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A day for Indigenous reflection

Education about reconciliation goes beyond holiday, principal says



Students at Crossroads Elementary school stand in front of 6,509 orange hands cut out to memorialize the thousands of Indigenous children who died in Canada's residential school system. SUPPLIED

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Inside Crossroads Public School, 6,509 orange hands adorn one prominent wall, each hand created by the students and staff to represent Indigenous children who died attending Canada's residential schools.

"We all get shivers looking at it. It has brought many people in this build-

ing to tears and it's really had a profound impact," principal Kate Fish said in an interview.

Every single student in the school has been involved in creating the display, Fish said.

"Even just talking about it now it makes me emotional and proud and gives me disdain and gives me a very heavy feeling in my heart," she said.

"But at the same time see-

ing the students' reactions to it as well as the dialogue it has generated in classrooms is — it's overwhelming, it really truly is overwhelming."

The 6,509 figure is not the official count of children's graves found so far but is a number that has been popularly used to represent the graves found and graves too be found across the country.

Fish said the school was a sea of orange shirts on

Sept. 30 as part of the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

"The really cool thing was not just seeing the kids wearing their orange shirts but parents dropping their kids off wearing orange shirts as well," she said.

"One mother had a shirt on that said 'Our Home is Native Land.'"

Fish said it's amazing to

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Ron Fritz checks out one of the anti-bird cannon signs along York Road in Queenston. KEVIN MACLEAN

Town's sign bylaw violates Charter rights, NOTL lawyer says

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Signs, signs, like the old song says, are everywhere.

"Please Slow Down," "Every Child Matters," "Home of A Crossroads Public School Grad," "Farmers Feed Cities," birthday, anniversary or retirement placards, even "Merry Christmas" salutations — and many other signs that people sometimes post on their lawn, or neighbourhood public property, all have one thing in common.

They are not allowed under Niagara-on-the-Lake's sign bylaw.

It's the medium, not the message, because "ground" signs (like flashing signs and fluorescent signs) are

among several types of signs that are illegal in Niagara-on-the-Lake. At least, the bylaw says so.

But that bylaw itself, and possibly many similar municipal sign statutes across the country, is not worth the paper it's printed on, according to a retired NOTL lawyer. The town's statute is illegal because it infringes on people's Charter rights, he says.

It's a complicated, yet simple, scenario, says Ron Fritz, the former dean of the University of Saskatchewan's law school.

No matter what the message is — think, "Celebrating Our Traditional Marriage," which offended many peo-

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Working with troubled youth critical for Indigenous culture, elder says

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Anishinaabe elder Albert Choken, a residential school survivor, cultural icon in his community and resident of Queenston, spends his time helping troubled Indigenous youth and men.

It's important to connect Indigenous youth with their culture, he said during a smudging ceremony Saturday as he cleansed the grounds of the St. Davids Lions Club and helped the spirit of a wandering soldier

find peace.

Choken performed the ceremony with the aid of two helpers. One was a 14-year-old Mohawk from Buffalo.

"He's one of our youth that has gotten into trouble. So, I was assigned to take care of him and help him with his troubles," Choken said of the young man.

His problems began with being bullied in school, the youth said in an interview.

The youth was reluctant to share the details of what happened but the elder was a bit more forthcoming.

"He was getting bullied at school, so now he can't go to the same school — because he got beaten up," Choken said.

The affable Choken speaks in a relaxed manner. As he sat on a blanket in the middle of a large circle of about 25 people, he laughed often and talked softly.

Choken said the young man had been getting in recurring fights with a bully at his school.

The youth got kicked out of school for fighting. His family entered him in the "I'm a Kind Man" program

at the Niagara Regional Native Centre, Choken said in an interview later.

He works with troubled Indigenous youth and men in the program.

"We teach them respect and forgiveness. Teach a man those two things and wherever they go in life they'll be alright," he said.

The youth was doing well in the program but Choken said he was worried the boy would not go back to school and end up another Indigenous person over-rep-

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Anishinaabe elder Albert Choken during the smudging ceremony in St. Davids on Saturday. EVAN SAUNDERS



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Truth and reconciliation isn't just one day, principal says

Continued from Front Page

see kids engaged in such an important issue – something many older Canadians never experienced in school.

“You see these kids engaging in the conversation with compassion and empathy and a sense of social justice that I never experienced as a student growing up. It’s inspiring, to be honest. It’s inspiring and it makes me feel hopeful for the future,” the principal said.

“We’re all coming at it from a place of lack of education. There is a huge amount of work to front load for us to make sure we’re doing it correctly and doing it justice and being sensitive.”

Fish said one of her students said the initiative made her happy and sad, telling the principal, in effect, “It makes me happy that we’re doing something about this but it makes me sad that we have to do it at all.”

The display is part of a larger project in the school to keep education about



Crossroads students learn about residential schools on the first ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. SUPPLIED

residential schools and Indigenous Peoples continuing long after Sept. 30 has passed, said Fish.

“We really try and weave Indigenous education through the curriculum throughout the entire year,” she said.

