

*Year is chance to celebrate indigenous peoples*

OHSWKEN — I was glad the Iroquoian Institute and the City of Brantford did not let this year go past without a reminder that there are indigenous people in Brant County. After all, 1993 has been declared the International Year of Indigenous Peoples.

The program they presented Dec. 3 at Branlyn School in Brantford was very interesting to me and I'm glad I went.

The International Year of Indigenous Peoples is not just a forum to bring to light the problems of indigenous people. It is also a time to show off their unique music and dance, which is a part of the culture of indigenous people everywhere.

I suppose if the Creator had wanted us to be all the same, he would have created everyone the same.

Until now, the indigenous people of the world such as the Sami (Laplanders) of Norway, Sweden and Russia, and Maori of New Zealand, and Aborigines of Australia and the misnamed Indians of North and South America, have been largely ignored.

They have had their lands taken away from them with little or no compensation. They have had laws concerning them passed by others who did not even consult them. They have been declared law breakers for following their own age-old laws and customs and for breaking laws that they had no voice in making.

In most cases, they have been denied the vote or have been denied a chance to place one of their own representatives in government.



Indigenous peoples all over the globe have had similar experiences. The wealthy and greedy corporations, who seem to control the governments of most developed countries have caused a lot of grief. They have clear-cut forests and they have polluted rivers and lakes. They have frightened away animals the indigenous people depended on to live. They have killed off the fish and their giant dams have flooded prime lands.

The local indigenous people at Six Nations have had some of these problems to contend with. For example, we have not been able to drink water from the taps in Ohsweken for over a year now. This water is treated after it comes from the badly polluted Grand River but it is still not safe to drink. The Grand River was not polluted by the local indigenous people.

The program at Branlyn School was opened by Elder Wilfred Jamieson in the Mohawk language. Brantford Mayor Bob Taylor also made some opening remarks.

Arnold General's Iroquois dancers demonstrated several traditional dances but most of the program consisted of various native singers singing

their own compositions.

Randell Hill sang a couple of his modern gospel songs with nice guitar work. His second song combined Mohawk phrases with a well-known Mohawk hymn. Wray Anderson did something similar with the traditional "Alligator Dance." He sped it up and added a pleasing guitar arrangement.

Other performers included the well-known Willie Dunn, Trisha Sky and the Darin Martin Brothers band.

The highlight of the evening was an indigenous rap band called 7th Fire. I'll tell you all about them in a later column.

*Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a freelance writer who lives on the Six Nations reserve.*