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Epekwitk Celebrates Indigenous Awareness Week: Honoring Mi'kmaq Heritage and Reconciliation Efforts

Indigenous Awareness Week, which takes place May 21-25 this year, offers an opportunity to celebrate the Mi'kmaq of Epekwitk (PEI) and acknowledge the Island's shared history. Epekwitk, also known as Prince Edward Island, is the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

Through L'neuey, numerous initiatives are taking place to commemorate Indigenous Awareness Week. Among them, the Reconciliation Recognition Award continues to recognize exemplary contributions to reconciliation efforts on the Island. This year, the fourth annual Reconciliation Recognition Award ceremony was held, where Corryn Clemence, Stephanie Arnold, and Joe McGuire were honored for their outstanding dedication to fostering an inclusive Island community.

Chief Darlene Bernard of Lennox Island First Nation, Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Co-Chair, expressed, "It is heartening to witness an increasing number of individuals in Epekwitk taking their own initiative to support the Mi'kmaq community and foster a more caring and inclusive Island community. We are genuinely pleased to extend special recognition to those who have earnestly championed the cause of reconciliation and eagerly anticipate honoring more allies in the future."

Furthermore, in partnership with the Government of Prince Edward Island, L'neuey continues its efforts to recognize Mi'kmaq heritage through the installation of Mi'kmaq place name signs across the province. This year, new signs have been erected in Rocky Point and Portage Lake, bringing the total number of Mi'kmaq place name signs installed across PEI since 2020 to over 40.

Chief Junior Gould of Abegweit First Nation, Epekwitk Assembly of Councils Co-Chair, reflected, "I am proud to see the continuation of this partnership with government in highlighting Mi'kmaq placenames. The place names highlight our presence across all parts of Epekwitk and provide a window into how our ancestors lived their lives and viewed the world. It's important that we take the time to learn about the history we all share as residents on this beautiful Island, so we can preserve and share our Mi'kmaq culture for generations to come."

"The Province is pleased to continue to partner with L'neuey on the Mi'kmaq place name signs initiative. It's important to recognize the language and culture of the PEI Mi'kmaq, as it provides a great opportunity to learn more about the island's history. We look forward to continue working with L'neuey in their efforts to promote and share the Mi'kmaq culture," said Hon. Dennis King, Premier of Prince Edward Island.

As L'neuey's activities for Indigenous Awareness Week are being held virtually, Islanders are encouraged to engage through social media platforms and lnuey.ca to observe various initiatives, including Mi'kmaq place name signs and the Reconciliation Recognition Awards. Stay up to date with L'neuey's initiatives through social media platforms on Facebook: [L'neuey PEI](https://www.facebook.com/lnueypei), Instagram: [@lnuey.ca](https://www.instagram.com/lnuey.ca), and Twitter: [@lnueypei](https://twitter.com/lnueypei).

Backgrounder

Epekwitk Assembly of Councils 2024 Reconciliation Recognition Award Recipients

The “Reconciliation Recognition Award” is granted to recipients based on a series of criteria that serves to recognize, respect, and include the Epekwitnewaq Mi’kmaq (Mi’kmaq of PEI), stories, history, or land in such a way that it creates a positive and inclusive Island community with lasting impacts for future generations.

The 2024 Reconciliation Recognition Award Recipients are:

Corryn Clemence, CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of PEI

This recognition is a result of Corryn’s steadfast support and allyship to Indigenous Peoples, particularly in her work in tourism development. Her commitment to reconciliation is evident through her proactive engagement with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Prince Edward Island (now Indigenous PEI) and her advocacy for the inclusion of Indigenous content at tourism Industry events held throughout the province.

With Corryn’s support, Jamie Thomas, Cultural Director of Lennox Island and Mitchell Rennie, Executive Director of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Prince Edward Island, have delivered a workshop “Creating Tourism Allies in Epekwitk” for owners and operators within the industry. The course introduces Mi’kmaq culture, history, tradition and language while providing information on how to engage with visitors and share the many tourism offerings available. Topics covered include Truth and Reconciliation, Land-based Learning, Cultural Authenticity, Two-Eyed Seeing, Decolonization, Canada and PEI’s True History and Indigenous tourism product that is readily available. Upon completion of this course, participants have a better understanding of Indigenous peoples and have been provided with tools to become better allies.

Corryn's support of Indigenous speakers, artisans and performers demonstrates her dedication to fostering meaningful relationships and economic empowerment within Indigenous communities, and her actions have exemplified a genuine commitment to reconciliation.

Stephanie Arnold, Strategy + Innovation Manager and PE Climate Services Specialist, CLIMAtlantic

Stephanie has been mindfully working to elevate the spirit of reconciliation on Epekwitk by centering Mi’kmaq and Indigenous voices and perspectives in their work on climate action. Their work challenges climate change funders, collaborators, experts, and practitioners to scrutinize whether their efforts reinforce existing settler colonial power imbalances or support Treaty Rights and reconciliation.

Stephanie’s presentations highlight how the exclusion of certain voices and worldviews has made climate action a tool for entrenching settler colonialism. From pointing to lessons on the need to use anti-colonial science so people do not assume access to Indigenous land when solving environmental issues, to Mi’kmaw Elder Methilda Knockwood-Snache’s lessons on the importance of all relations... and the need to be equally concerned about how climate change impacts harm ecosystems as much as they harm humans... Stephanie points to the possibility of reconciliation and justice through climate action. This message has been spread through workshops and presentations to the Minister and Deputy Minister of Environment, Energy, and Climate Action; climate change coordinators across Provincial Government departments; UPEI students, staff and faculty; CleanTech Academy staff; municipal CAOs, councillors, and mayors; NGOs; professional associations; high school students; and the general public.

In workshops they co-lead with Dr. Sobia Ali-Faisal, participants also learn to recognize the influence of colonialism and imperialism in past and current climate action... and how to start untangling those influences... and set new paths forward.

Stephanie constantly challenges themselves and others to practice “disruptive kindness”. They talk about the need to disrupt the status quo to make positive change.

This includes owning up to the relations settlers have taken on Mi’kmaq land; not shying away from the hard and complex work of repairing the harm; building authentic, restorative relationships; and honoring treaties and embedding anti-colonial and reconciliatory approaches in climate action.

Joe McGuire, former Member of Parliament for Egmont

Joe McGuire is a humble man and many of his contributions to the fabric of Prince Edward Island have been quietly accomplished over the years. Included amongst these important contributions is the support and advocacy for the Mi’kmaq community, and in particular the role that he played in the successful establishment of a shared Mi’kmaq rights forum and tribal council for the PEI First Nations, which would not have been accomplished without his support.

Following the *Marshall* decision in 1999, Joe listened to Mi’kmaq leadership on the need for access to technical resources to support collaborative efforts on Mi’kmaq rights matters as well as provincial Mi’kmaq programs and services. Due to the size and limited number of First Nations, PEI was ineligible for a tribal council. Joe then advocated for the policy exemption that allowed for the establishment of the first tribal council in Prince Edward Island and helped to usher the process which established the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI, which has now evolved into the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils and its two operating organizations – L’nuey, the PEI Mi’kmaq Rights initiative and MCPEI, the First Nations’ shared provincial programs and services organization.

In this instance, as with many others, Joe McGuire’s quiet but effective efforts continue to influence the culture of Prince Edward Island in a very meaningful way.