so shallow we had to get off the canoe and push because it was touching the sand. We pushed it a long way.” He enjoyed the food, the hard work, (even though it meant sore arms) and the history. “It was cool, they told us cool stories.”

The participants were challenged by the heat and the hard work as they tried to stay hydrated. “I’m not trying to take them out there to put them through the most gruelling boot camp in the world. I want to try to get them to get some sense of what the lifestyle was back then, to thank their lucky stars they’re not living in that century.”

A lot of them haven’t seen a lot, living at road’s end in La Loche. It’s a tough environment. A lot of these kids come along, they get a break, a respite from that. They can sit back and be themselves,” says Montgrand.

“It’s not a life changing moment for them but sometimes in the back of their minds they always have that memory, that good memory, they need more good memories than bad memories.”



Traditional Languages Meet New Form of Self Expression

Meme-making workshops help Northern youth reconnect to their roots

BY SHAUNNA GRANDISH

The latest forms of digital communication and expression are breathing new life into traditional languages for many Indigenous youth.

Fransaskois artist, educator, activist and graphic designer, Zoé Fortier travelled throughout Saskatchewan, including the northern communities of La Ronge, Patuanak and Prince Albert, helping youth create ‘memes’ – a virally-transmitted cultural symbol or social idea. Fortier was hired as a SaskCulture Cultural Engagement Animateur (CEA) in 2016. At her meme-making workshops in the

“A lot of young people struggle to understand that being different means that they bring something new and unique to the world.”
– Zoé Fortier

North, Fortier encouraged her participants, many of them Indigenous youth, to construct memes in their traditional

language (such as Cree or Dene) as a way of practicing and using their language skills. She based and designed her workshop on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Language teachers told Fortier they were inspired by the simple workshop idea she proposed. They found that the young participants discovered that their languages are alive and still part of the contemporary Saskatchewan cultural landscape.

“It felt extremely rewarding to reach out to youth and make them feel good about being ‘gifted’ with more than one

"First Nations people want to regain access to their languages, and they want to engage their youth with their languages."

– Zoé Fortier

language – or rather, of having a different perspective on life in Saskatchewan," explains Fortier. "I think we are at the brink of a whole new wave of cultural programming that will be language-orientated."

Fortier also believes that it is important to seek ways of encouraging Indigenous language retention by sharing ideas and resources on how youth can practice and use their language skills.

"First Nations people want to regain access to their languages, and they want to engage their youth with their languages," she adds.

She also is happy that the memes produced by the youth are now housed online where they will remain accessible for all.

The project also saw Fortier reflecting on her own youth. "I saw my younger self, struggling to feel confident in the fact that my language was not a barrier but the building blocks to who I was as a Saskatchewanite," she explains. "The more they reject who they are to fit in, the more they feel that who they are or what they have to offer is 'not good enough' or 'unwelcome'." Fortier found the young people she worked with would reject who they were to fit in. "A lot of young people struggle to understand that being different means that they bring something new and unique to the world."

Fortier says she believes the richness of human experience depends on our willingness to include and value different, and not so mainstream, perspectives and life experiences. "I was so happy that I could make some of these young people feel valued for all the different parts that formed them."



The Making of Memes

Q & A with Zoé Fortier

How did you get into meme-making?

I didn't really make memes before my work with SaskCulture, but I definitely was a consumer of them. I think they're just another contemporary vessel for communication - but with a strong emphasis on visuals. They're also a great and easy way to have fun while expressing yourself.

What is the cultural significance of memes (if there is one)?

In some ways memes are caricatures of the world around us - they synthesize what we might feel or think at a given

time in sometimes brutal or subtle ways.

They might look innocent, but I think they're pretty powerful in giving a voice to people. Maybe that's why they're such a great tool for teaching us about culture and identity. They give us a means to tackle hard subjects with humour.

How did the youth create the memes? Where did they find inspiration?

The way we created the meme depended on what kind of technology was available, but also which language we were intending to use. Working with Cree and Dene made me realize that there's work





to be done in making older languages accessibly 'digital'. I thought it was sad that it wasn't an easy thing to figure out how to write Dene on a cell phone or key board. Luckily, I found a few tools like the Web site denefont.com, Firstvoices.com and creedictionary.com.

Did any of the youth give you direct feedback on your workshops? What did they tell you?

