

Unity meeting held at Skeetchestn

Representatives from 10 Secwepemc communities gathered in Skitsstn to share successes, concerns, economic development opportunities and help the Secwepemc Nation build unity. It was good to see several communities send Elders along with their politicians. Our Elders contributions are needed now more than ever, to give our leaders the strength and keep them on the right path.

A prayer by Elder Lena Bell of Splatsin started off the day's discussions. The combined efforts of those in attendance joined Councillor Terry Deneault in a Welcome Song.

The morning was taken up with the roundtable community updates. Each community reported on their activities and economic developments.

Skeetchestn reported on: their new school; a new ranch bought that they hope to get reserve status for; fisheries fencing project; and a new administration building. Little Shuswap talked about their expansion at Quaaout Lodge, a new golf course, more partnerships at Sun Peaks, heli skiing, housing developments and an upgraded water system.

North Thompson updated everyone on their partnership and a \$7 million initia-

tive with Mike Wiegele heli skiing resort north of Blue River, community hunts and berry picking, the problems with drugs on the reserve, non-Secwepemc hunting in their territories, working with Clearwater and Barriere communities on economic development for the valley and having their name officially changed to Simpcw instead of North Thompson.

Neskonlith discussed their strategies on their Harper Lake Logging case and also their Douglas Claim. They have received approval to get irrigation back on at #1 Reserve that was destroyed by last year's wild fires as well as 10 km of fencing to be done.

Canoe Creek is working on their own custom and elections act, developing an Economic Development Corp., forestry projects and some tourism possibilities. They also have critical concerns on the hunting regulations in the area regarding bucks. A recent road block brought attention to their concerns.

Bonaparte shared the news of new administration offices (including an office for their Elders), their forests and range agreement, timber permits, and their concerns regarding the Ashcroft land fill. They held a community recognition day to honour

their band members' accomplishments.

Adams Lake representative spoke about the good health of their people – by helping themselves and each other. Great revival of the language going on with their Head Start, Language Nest and Chief Atahm School. They have a partnership with Neskonlith, Salmon Arm, the BC and Federal government to embark on a water system that should be flowing by September 05. A new gymnasium is a new source of pride for their community.

Whispering Pines is still working on their bridge to cross the North Thompson River, a replacement of the ferry system. They are hoping to have a electric production component that is environmentally friendly as part of the bridge. Their recreation center is busy and growing and adding snowmobile racing to the roster of events. They too have held community hunts and their Elders freezers are good and full.

Spallumcheen has been busy, they have been stewards of 37 forestry recreation sites in their territory which are now shut for winter. They opened an RV Park this year, upgraded their gas station, are building a small arbor at their ball fields, wish to start a Hall of Fame, started a bi-annual

elder celebrations, and are working hard on language revival. Fund raising has begun for the Enderby Centennial celebration which will include logging sports, a Pow Wow and Feast to be held on August 6, 2005.

A lunch break included a tour of Skeetchestn's new school. After lunch Bonnie Leonard of the SNTC Title and Rights department held a brainstorming session on what is a constitution and what would our communities like to see in the one they are beginning to develop.

There will be a meeting to discuss the constitution on December 13th at the SNTC

boardroom and the next unity meeting will be held January 28th at the Chu Chua Community Hall, Simpcw.



Chief, Council, Staff,
 & Membership of Simpcw

Community Futures Development
 Corporation of Central Interior First Nations



Wishing you peace and happiness

Secwepemc Elders Cour

from minutes of Elders meeting

Twenty-one Secwepemc Elders made it out to the Secwepemc Elders Council meeting held at T'éxelc (Sugar Cane) on October 4, 2004. Representative came from T'éxelc, Esk'ét, Simpcw (North Thompson), Sk'atsín (Neskonlith), and St'uxwtéws (Bonaparte). It is unfortunate that our Elders are not being made aware of these meetings. There is travel support for one vehicle per band.

SNTC, through a motion made and passed by our chiefs, made funds available for travel and activities, yet even then Elders are not getting to come to these meetings. Some bands have Elders' workers who raise funds, drive them about and keep them informed of upcoming meetings and activities. These are our holders of knowledge; without them we would be lost.

The Elders want their discussions printed in the Secwepemc News, so that they may be heard. They are still requesting that one or two representatives from each of the 17 bands attend these meetings so they may make a full council. They want to bring the meetings to different communities to get more Elders involved and to know what they are doing. They want to keep each other informed and become more unified. Elders are still working on their plan on how they are going to work together as Secwepemc Elders. A strong nation is needed for the land claims coming up.

Those gathered discussed many issues from loss of the language, lack of respect, drugs and alcohol, and spoke at length about the old ways, the traditions. Grandmother Wilma Basil of St'uxwtéws is so proud her grandson acknowledged the old ways when he made his first kill, he gave all the meat away to the elders.

Many are saddened by how the almighty dollar affects their lives. "We cannot practice our traditional ways because we have no money for gas" said Les Peters of

Esk'ét. Everything seems to cost money to do. Even lehal games cost money to play. Gatherings used to be fun, but today it costs, nothing is free.

December Meeting

A small number of Elders made it out to the most recent Secwepemc Elders Council meeting held at Simpcw. Snow and ice kept everyone at home except from a few neighbouring communities. Not letting any opportunity of getting together go to waste, the few Elders shared their concerns and ideas for the group. For many of the Elders this was their first opportunity to attend one of these Elders council meetings, and for them it was a chance to hear what others are doing and share some of their wonderful knowledge.

