

Indigenous Languages Day on Six Nations territory

By Mari Reeve

OHSWEKEN - Roughly 120 people gathered from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday at Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP) for a celebration of the Indigenous languages of Six Nations. Tannis Hill, with SNP, was the main organizer of this event and made sure everything was running smoothly.

The gathering began with socializing and interacting with the different language school representatives, each with their own information booth. Rick Hill, coordinator at Deyohaha:ge Indigenous Knowledge Centre, presented information about the language resources available through the centre.

K a w e n n i : i o (Gaweni:yo) School had extensive information about their curriculum model and the Cayuga and Mohawk Immersion Planning Framework. The *Two Row Times* was able to chat with the student and teacher representatives from the Cayuga, Mohawk, and Onondaga language programs offered in the area. Everyone that we had a chance to speak with had great things to say about their programs, and the beauty of the different language programs coming together and celebrating.

Darla Henry, student at the Onondaga Language School, offered attendees an opportunity to speak in the language and be thankful for a drink of sap water. Darla says, "I think it's really good we have gatherings like this on Six Nations because it's who we are. Our language defines who we are. I think we should have more gatherings to promote our language."

People who gave thanks in the language were not only offered a delicious drink of sap water, but also a CD with language recordings and other useful resources.

The event also featured the launch of a new book: *Carrying It Forward. Traditional Knowledge through the Eyes of Young Hodinohso:ni Artists.*

Rohahi:yo Brant, studying in the Onkwawenna kentyokwa program, shared his enthusiasm about the day's events: "It's awesome to hear the other languages and how strongly related they are. A lot of words are similar. It's good to see people so passionate like us, doing what they love. Hopefully in the future it will be a whole weekend celebration of the languages."

Artie Martin, who attends the same Adult Immersion program for Kaniienkeha (Mohawk), displayed the multimedia aids the class uses to learn, like videos that are both interactive and entertaining.

Instructor Renae Hill of the Cayuga Adult Program, and one of her five students, Tesha Emarthle also displayed language resources such as pictures, flash cards, grammar rules and language recordings. Hill also invites elderly Cayuga speakers to class to help students with their conversation skills. This helps in demonstrating the difference in dialects between speakers of the Cayuga language.

This is a tactic that works well for Emarthle, who says, "Most of us don't have access to elders, we are second language speakers... We always have at least one person (if not three or four) aged 60, some as old as 89, to speak to the class. It's helpful to us, and our elders. There are some differences in dialects and speakers so that is helpful to hear many different ways of speaking Cayuga. We are being exposed to proper enunciation and higher fluency."

Hill estimates that there are currently only about 40 fluent speakers of the Cayuga language.

"These five advanced students are wanting to teach. It is good to see this today and know that we all have the same wish to keep languages going."



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