What I saw was that youth were having fun with their ancestral language. Sometimes they spoke it already, sometimes it was something not so familiar. In the end, it didn't matter what their proficiency with the language was before the workshop. After an hour of coming up with jokes in Cree or Dene, they were starting to learn new short phrases or nicknames. It was really exciting to see the enthusiasm, and the interest they were showing for how the language could be used to make someone laugh, or to laugh at themselves. Humour often synthesizes culture, it's really all-encompassing, and so it's a perfect window into culture. The Elders or language speakers I worked with throughout my work with SaskCulture told me that they saw a real engagement from the youth with their language. For me, that's what mattered the most.

What's the website address where the project lives?

Look for Saskatchewan Memes or Saskmemes on Pinterest.

<https://www.pinterest.com/saskmemes/saskatchewan-memes/>

Feel free to follow other First Nation meme makers, such as Randy Morin or Neal Mcleod – their memes are HILARIOUS!



Important Link in Saskatchewan's North

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARMONY JOHNSON-HARDER



The Northern Drama Mentorship Program helps drama students with new skills and resources.

BY DIANE ELL

Facilitating community engagement in communities spread out over a large geographic area is no easy task. However, the Northern Sport, Culture and Recreation District (NSCRD) has developed the linkages needed to help develop cultural connections and activities in Saskatchewan's northern communities.

The NSCRD consists of eight staff members, who help facilitate the networks of sport, culture and recreation in the area. Harmony Johnson-Harder is the new Program Manager for Culture and Community Development. Working out of La Ronge, she works with community partners and others to help build and maintain cultural programming opportunities in the area each year.

"Culture is my passion, I love connecting with our communities while supporting them and developing culture programs across the North", says Johnson-Harder, "The north is rich in culture and diversity. We have artists, and singer-song writers. We have birch bark biters, drum-makers, and quilters, writers, jewelry makers and trappers. Northerners are passionate

about our unique culture, and vast geography. Although we find our identity and strength in our isolation, it also is our greatest barrier."

Over the years, the NSCRD has been instrumental in several key programs that are still running today.

Northern Spirits continues to soar

The NSCRD has been an active supporter of the Northern Spirits program since it began. Northern Spirits, originally developed and organized by Musqua Entertainment, began engaging youth in performance and production experiences more than 10 years ago. Each year, youth from the north learn skills in performing and producing a showcase (stage presence, live band, set design, etc.). The multi-day workshops, held annually in the fall, engage 70 to 80 youth from different northern communities, in experiences designed to help mentor their creative abilities, whether they are aspiring musicians, singers, actors, presenters, designers or production technicians.

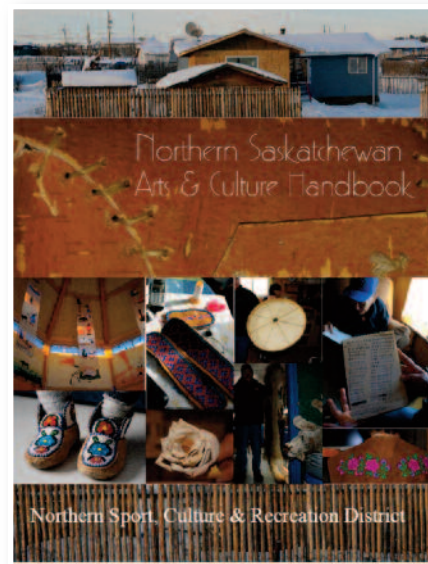
After the workshops, 25 youth are

selected based on their determination, passion and drive, to be part of the Showcase held in February. While audiences look forward to the Showcase performance each year, it is the youth that benefit from sharing their skills. Along with increased confidence and new ideas, many have gone on to put their training to use.

