

Bob Rae joins Save the Evidence Campaign

By Jayson Koblun

BRANTFORD – The past has shown us that history books are not always right; Hon. Robert K. Rae toured Canada's first Residential School earlier this week to learn the school's history from those who have inter-generational experience.

"I think it's very important for all of Canada to embrace and understand this experience," said Rae, former Ontario Premier and Interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. "I think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped to educate all of us about how important this experience is in understanding the relationship between First Nations and other communities."

After the tour on Monday at the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School building, Rae was announced the Honourary Patron of the Woodland Cultural Centre's Save The Evidence fundraising campaign — a campaign raising necessary funds for repairs and renovations of the school to ensure the

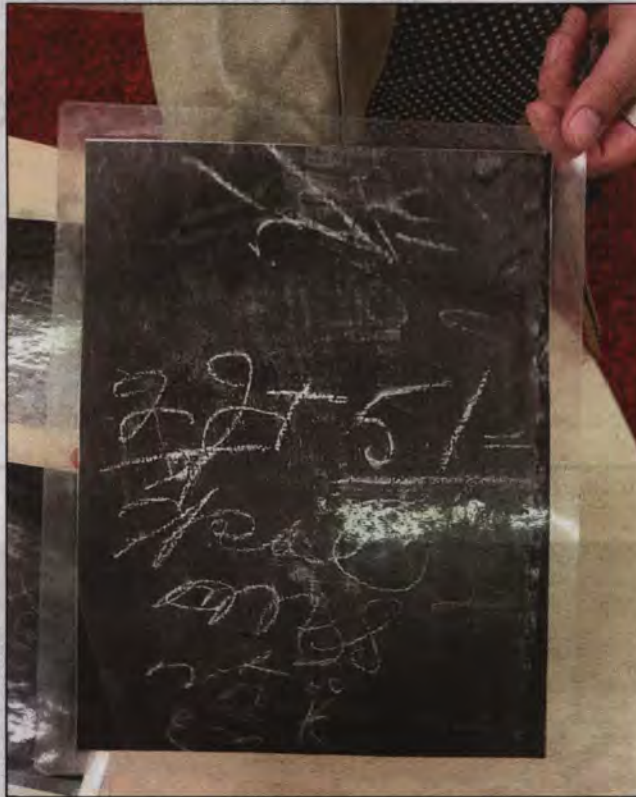


Hon. Robert K. Rae is the new Honourary Patron of the Woodland Cultural Centre's Save The Evidence fundraising campaign. SUBMITTED PHOTO

physical evidence of the dark history of residential schools in Canada is never forgotten.

"We now have an opportunity to create a place that will serve as a historical reminder for all Canadians. An educational centre, a museum, a learning centre where people can understand what happened," said Rae. "Most of the other residential schools have been torn down or destroyed across the country."

Lisa VanEvery, who works at the Woodland Cultural Centre, said that it is so important for adults



A photo of what teachers at the Mohawk Institute thought was a student's math problem really turned out to be a secret way for registered students to let one another know who was sweet on each other. PHOTO BY JAYSON KOBLUN

and young children to learn this history.

"Where else are you going to learn it?" she asked. "History books are not always right, so to come here and get a tour from people who may be inter-

generational survivors themselves, who can give you the correct history is so important."

VanEvery mentioned that her grandfather, who has now passed, went to the school and she wishes

she could have asked him about his experience. But even if she had asked, he may not have wanted to tell her.

"Many survivors don't want to remember their experiences here," she said. "It's only recently that some survivors are beginning to share their stories; they weren't before."

Guided by the centre's Education Co-ordinator Lorrie Gallant, Rae heard the horrendous acts that took place in the school, but he was also touched by the stories of humanity's resiliency and love that the students had for each other despite their terrible circumstances — here is one that he won't soon forget:

Gallant told him that the students were all given numbers when they were registered at the school and that because interactions between girls and boys were few and far between, a boy could only show he liked a girl without getting in trouble by writing it out like a math equation. So, if boy number 22 like girl num-

ber 51, he would write it down in chalk as $22 + 51$ to let her know. The teachers thought the children were simply doing homework so they were never the wiser — it's stories like this that show the children were so much more than just a registered number.

"What's always remarkable is the story of survival, of persistence, the resilience and the struggle," said Rae. "And I think that's very much the story of this place. It's a place of great hardship and great sadness, but it's also a story of great love."

As the Honourary Patron of the campaign, Rae will be Woodland's partner and advocate for this culturally and historically significant project. As well as helping to bring much needed awareness to the campaign, it also serves to bring awareness to the Mohawk Institute, one of only a handful of Residential Schools left standing in Canada.

"That's going to take a lot of time and effort to do it, but we need to start somewhere," said Rae.