

Two Dufferin County events to commemorate National Day of Truth and Reconciliation

By Paula Brown, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Two events focused on the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation are coming to Dufferin County.

The first event is being hosted by a local Indigenous-led not-for-profit organization called the Brave Canoe. The event is called "Every Feather Counts," and will be held at the Medicine Wheel in Bravery Park by the Alder Street Recreation Centre's outdoor playing fields in Orangeville on Saturday (Sept. 28) at 4 p.m.

Through the event, the Brave Canoe is looking to work towards healing and rebuilding relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

During the "Every Feather Counts" event, participants will have the opportunity to paint wooden feathers, which will then be hung from the surrounding trees for one week. Afterwards, the painted feathers will be collected and arranged as part of a collaborative art installation.

The concept of painting feathers comes from Indigenous cultures, where feathers are often told to be gifts from the Creators and symbolize a connection between the owner, the Creator and the bird it came from.

"This event offers us a chance to connect as a community in solidarity. Rather than directing the experience, we aim to guide our time together, embracing a decolonized approach to leadership by fostering an environment of equality," said Sharon Rigby, co-founder of The Brave Canoe.

The first observance of a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was held in 2021, following the identification of unmarked burial sites at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia.

The commemorative day looks to honour residential school survivors while also educating the public on the history and legacy of residential schools. The day is also in response to the 80th call to action within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.

The last day in September also marks Orange Shirt Day, an Indigenous-led grassroots commemorative day, which was inspired by the story of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad of the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation. On her first day at St. Joseph Mission Residential School, six-year-old Webstad wore a new orange shirt that was immediately taken away from her by school staff.

Initially started in 2013, Orange Shirt Day has become a symbol of remembrance to honour Indigenous Children forced to leave their families to attend residential schools.

"Marking this important day is a way for us to stand united not just in recognition of the past, but in the hope of creating a more equitable future. Together, we can drive change and continue to support healing and understanding within our communities," said Rigby.

The Brave Canoe was launched in early 2024 by Rigby and Julie Elsdon-Height as a community-based not-for-profit organization that looks to bring the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities of Dufferin County together to learn, grow and heal.

The overall goal of The Brave Canoe is to be a leader in Indigenous cultural resurgence and community healing in Dufferin County by fostering a space that promotes Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching and approaches that enhance the cultural fabric of the community.

The foundation of The Brave Canoe is grounded in the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, a term coined by Mi'kmaq Elders which utilizes both Western and Indigenous knowledge.

"This approach encourages Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to collaborate, creating a space where everyone's voice is heard and respected. By looking at issues from different perspectives, we can better understand the challenges our communities face and find effective solutions that honor cultural traditions while also using modern practices," said Rigby.

To learn more about the events, programs and services The Brave Canoe has, visit www.thebravecanoe.ca.

Town of Shelburne's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation event

The Town of Shelburne is taking steps towards reconciliation as they pay tribute to residential school survivors and missing Indigenous children.

During Shelburne Town Council's regular meeting on Monday (Sept. 23), Mayor Wade Mills proclaimed Sept. 30 as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in the community.

To commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, the Town of Shelburne will be hosting a special event on Monday, Sept. 30 at 7 p.m. at Jack Downing Park, located at 140 Main Street East. The event will include an opening ceremony with a few speeches, drummers, the raising of the Every Child Matters Flag and concluding with a roughly 1 km candlelight reflection walk.

The Town of Shelburne's annual Orange Shirt Day and National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Ceremony is organized by the Town's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, whose mandate is to create a welcoming and inclusive community in the Town of Shelburne.

"The public is encouraged to come out, wear your orange shirts, and mark this somber and important occasion," said Councillor Len Guchardi, chair of the Shelburne DEI Committee.

The event will occur rain or shine.

Those interested in learning more about and reflecting on the ongoing legacy of Indian Residential Schools are recommended to visit the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website at - <https://nctr.ca/>