Partners in drama

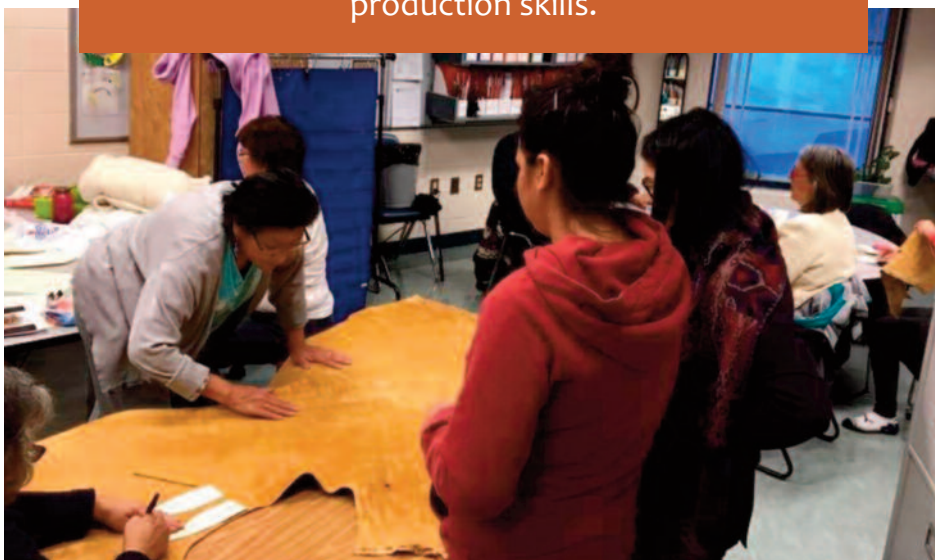
The NSCRD was instrumental in recognizing the need for drama classes in the north. A partnership with the Saskatchewan Drama Association resulted in an ongoing program, the Northern Drama Mentorship Program, which provides a network of support to aspiring drama clubs in the north.

As a result of this program, students from junior high and high school, from five community schools in northern Saskatchewan, belong to drama clubs that work on their own theatre production. The Northern Drama Mentorship Program supports drama mentors who travel to northern communities to discuss the program with teachers and students, find out participants' needs, help choose a play, share skills and develop the process, including everything from basic improvisation to technical theatre production. According to Levay Turner, a teacher from Twin Lakes Community School in Buffalo Narrows, "At the beginning of the school year, kids are already asking "When is drama club starting up?" Teachers have access to mentors and resources to help these youth succeed.





Northern Spirits continues to bring northern youth together to learn and share performance and production skills.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARMONY JOHNSON-HARDER

Each year, one of the participating schools hosts the Northern Drama Festival, supported by the NSCRD and SaskCulture, and features the work of three or four of the drama clubs. The plays are adjudicated and receive review and critique from experienced theatre professionals.

According to Turner, “They take it pretty seriously. They work towards competition all year. They know the rules and they really strive to do well.”

Promoting northern artists

In 2011, the NSCRD published the Northern Saskatchewan Arts and Culture Handbook – a colourful, 50-page publication that highlights many of the region’s creative talent. The District collected the names of northern artists by conducting a northern Saskatchewan-wide artist registry. Available in print and online, the handbook helps promote northern artists, from various disciplines, giving them more province-wide exposure.

Besides promoting artists, the handbook includes useful strategies on successfully integrating arts in schools or community programming. Visit www.nscrd.com to check it out.

Promotion and support for the Cameco fund

The Cameco Creative Kids Northern Cultural Fund is providing cultural opportunities for many youth in the north. The NSCRD is helping get the word out to communities about this fund, and others.

Connecting the northern schools

THE NSCRD also has a leadership role in the sport, culture and recreation linkages in 22 community schools located in the north. Each school has a Community and School Recreation Coordinator who facilitates the delivery of various after-school, evening and/or weekend sport, culture and/or recreation activities, usually

held at the school, which serves as a community hub. For more information on this program, contact Brandy Smart at 306-922-2004 or email: bsmart@nscrd.com.

Supporting a growing need for grant-writers

The NSCRD has also helped facilitate several Grant-Writing Workshops for SaskCulture and its partners. Most recently, Dominga Robinson, outreach consultant, SaskCulture, travelled to several northern communities – Creighton, Buffalo Narrows and La Ronge – to share information about SaskCulture grants along with key strategies in successful grant-writing. Thanks to the NSCRD, the workshops were very well attended.

“People are very eager to learn what they need to do to be successful at grant writing and to hear about the various options that are available to obtain funding for cultural activity,” says Robinson. “Some participants drove from two hours away to attend and they were so grateful to have someone come to them to provide this type of training. There was a lot of excitement about the possibilities for their communities and I saw more than one lightbulb moment about why they may not have been successful in their applications in the past.”

Thanks to the community-minded spirit of the residents of Saskatchewan’s northern communities, many different cultural activities continue to flourish, and many more are ideas just waiting to get underway. THE NSCRD, supported by funding from Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation, is a key partner. Cultural groups seeking to make connections in the northern part of the province are always encouraged to contact the NSCRD, who can help identify interests and facilitate potential partnerships. Contact Harmony Johnson-Harder at 306-425-3127, ext. 4, email: hjohnson-harder@mscrd.com, or visit www.nscrd.com.