The school is using a number of resources to educate its students on residential schools and Indigenous history.

One great resource is Phylis Webstad’s book “The Orange Shirt Story,” Fish said and noted the challenge

of ensuring the educational tools are age-appropriate and develop as students mature.

“Orange Shirt Day gave us a really great starting point because it’s already in kid-friendly language,” she said.

“Language changes according to the age of the student. You wouldn’t use words like ‘abuse’ in a really early grade, you use words like mistreatment or treated poorly. But as they get older you start using terminology like that.”

Fish said the school is also using “When We Were Alone” by David Robertson, “I Am Not a Number” by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer with illustrations by Gillian Newland, and “Fatty Legs” by Margaret-Olemaun Pokiak-Fenton & Christy Jordan-Fenton, among other books.

The school also has been showing students films and documentaries about residential schools.

Fish said a quote from Sen. Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has been a driving theme for her during this time. He noted: “Education got us into this mess and education can get us out.”

And that theme was one

reason Fish was glad the kids were in school on Sept. 30, though she understood the desire for many Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents to have their kids out of class that day.

“The systems we have created are the ones that are causing the problems. So, by requiring Indigenous people to continuously engage in those systems it almost feels like you are re-perpetrating the problem,” Fish said.

But having children in school made sure they were being educated on reconciliation and residential schools on Sept. 30, which, unfortunately, is not a guarantee many students would have had if they were at home, Fish said.

“It allows us the opportunity to give the students experience and exposure that they wouldn’t necessarily receive elsewhere. It ensures that it’s happening for the right purposes, but I completely understand the other perspective of it,” Fish said.

SORE nominated for conservancy award

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Save our Rand Estate, the community group best known as SORE, has been fighting since 2018 to protect the historic property in Old Town.

Now, the group has been recognized by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario for its ongoing efforts, and is nominated for the Margaret and Nicholas Hill Cultural

Landscape Award.

“SORE has been a pivotal force in the protection of this historic estate, spurring significant community action,” the nomination reads.

SORE welcomed the honour and noted the efforts of the group and the town “with respect to the iconic Rand Estate are clearly being followed and applauded by the heritage community provincially and beyond.”

“SORE is gratified to be recognized by the Archi-

tectural Conservancy of Ontario for the almost four years of hard work pushing back on Benny Marotta’s outrageous plans for and activities at the Rand Estate,” Lyle Hall said in an email on behalf of the group.

“The recognition is nice but the commitment is and will be there regardless of whether SORE is given this award.”

The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario was created in 1933 by Dr. Eric Arthur, a

professor at the University of Toronto, to save the Barnum House near Grafton, Ont.

Since then the organization has documented and saved hundreds of heritage sites across Ontario

The Margaret and Nicholas Hill award was named for a couple who worked for nearly four decades with the conservancy and helped to protect and establish heritage areas throughout the province.

Award winners will be announced on Oct. 14.



A group largely corralled by SORE attends a public meeting regarding the Rand Estate in 2019. FILE PHOTO

Marotta group appeals Rand Estate repair order from town

Evan Saunders
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Two Sisters Resorts Corp. is appealing an order by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to carry out repair work on the Rand Estate.

There will be a live appeal hearing on Oct. 12 at 5 p.m.

The order, issued Aug. 25, compelled the company,

owned by developer Benny Marotta, to conduct a series of repairs and restorations on the Rand Estate as the property has run afoul of the town’s property standards bylaw.

The work is to be done by Jan. 25, 2022, according to the appeal notice. But Marotta’s appeal states there’s not enough time to do all the requested repairs by the deadline and asks for all

items to be delayed.

In the original order, the town requested nine specific repairs be undertaken.

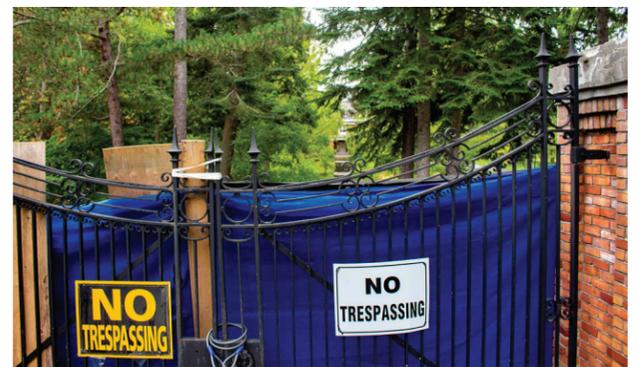
These included the boarding of all possible entrances, mould remediation for the interiors, review and repair of the roof if necessary and the installation of a metal fence around vacant buildings.

The appeal also claims some of the orders are not applicable because they fall

under the residential property section of the property standards bylaw.

The building falls under the heritage property section of the bylaw, according to the appeal and the original order.

The bylaw states that any vacant heritage property needs to have on-going maintenance inside and outside the property to maintain standards.



Little be seen of the Rand Estate behind the no trespassing signs and tarpaulin. EVAN SAUNDERS



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