

ACKNOWLEDGMENT 'WONDERFUL THING', SAYS FIRST NATIONS COORDINATOR

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recognizing Halton Hills is within the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

"It is important that we recognize this and build relationships with Indigenous Nations," said Mayor Rick Bonnette.

While the land acknowledgment recognizes the treaty holders, there is still work to be done.

"The land acknowledgement is the very first step on a very long path towards reconciliation," said Catherine McLeod, senior arts and culture specialist for the town.

The June 14 acknowledgement uses language recommended by a document on the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation's website, but McLeod said, considering the complicated history of southern Ontario, the land acknowledgment will transform over time.

"It's a very long process, the very first step is recognizing the Treaty Lands," McLeod said.

"This is one piece of a much larger Truth and Reconciliation plan."

While the Mississaugas of the Credit are the treaty holders of much of southern Ontario, their traditional territory is along the north shore of Georgian Bay.

"I think it's a wonderful thing that people are now acknowledging the people that lived on the land long ago," said Darin Wybenga, traditional knowledge and land use co-ordinator for the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

"I like to think we are a founding people," Wybenga said. "The French, the British, but what about the First Nations? We are the original people."

Wybenga noted though his First Nation holds the treaty, traditionally the area was inhabited by the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee.

While all levels of government make efforts toward reconciliation, Wybenga said the responsibility also falls to individuals.

"This is one piece of a much larger Truth and Reconciliation plan."

- Catherine McLeod, senior arts and culture specialist for the Town

"If we leave it to government responsibility — I don't think it'll ever get done," Wybenga said. "It's up to every individual person in the treaty lands to understand whose lands they live on, the history of the people who live there and the treaty relationships that went on and to try to reconcile the two groups as we move forward in history."

For Jody Harbour the land acknowledgment helps to make people more conscious of the land.

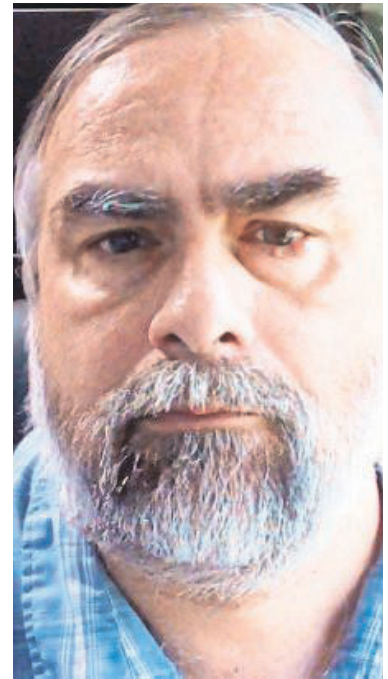
"(Land acknowledgement) has nothing to do with materialism but the real spirit of the people and of the earth," said Harbour, a

Haudenosaunee woman. "People are waking to the fact that when they come together, they should acknowledge where they're coming from."

Harbour is one of the founders of Grandmother's Voice, an Halton-based organization created to advance education, knowledge, and understanding of Indigenous cultures and practices.


"As these truths are coming out about how Canada became Canada, people can now understand why our communities of Indigenous people are the way they are," Harbour said. "Equity, diversity, and inclusion — it was already here before people came over on the boats."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: The recently-implemented land acknowledgement at Halton Hills town council meetings recognizes the treaty lands of the Mississaugas. We wanted to find out how residents and officials feel about this action and what it means toward reconciliation.




Darin Wybenga photo
Darin Wybenga, traditional knowledge and land use coordinator for the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

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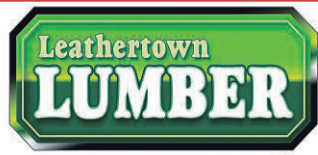

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