TOP: Northern Community and Recreation Culture Program at Bells Point Elementary School Lac La Ronge Indian Band Kitsaki.

BOTTOM: The mitt making program averages 8-10 youth, Jody Ratt the CSRC (community school recreation coordinator) loves to hear the old ladies laugh while they do the mitt making. Jody feels the biggest success is finding out that teenagers want to be a part of this as well.



Family Camp Brings Together Community and Traditions

BY DANICA LORER



“Sitting back and watching the kids, looking at the smiles on their faces, not a care in the world, they’re in a safe zone.” – Philip Durocher

For over two decades, South Bay has been the site of an annual community celebration that brings together important modern and traditional practices.

The 22nd Annual Wellness Gathering, hosted by the Ile a la Cross Friendship Centre, took place this past August, and welcomed 373 participants – most of them youth.

“The main issue is the negative influences in town, [the Wellness Gathering] addresses alcohol and drug abuse and promotes a healthier lifestyle,” says Phillip Durocher, a board member, Ile a la Crosse Friendship Centre, who has been involved in the camp for many years.

“Always make sure you give them what they want in order to give them what they



need,” says Durocher as he explained the involvement of youth in the planning process. Along with workshops and presentations focusing on culture, education, health and wellness, the participants enjoy a wide range of entertainment and recreational activities: horse and wagon rides, beach volleyball, water sports, live bands, square dance and jiggling.

Elders also had the youth involved in fishing and snaring rabbits. “Girls are busy with the Kookums, the female Elders. They

learn beading and cooking bannock over a fire, while they’re learning to bead, the Elder usually tells stories.”

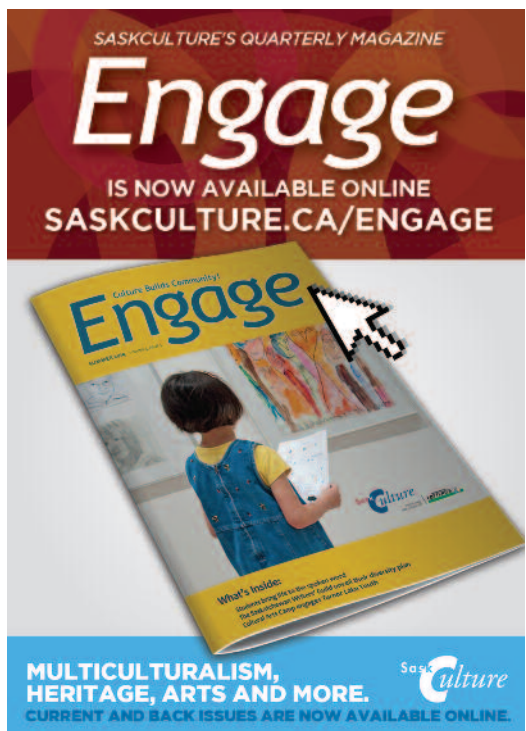
Amy Morin was the Family Camp Coordinator in 2015 and 2016. It was important for her to offer many different activities to the participants so there was something to appeal to everyone. She enjoyed working with the Elders and the relationships built during the camp. “I’ve had so much respect for the Elders, and they have the same towards me,” she says.

Durocher’s favourite camp activity is the

Photos courtesy of Ile à la Croix Friendship Centre



“This is a lot of tradition, a lot of history for the community. Our roots are tied to it, the location and the beauty.” – Brennan Merasty



sweat lodge ceremonies. “They have one for the girls and one for the boys. Sitting back and watching the kids, looking at the smiles on their faces, not a care in the world, they’re in a safe zone,” he says.

The camp, supported by the SaskCulture Métis Cultural Development Fund, makes a difference in the lives of the participants. “A lot of people that have gone through our conference have completed their education and gone on to university. They’ve become RCMP officers, teachers, one is a surgeon, a lot of professional people have gone through [the camp],” says Durocher.

Brennan Merasty started out as a youth participant, was a volunteer, worked with security, and then coordinated two back to back conferences. He explained the importance of the location. “We have the south side beach which is huge and wide open. The camping is great, the municipality really looks after the grounds and people respect the land and area. My dad’s family grew up there in certain times throughout the year. They would do some camping for trapping and harvesting berries. There’s a spot that my late grandmother is known for, for setting up her camp and blueberry picking. There is a lot of tradition, a lot of history for the community, our roots are tied to it, the location and the beauty.”



Youth and Elders Voyage held in conjunction with Back to Batoche Days July 2016.

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