



Celebration of Giving



Aboriginal community celebrates giving to Winnipeg Harvest October 10, 2009

Aboriginal youth, flag bearers, dancers, drummers and musicians helped lead the Celebration of Giving – A Benefit for Winnipeg Harvest at The Forks in Winnipeg on October 10.

The event was initiated by the Aboriginal people, and began with the lighting of the Sacred Fire and the gathering of the Drums of the Four Directions: drums from the Aboriginal, Japanese, African and Celtic traditions.

Sacred Fire

On the sunny and crisp Thanksgiving Saturday morning at the Oodena Circle, representatives from the four races lit the Sacred Fire, as the drums sounded and flag bearers hoisted flags with the images of the seven animals representing the Seven Sacred Laws of Aboriginal people.

Two Aboriginal youth, Ryanna and Lil Bear White – chosen to represent the future – lit the Sacred Fire from the Eastern direction. Minister of Healthy Living Kerri Irvin-Ross, Phoebe Man and Sabina Ijaz were chosen to light the Fire from the North, South and Western directions, representing the White, Asian and Black races respectively.

The purpose of the Sacred Fire was to introduce the Seven Sacred Laws to the City of Winnipeg:

- Love – Represented by the Eagle
- Respect – Represented by the Buffalo
- Courage – Represented by the Bear
- Honesty – Represented by the Sa-be (Bigfoot)
- Wisdom – Represented by the Beaver
- Humility – Represented by the Wolf
- Truth – Represented by the Turtle

Celebration of Giving

The Celebration of Giving was an initiative started by the Aboriginal organization Turtle Lodge in partnership with Winnipeg Harvest, to encourage people to fast for one day on October 10 to experience hunger and donate the monetary value of what their daily food would have cost to Winnipeg Harvest. If unable to fast, they could support the cause by making a non-perishable food donation to Winnipeg Harvest, and by giving of themselves in service in other ways. The Celebration of Giving goals were also to encourage youth, schools, universities, organizations and people from all walks of life to come up with their own ideas of how to give more to the community and to Mother Earth. Fasting was seen as a way of giving by not taking from Mother Earth for one day, giving her a rest.

“The Earth also needs our help and respect,” said Dave Courchene, founder of the Turtle Lodge. “By not taking from the Earth for one day, we are giving her our respect and gratitude, by allowing her that time to rest. We must find a way to understand our relationship to all life. What we are proposing in celebrating life is participating in the act of giving. If we achieve that level of understanding – that the more we give the more we receive – we can eradicate poverty and child hunger.”

David Northcott, Executive Coordinator of Winnipeg Harvest, welcomed the support from Manitoba's First Nations and Aboriginal communities.

“Winnipeg Harvest has partnered with the Turtle Lodge to add an Aboriginal spiritual dimension to our journey. Dave Courchene is helping young people to understand the meaning of hunger and poverty for all too many people, including children. Nearly half the 40,000 individuals in Manitoba served every month by Winnipeg Harvest are children,” Mr. Northcott said.

A Celebration of Giving formed part of Winnipeg Harvest's annual Share Your Thanks campaign, which takes place every Thanksgiving weekend. It has also been introduced into schools in the Winnipeg School Division, Sagkeeng First Nation and other Northwestern Ontario schools.

Dave Courchene hopes that the Celebration of Giving will highlight the contribution that Aboriginal people have to make to inspire people to be more giving and sharing.

“In our belief system as indigenous people, we are encouraged to always be giving, whenever that opportunity shows itself, and no matter what economic situation we find ourselves in,” Mr. Courchene states.

“We wanted to encourage people to recognize that our people have a very strong belief system that can help everyone understand spiritual connection. As the First Peoples we were given a belief system with 7 Spiritual Laws. One of the Laws that inspired our people was the Law of Respect, which was symbolized by the Buffalo. The essence of Respect is to have the Spirit of Giving. The way we nurture our spirit is by giving,” Mr. Courchene said.

“We recognize Manitoba to be the geographic centre of the continent. Being at the centre reflects a lot of symbolism. To go to the centre is to find balance in life. We need to find balance in life. There cannot continue to be a disparity between the rich and the poor. There is a prophecy of our people about the truth being revealed from the centre. Because we sit at the geographic centre, much will come from here which will be led by the indigenous people. We are being given opportunity to create initiatives that reach to a higher level of living, that take us beyond the separation and what has divided us as human beings,” Mr. Courchene added.

Aboriginal Music Tour

Joining the Celebration of Giving this year was the highly acclaimed Aboriginal Music Tour, the group of healthy lifestyle Aboriginal singers and songwriters led by Shy-Anne Hovorka, which includes Missy Knott, Nylin White, and Shibastik.

The Aboriginal Music Tour has been touring schools and communities in Northwestern Ontario, performing hip hop, contemporary, folk and inspirational music while sharing the Celebration of Giving's message of fasting for Mother Earth, peace and harmony, and the Seven Sacred Laws. The Tour has become an overwhelming success – it is now going national – asking young people to support the message of the Seven Sacred Laws.

A youth talent search was part of every concert they did, and the youth winners from the Northwestern Ontario Tour were selected at a concert in Thunder Bay on October 3, which was supported by renowned folk singer Rodney Brown. The Aboriginal Music Tour brought these youth to perform at The Forks on October 10.

“Getting the youth involved made the tour even more successful in the way that the ideas were spread, heard, and kept by the youth,” says Shy-Anne Hovorka. “We are now hoping to go national with the tour group, giving other artists opportunities to tour with the group, and spreading the word of peace, hope, love and the Sacred Grandfather Teachings to youth everywhere. It is the youth who will bring this world to a better place.”

Youth Performances

This year's Celebration of Giving allowed youth to share their talents through music, dance and the dramatic arts. MCs Ray "Co-co" Stevenson and Troy Westwood introduced adult acts including Adrian Sala and Lawrence Mulhall, and highlighted various young artists including performances by the World Champion youth jiggers from Sagkeeng First Nation – the *Sagkeeng Elders of the Past Memorial Dancers*, and other Youth performances including Morning Star, Cheynna Gardner and Dakota Lands (*Eagle Lake First Nation*), Ali Fontaine and Adam Courchene (*Sagkeeng First Nation*), Amy Michano (*The Ojibwe of the Pic River First Nation*), Kaitlyn Shortreed (*Fort Frances*), and Dean Mapeso and Graeme Doyle (*Thunder Bay*).

There was a special introduction of Kaitlyn Lashley, the 7-year-old child star of the upcoming feature film "The Sacred Seven" by Winnipeg Metis Director Jordan Molaro. Also featured was a reading of "The Seven Teachings" (Niishwaasho Mishoomisak) by young illustrator Mary Black.

Outside Manitoba

A number of communities outside Manitoba have also joined the Celebration of Giving. The Muslim community from the Greater Toronto Area joined in solidarity to fast on October 12, 2009, and will be donating the proceeds to the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto Community Kitchen.

Other groups have also expressed interest in joining this initiative, including the Baha'i community in Connecticut, USA.

More information on the Celebration of Giving can be found at www.theturtlelodge.org/celebrationOfGiving.html or by contacting turtlelodge@mts.net.