

# Bridge a link to northwest industrial park

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Two cultures came together beside the Grand River Saturday to celebrate a common history and bright future. In a ceremony rich with symbolism and full of emotion, the \$3.5 million Northwest Pedestrian Bridge spanning the Grand River officially opened, marking the end of a rocky eight years of planning and construction.

On top of connecting 26 kilometres of trails in Brantford, the bridge will serve as a transportation route for water, utility and sewage lines slated to service the new 11,000-acre northwest industrial park under development on Hardy Road.

It will also connect 26 kilometres of trails as part of the national Trans Canada Trail.

The city co-operated with the Six Nations, which seeks to protect the river. In 1994, native and environmental protesters blocked construction.

## COMMUNITIES WORK TOGETHER

On Saturday, that friction was forgotten.

"After many hard years and much negotiation, we are here today to celebrate the coming together of two cultures," said Mayor Chris Friel. "The two cultures are beginning to work together to find a common purpose and common goal."

Six Nations Chief Coun. Wellington Staats, while stressing the political and economic benefits of the bridge, said its completion serves as an example of the positive outcome of native and non-native governments working together.

"I can only look forward to how our two communities can work together and set an example for others across the country," Staats said. "You do things like this, and it benefits the community. It's another step on the trail to working together, to co-operating and to making things happen."

"This can be a benefit to us all."

Brant MPP Jane Stewart called the completion of the bridge a result of an "extraordinary partnership" between Six Nations council and the City of Brantford.

"We are connecting and reconnecting our communities," Stewart said. "To me, that is the most significant and symbolic part of this undertaking."

The minister of Human Resources and Development hailed the bridge opening attended by close to 1,000 people over the course of the afternoon as an example of what can come from a process of consensus building between native and non native communities.

"The day is a reflection of the history of all the partners here," she said. "That's why this day is important."

Brant MPP Dave Levac commented on the importance of Six Nations council and the City of Brantford sharing a constructive relationship.

"This is a fine moment in which we are able to bring our cultures together," Levac said.

In a tree planting ceremony, Mona

Staats read a portion of *The Great Law* entitled *The Eagles Cry*, which offers a path to what is known in native tradition, as the great tree of peace.

"We shall all seek shelter under this tree and live in peace," she read.

The words will remain a permanent fixture at the site of the new bridge on a plaque embedded in rock.

Staats' reading also touched upon unification of purpose and respectfully settling differences — symbolized in how a single arrow can be broken, but five bound together cannot.

During the ceremony, she broke apart an arrow and placed it below a white pine tree where Friel and Chief Staats covered it with earth.

"I feel a sense of peace," Friel said after the ceremony. "There's been such tension and conflict in the last six years. I think it's breaking up."

Josie Mannen, executive assistant to the mayor, who played a role in organizing the bridge opening ceremony, was moved to tears as Friel and Staats cut the ribbon officially opening the bridge.

"It's really emotional," Mannen said. "We've spent months and months of hard work. It's been a true partnership between Six Nations council and the City of Brantford."

After the ribbon cutting, the Paris Pipe Band led a procession of hundreds in attendance across the 1,000 foot bridge.

The longest of its kind in Ontario, the bridge will officially become part of the national Trans Canada Trail.



Mayor Chris Friel and Six Nations Chief Coun. Wellington Staats (centre) listen as Mona Staats reads "The Eagle's Cry" during ceremonies Saturday afternoon to open and dedicate the Northwest Pedestrian Bridge.

Brian Thompson, Expositor Staff