

Border Crossing delayed when marchers asked for I.D.

By Donna Duric
Writer

NIAGARA FALLS - About 200 people celebrating the 87th annual Border Crossing in Niagara Falls Saturday were ready to call in support from across Turtle Island and shut down the Rainbow Bridge after border guards stalled the group demanding each person show I.D. at toll booths. It's the first time in the annual border crossing's 87-year-history that border guards demanded to see identification.

It goes against the principle of the yearly event - marking free passage for Onkwehonwe people to cross the border between Canada and the United States, said marcher John "Sewatis" Garlow. "They tried to individually I.D. all of us and get us to sign our names and we said, 'no way,'" said Garlow. "We started texting the men from

Six Nations, asking them to be ready to come and shut down the bridge. They were going to come." After about 15 minutes of arguing between parade-goers and border guards, the group passed through without having to show identification, cheering, honking their horns loudly and displaying various flags, eagle staffs and banners as they wound their way over the Rainbow Bridge, through the parking lot, and through the streets of Niagara Falls to Oakes Park on Law Ave. Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill was standing on the Canadian side, ready to greet the marchers after they came through the toll booths, when a guard demanded she and a Turtle Island News reporter vacate the property and stand on the other side of the street. The move prevented the reporter from filming the inter-

action between guards and parade-goers but the guard insisted the parking lot was "private property." Members of the group could be heard from the bridge saying, "That's your I.D." before the media was kicked off the bridge and told to leave. A border guard told the media present: "You guys weren't pre-cleared with the bridge commission. It's private property. You just gotta go." Hill told him, "This is our traditional land." She asked the guard why the group was being stopped and he said he didn't know. "They do this every year with no problem," Hill told him. "Goddamn Canadian government." Saturday's event is an annual celebration marking the Jay Treaty, which recognizes free crossing for all Onkwehone people on Turtle Island. "It's supposed to symbolize



The Indian Defense League of America's 87th annual parade continued on the Canadian side after a short interruption by customs officials. (Photos by Donna Duric)

that we have free border rights. We should never have to go through this border. According to the Jay Treaty, we are able to cross this border freely at any time and we always get problems from the Canadian government." Hill told reporters on a curb across the street where they were forced to stand that she'd been participating in the event for years and this is the first time she'd ever seen

parade-goers given a hard time. "They usually just stand back and let everyone walk through," Hill said. Hill said her great-grandmother as one of the founders of the Indian Defense League of America, which organizes the annual border crossing celebrating the Jay Treaty. "She's probably rolling over in her grave that this is happening," Hill said. "I'm certainly

going to make a call to the federal government and find out (what happened)." The group celebrated the rest of the day with a picnic at Oakes Park, that also included a Smoke Dance contest, baby and regalia contests, slo-pitch softball and the crowning of Miss IDLA 2015 Kyleigh Farmer. The IDLA was founded in 1926 by Tuscarora Chief Clinton Rickard.