One of the discussions this day covered the inaccessibility of our berries, food and medicine plants. Our lands are full of some, fences are up keeping us out, and no trespassing signs threaten us with



Dianne Sandy singing the Woman's Warrior song



ncil Updates



Ida Matthew of Simpcw with her birchbark christmas decoration she won as a door prize

charges. With the push to get back to the land, showing and using our relationship to the land is becoming harder and harder. Those present wondered if there was a chance of our politicians making access agreements with the forestry and ranchers in the area.

The continued call for our Elders to remember the Secwepemc place names and have them documented for our rights and title court cases was well received as several of the attending bands have extensive mapping done with traditional place names already.

Survival or immersion camps for the youth were discussed, a place to learn our culture and language in a traditional setting. An exciting idea that came from their talks was having a camp for Elders. A retreat to refresh and energize Elders, returning to their families and share the ways with their children. The idea was met with enthusiasm and a few ideas about where this camp might be located.

Of grave concern to many was the drugs and violence coming to the reserves. Cars come to the communities and sell drugs to the children. Old ways of justice was discussed with a call for help from the communities in fighting the disease of drug addictions. Many wanted to know what our ancestors did when there is conflict or troubles in their community and what they might be able to do for the children. Everyone felt a strong message needs to be sent to our politicians, the leaders of communities to step up to the plate and address

the problems and look for some solutions.

Minnie Kenoras of Neskonlith brought a Christmas decoration made of birch bark, cedar and pine as a door prize, won by Ida Matthew of Simpcw. It was suggested the Elders bring show and tell items to these meetings, as well as traditional foods to share.

The Bonaparte Elders are active as ever, ready to move into their new office provided for them at the band office. Weekly get togethers with activities using the language have been a lot of fun.

It was suggested the Elders meetings take a break til after winter as travel has become a problem. Elders are encouraged to continue their work in their communities over the winter and come together next spring.



Ralph Sandy drumming

What is wanted in a constitution?

*Submitted by: AR&T Department
Nation Building*

A constitution is a set of written and unwritten rules and principles that govern decision-making in a political community. A constitution is a guideline for how a Nation will function.

On November 16, 2004, member bands of the Shuswap Nation met for the first time to fulfill their commitment made at the 2004 Shuswap Nation Gathering to build a Secwepemc Nation Constitution. To date, sixteen of the seventeen bands have signed the declaration and have confirmed their commitment to complete this work. Most communities at the November 16th meeting stated that they desired to achieve political recognition, assert government, be independent, and assert recognition of Secwepemc peoples, economic and social empowerment.

Significant steps were made at the November Unity meeting, which Bonnie Leonard, SNTC Aboriginal Rights and Title Director facilitated a brainstorming session to come up with ideas for the constitution. Elements of the constitution were identified in areas of: membership, representation/speakers, decision-making process, organizational structure, areas of jurisdiction, role & responsibilities, culture

and language, dispute resolution, land, administrative structure and unity collectiveness.

The SNTC Council of Chiefs have taken the lead in planning the next Constitutional Building meeting and set the date for December 13, 2004 to further discuss the development and implementation of the constitution. Traditional governance and laws may form a basis and or approach for the principles within the constitution. The suggested name is *ckwenme7/sple7en* which means law or rule and/or *sk'wenme7/sple7* which translate to law or commandment which signifies the traditional bearing for our constitutional development.

The constitution must reflect the people and connect the culture of the community that it governs. It should also consider the principles, values and beliefs of their membership to gain acceptance and endorsement. Many different forces shape our Secwepemc communities; and our people's values and goals may change over time. Thus as the sovereign will of the people evolves over time the constitution too must be seen as a living document. Which is driven and guided by experience and principles of its members. These discussions have provided a clear starting point for constitutional development in the Secwepemc Nation and our futures look bright.

Defining a Native Elder

What is an Elder?

A good question . . . although not an easy one to answer. The first and most frequent misconception is that people often confuse the term "Elder" with "elderly".

Does one automatically become an elder because of age, and if so, is it when they turn 55, 60 or 65? Are you an elder because you are the eldest of your family, or you have grandchildren? Is it more than just age or do they need to be active community members, respected role models, holders of knowledge, teachers or pillars of the community? This is a very touchy subject.

Here are several definitions to think about:

- New World Dictionary; An older person with some authority and dignity within a tribe or community.
- Secwepemc Elder and World War II Veteran Ethel Wiens of the Neskonlith band makes it quite clear that there is a distinct difference between an elder and an old person. An Elder can be as young as 50 years and is very active within the community, working in a sharing and caring capacity. It is important that people realize this so that they too can become active members themselves, carrying on the old traditions of the Shuswap Nation. An old person is a senior person who is inactive

in the community.

- Elders should be role models for everyone else. Elders should be teachers to the grandchildren and all young people because of their wisdom. Elders should be advisors, lawgivers, and dispensers of justice. Elders should be open to everyone. Elders should be knowledgeable in all aspects of their culture. They should be recorders of history, not only orally but to be preserved in print. Elders should be teachers of values important to their people to be passed on from generation to generation. Elders should be teachers of language and oral history. Elders should be teachers of our lands medicines. (statement by Innu delegation April 27, 1989)
- An elder is given the title and recognition as elder by other elders of his/her respective community and nation.

There is a large number of First Nations across the country, embracing some 55 languages and major dialects, and constituting 11 linguistic families. The definition of an Elder varies from nation to nation, but their functions are basically the same: to ensure that traditional values, language, principles and other teachings are passed along, and to provide instruction to help individuals live in the right way.