

## AHS students set to lace up to raise awareness of water health in Indigenous communities



Aurora High School students are preparing to lace up to raise awareness of water health in Indigenous communities and train a spotlight on the non-profit Shining Paddle Water Initiative.

On Friday, May 15, AHS students will set out into the community for their fifth annual Water Walk event. The event aims to not only educate members of the school community about the importance of water conservation and environmental stewardship, but the wider Aurora community as well.

The Shining Water Paddle Initiative is led by Vicky Wolske, a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, the First Nation closest to Aurora. The name "Shining Water" reflects the Anishinaabe name for Lake Simcoe and its mission is to raise awareness of the health of Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

This is the fourth year Aurora High School's Indigenous Allyship Club has partnered with Shining Water Paddle and it's a relationship that goes from strength to strength each year.

"For as long as we have been doing this, I'm always amazed by how much we can learn through an Indigenous lens and Indigenous perspective, especially with our closest partners in education, which are the Chippewas of Georgina Island," says teacher Vincenzo Fragomeni who is the faculty's co-lead facilitating the Indigenous Allyship Club.

Fragomeni grew up in Thunder Bay and, during his childhood, and remembers boil water advisories in his community from time to time.

"We'd get the advisory, my mom would boil a jug of water, put it in the fridge, and we were just reminded to drink that water? you don't think about it until much later than life and how we take something like that for granted," he recalls. "Anything we can do to bring awareness to something I think a lot of people in this country feel should have been solved long ago? I feel like, for us, on a micro level, it's just trying to do what we can to bring awareness to people who take water for granted every day."

This is a sentiment shared by Grade 11 student Aaron Khaykin one of the student co-leads for the May 15 walk.

"I'm thankful I've never had the personal experience of a boil water advisory, but I can just imagine not even how scary, but how stressful a situation like that may be because you never know how long it is going to last," he says.

This will be the second Water Walk in which Aaron has participated and he is eager for he and the team to do their part to raise

awareness of Shining Water Paddle and the work that it does around Lake Simcoe and beyond.

This work is already underway as teammates have fanned out throughout the community with door flyers, as well as invitations to local businesses and community members at large to come out and participate, or simply make a donation to Shining Paddle.

The Walk is expected to begin around 9.45 a.m. with a ceremony led by Wolskie. Following the ceremony, which includes the blessing of water in copper vessels, participants will be invited to set out for the trek itself, which includes a number of stations designed to educate on water knowledge, connection, and more.

‘We’re just so proud of the collection of students who come forward, who have expressed interest in wanting to do this,’ says Fragomeni. ‘For us, being in Year Five, I feel like every year I’ve done, I’ve had to do a little bit less because the kids have really come forward and done most of it. As long as the kids want to keep doing it and as long as Vicky allows us to do it and we can host this great event, we’ll keep going.’

Adds Aaron: ‘I think it is going to be a lot of fun and I think I still have a lot to learn about this initiative, and I hope to be able to continue helping with this initiative in the future and just bring awareness about these overall issues.’

For more information about this year’s Water Walk, including how to get involved, email [Vincenzo.fragomeni@yrdsb.ca](mailto:Vincenzo.fragomeni@yrdsb.ca).

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