

Indigenous History Month event will feature storytelling, water walk talk



National Indigenous History Month will be marked with a special community gathering on Saturday, June 21, featuring traditional storytelling and a celebration of the sacredness of water.

Set for Town Park at 10.30 a.m. and 11.30 a.m., the gathering will be led by Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley in two rounds of storytelling designed to honour the history, resilience and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people on these lands.

It will also feature a story walk and crafts to shine a light on water walks – a traditional ceremony of the Anishinaabe people, usually women, as a way to protect water for all life. Such walks have also been taken up in recent years by non-Indigenous peoples as a way to raise awareness of water scarcity and the trials experienced by those affected by it.

“The Town of Aurora has been very, very fortunate for the guidance we have received and continue to receive from Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley,” says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. “She certainly educates us, helps to guide us, but certainly ensures that we also do the work as well. She is an incredible storyteller. She’s not scripted; she tells us what her soul feels, that we need to learn as a community as the stories that come to mind are spoken to her by her ancestors. Anyone that has seen Anishinaabe grandmother Kim Wheatley do storytelling, I believe no two experiences are the same, so I think it is a true gift that she will come to Aurora, spend time in our community, and to offer up her energy to provide two different storytelling sessions at Town Park.

“In addition to those two [storytelling] experiences, we’ve also put together crafts and a story walk focused on water walks. As an Indigenous action, water walks are happening in more and more communities and more and more groups and we want to be able to bring this concept to Aurora for people to learn what a water walk is, what’s hoped to be achieved by them. People can walk between each display, which will educate them along the way.”

Ware says the Planning Committee behind this event has been particularly impressed by the water walks carried out each year by students from Aurora High School and the Town wants to support their efforts as well by expanding awareness and education throughout the whole community.

“I think unless you’ve ever dealt with scarcity of water, I think it’s hard for anyone to really fathom communities and those that don’t

have sufficient, accessible, or clean drinking water," says Ware. "Water walks are about creating awareness, and also, I feel, kind of connecting us between different groups and different parts of the country in which people live because, especially being here in York Region, water can easily be taken for granted. Regardless what community or group is facing, a lack of access to water is still detrimental whether it's across the world, whether it's in our own country, there's a lot to it and so this just we feel kind of ties it all in and will definitely without a doubt create some awareness.

"There are so many different places you could spend your time on Saturday, June 21, and we really, really encourage you to come [out to Town Park] to take in this experience firsthand."

For more on the day's activities, and other programs related to Indigenous History Month within the Town of Aurora, visit www.aurora.ca/indigenousPeoples.

By Brock Weir