

The Westend Weekly

Bringing Communities Together



Box 66, Rainy River, ON POW 1L0 Ph. 852-3815, FAX 852-1863, e-mail: westendweekly@tbaytel.net - Serving the District for 18 years VOL. 18, NO. 4 Wednesday, April 28, 2010
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Couchiching First Nations to erect toll booth near Causeway

by Marlene Deschamps
Couchiching First Nations Chief and Council held a press conference on Monday, May 26th. Present at the meeting were Chief Chuck McPherson, Councillors Ed Yerxa, Dick Bird, Christine Jourdain, Eugene McPherson, Dan Mainville and Band Manager, Smokey (Louis) Bruyere. Another Councillor, Sara Mainville, was not present because of previous commitments.

Couchiching will be having a slowdown of traffic in order to hand out brochures which detail how they feel they have been treated unjustly and unfairly by various levels of government. Following the slowdown they will be erecting a toll booth at the foot of the causeway that leads into their community. The toll booth will be placed there on May 21st. Chief McPherson said since people have no objections to paying toll on a privately owned bridge to enter into Canada, there should be no problem with them paying to enter into their community. He added the tolls would be compatible with the tolls on the bridge people cross on a regular basis to come across from International Falls. The reasoning behind this move is clearly stated in the brochure.

The first issue where there is no satisfactory resolution from the government is the contaminated soil left behind by the J.A. Mathieu Sawmill as well as other sawmills and wood treatment plants operating on their lands in the past. Chief McPherson said the government has the responsibility to restore those land to pristine conditions and the only thing they have done to date is spend \$2 million to confirm what they already know. He quoted from a letter from Acting Regional Director for Canada Northern Area, Leigh Jessen, which said (in terms of a resolution to most problems) -if we do it for you it will set a precedent and we will have to do it for everybody. He mentioned that he thought the priority should be

for health and safety for all First Nations. The brochure has pictures showing the sad state of the shoreline along the questionable land and people should remember this problem may not impact Couchiching residents. The water does flow west and there could be a high probability that some of those toxins are in the water around the beach area all along Rainy Lake to the west. Chief McPherson added that the government wants to do another study and Chief and Council are saying no more studies-we need a remedy-we need to get people compensated so they can move out of their contaminated homes. The problem at this point involves 6 residents. They were requesting \$1.5 million from the province and the province came up with a counter offer of \$250,000 from each level of government-less than half of what is required. They are still working on the issue but are getting very frustrated with both the Provincial and Federal government for not coming up with any workable and fair solutions.

The second issue and the reason why there will be a toll booth is to address, again, the provincial and federal governments use of their land for a passage way, but done under very questionable circumstances. According to Couchiching leadership, Highway 11 which runs through their community is a source of economic prosperity for Northwestern Ontario and the Rainy River District. But the economic prosperity from Highway 11 comes at Couchiching First Nations' expense. To compensate them for the land used for the highway right of way, the provincial government and INAC negotiated to transfer what is known as the 'two chain shore allowance' to the reserve. The 44.5 acres of two chain land would be transferred in exchange for 33.9 acres of land to be used for the highway. The problem? the 44.5 acres were surveyed erroneously by the surveyor E.C. Caddy in 1876.

Caddy was commissioned to survey the neighboring Agency #1 reserve, but continued along the shoreline through what is now known as Couchiching reserve. The survey, and eventual land transfer of the two chain properties of the provincial government were never supposed to take place. Furthermore, of the 44.5 acres of two chain shore allowance surveyed by Caddy in 1876 only 9 acres of actual land exists today due to flooding from a local dam constructed in the early 1900's. The government knowingly attempted to transfer flooded lands they never owned to Couchiching First Nations as compensation for a highway right of way. The highway generated billions of dollars of economic activity in the region. Recognizing their mistake the Federal and Provincial governments recently offered \$250,000 each as compensation for the loss of land. The amount was viewed as an insult to Couchiching First Nation leadership. So while the Highway 11 right of way has economically benefited the region, Couchiching has been excluded and exploited in the process.

It was pointed out that Couchiching is required to pay non residents for any level of service they receive from Fort Frances such as rink time and have paid it and yet the Town has not paid for the one extension on the lease of Pithers Point. It was noted they would not be negotiating with the Town as long as the Town is putting an injunction in the Courts based on some law from the far ago past in terms of any treaty or agreement issues. It was also pointed out that until 1960, First Nations leadership were not allowed to retain counsel to make sure they understood the documents that were being signed. Not only was it not allowed but they would actually be charged and may end up in jail if they employed legal counsel. It was mentioned that the Town is

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Rainy River Trade Show packs them in again



People were lined up at the door waiting for the 10 o'clock opening and by the end of the day five hundred paying guests had checked out the more than 50 booths. Exhibitors came from different parts of Ontario, Manitoba and Minnesota and were pleased with the enthusiastic response of the public. There were lots of prizes to be won at the individual booths as well as an impressive penny table and door prize. The number of exhibits has grown each year and next year promises to be the biggest yet.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week



From left front-Dorion Chambers, Tammi Noble and Trudy McCormick from the Legal Clinic, Peggy Loyie, Director of local office.--back from left Constable Ashley Gibbs from Treaty #3, Cheryl Horne from Victim Witness Assistance Program and volunteers Debbie Emes and Ashley Steele.

by Marlene Deschamps
National Victims of Crime Awareness Week ran from April 18-24th. Locally there were a lot of press releases, presentations, and radio spots with the week culminating at the Appreciation Dinner for both the volunteers and the different agencies that work with the local office.

Peggy Loyie was the guest speaker at the Fort Frances Rainy River Business Women's Network monthly meeting on Wednesday, April 21st.

On Thursday, April 22nd an Open House was held at the office located on Scott Street in Fort Frances. The Open House was well attended and the various agencies that are the referral base for the services available were there with pamphlets and information on how they

helped victims. Director/Administrator, Peggy Loyie said that they have protocol in place for transportation to the Rainy River Shelter of Hope; they work with the legal clinic and with the Fire Department. She cited the help they gathered for recent victims of fires. They also work with Treaty #3 and OPP along with Emergency Medical Services. They also liaison with various service agencies so they can tap into what they have available. The number of people who have accessed the Victims Service office help are going up and over the past year there were around 70 people they referred on or were directly involved in helping. Peggy said the families of victims also benefit. She added there has been increased awareness and

there had been a good response from businesses and citizens over the week. She mentioned the place mats many local restaurants used that were especially printed up for the week.

The week wound up with an Appreciation Dinner held at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #29 for volunteers and the community partners. A great meal was served by the Ladies Auxiliary and the volunteers and community partners were presented with certificates. The volunteers that work directly with victims were presented with blue sweatshirts with the local office logo on it. It was a pretty hectic week for the staff and workers but they feel they have increased awareness of just what there is out there for victims to access at a time of great need.

Joyce Young's Mini Horse herd growing



Mother Goldie and young Irish with Joyce Young.

by Marlene Deschamps
Joyce Young is now breeding mini horses and intends to use them to work with the special needs children that use her therapeutic services. Although she sadly just lost another new one, there are two that are healthy and one of them has already brought lots of pleasure to one special needs little girl.

Joyce said now that she knows what happened with the newest newborn, she will not lose another one that way. She apparently wasn't given enough information when she first got the horses to know what to do to prevent the recent loss. These little horses only weigh around ten pounds at birth so

are really small. The last two Joyce had weighed in at 9 pounds and 11 pounds. Someone recently said the smallest one on record to date was around 7 pounds. Joyce is really looking forward to growing her little herd and helping the special needs children who she works with.



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