

Heritage Minutes showcase and celebrate National Aboriginal Day

By Jayson Koblun

BRANTFORD – Two young men of Six Nations are part of Historica Canada's latest Heritage Minute that explores the dark history of the country's residential school system.

The video was shown for the first time at the Woodland Cultural Centre's National Aboriginal Day ceremony after Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada and other dignitaries toured the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School.

"I saw the finished video for the first time this morning. It was great to be a part of something as important as this it," said 12-year-old actor Davin Bomberry. "The filming was tough; when you act something out you have to really try and feel how your character would feel in those moments. It didn't feel good knowing what he [Chanie] went through.

Bomberry plays Chanie (Charlie) Wenjack; a young boy who attended Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School in Kenora, Ont., in the '1960s. Chanie ran away from the school and his frozen body was found one week later beside the railroad tracks near Reddit, on Oct. 23, 1966.

Bomberry's mother, Amy, watched much of the video's shooting and



A new Heritage Minute commercial tells the story of Chanie (Charlie) Wenjack, a student who runs away from residential school. It is narrated by his sister Pearl Achneepineskum, who is a survivor of the residential school system. Davin Bomberry portrays Chanie (Charlie) Wenjack in the commercial. It will air on network television across Canada. PHOTO VIA HERITAGE MINUTE

said that had a tough time watching her son played a character that dies.

"It's not a good feeling," she told the *Two Row Times* not long after the video was originally shot. "Knowing that some parents actually went thorough this — having their children taken away and then never brought back — is unbearable."

Jared John, 12, played another student in the video. His scene shows his character getting his long hair sheared off right before he is enrolled into the school. John has been growing his hair for as long

as he can remember and couldn't imagine someone cutting it off without his permission. Even though he was wearing a wig in the video, he couldn't help but imagine what it would be like if he really were the boy he played getting his hair cut off.

"I was shocked and scared," said John. "It was a wig, but I still felt like what was going on wasn't right."

The video launched on National Aboriginal Day and Governor General of Canada David Johnston said a few words before the video was shown.

"As honorary witnesses

of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Sharon [Johnston's wife] and I understand the importance of learning about residential schools and the impact they had on First Nations people in order to work towards healing the wounds of the past and creating a better future for all," said Johnston. "National Aboriginal Day is an opportunity to continue to tell the complete story of Canada and to celebrate the great contributions Aboriginal peoples have made to this country."

Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill, Honourable



Davin Bomberry standing with his family; Sydney; Amy; Patrick; Cody; and Kennedy on National Aboriginal Day moments after the short video he starred in was shown to an audience inside the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford. PHOTO BY JAYSON KOBLUN

Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Canada, Amanda L. Sherrington, President and CEO of Prince's Charities Canada and David Zimmer from the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation also gave speeches and remarks regarding National Aboriginal Day.

"We're going to have to petition the federal government and the new prime minister to change this to National Indigenous Day," said Elected Chief Ava, followed by loud cheers and applause from the audience.



Jared John, 12, standing with his mother Tracy outside the Woodland Cultural Centre before a film he played a part in was shown on National Aboriginal Day. PHOTO BY JAYSON KOBLUN