Best Arts & Culture Story

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Kivalliq News

Marlene Tuluqak and Nelia Kusugak, left, work with their skins during the Somebody's Daughter program on Sikaile Island near Rankin Inlet earlier this month.

Somebody's Daughter

Healing, skills program gets rave reviews from participants

by Darrell Greer
Northern News Services
Rankin Inlet

A group of 11 women from four Kivalliq communities gathered in Rankin Inlet earlier this month to take part in the Somebody's Daughter (Panigiaqtaq) program.

The 10-day camp was held on Sikaile Island, about 15 miles across the bay from Rankin.

The annual program, which promotes culture, traditional skills and emotional healing, is sponsored by the Kivalliq Inuit Association and has been highly regarded across the region for more than a decade.

The camp is only available to women who were through residential school or were affected by it (intergenerational victims).

The program is funded through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The female participants who attended the 2009 camp were Annie Annaulik, Lucy Ferguson, Eva Okasuiq and Sarah Aulatsi of Arviat, Georgina Ipkarnerk and Sheila Netsiniak of Chesterfield Inlet, Marie Shiwak of Coral Harbour, and Rankin's Nellie Kusugak, Marlene Tuluqak, Debra Taipana and Mary Tuty. Somebody's Daughter featured a top-flight group of elder instructors.

In charge of teaching traditional sewing skills were Alexina Nanordluk and Taptua Sheutgnuak of Repulse Bay, along with Elizabeth Mingnana and Hannie Alagalak of Arviat.

The camp's cooking duties were handled by Nancy Tootoo and Martha Otak of Arviat, while Sam Shamus of Arviat was the maintainer and Rankin elder Simon Kownak handled guiding and hunting.

Single mom, Sarah Aulatsi, 35, of Arviat was excited to learn she had been accepted for Somebody's Daughter.

She said this was her first chance to attend the program, but, if she gets her way, it won't be the last.

"This was my second time to work on sewing kamik," said Aulatsi.

"I tried sewing my first pair when my son was three years old, so this time I sewed for my mom.

"I really learned a lot during the program, not only in sewing but also in life issues.

"I feel like I am a better person for taking part in this."

Aulatsi said she's had problems for about three years now, and that was the main reason she decided to take part in the program.

She said the program allowed her a chance to help heal herself and look at where she's at in life.

The doctor told me my problems is from the stress in my life.

"So, I told my mom I would try my best to see where I'm at in life and learn to sew at the same time.

"I was very impressed with the program and would recommend it to any woman in the Kivalliq who was thinking about taking it.

"I told my friends about it when I returned to Arviat, and she went on local radio to encourage other women to try and take part in it next year."

Aulatsi said she made new friends during the program and was very impressed by the instructors.

She said she hopes to get accepted back to the program next year.

"Somebody's Daughter was a very positive experience for me.

"I am going to try and go back next year and really hope they pick me."

"I feel like I am a better person for taking part in this."

Traditions

Marlene Tuluqak, 41, said she joined Somebody's Daughter because she wanted to learn how to sew traditional clothing, and clean and prepare skins properly.

She said she thoroughly enjoyed the camp.

"It was pretty much what I thought because we were notified of what to expect before it began," said Tuluqak.

"It was really enjoyable and I learned a lot of different ways to take care of skins.

"It actually varies from community to community, and it was interesting to learn how someone from Repulse Bay or Arviat takes care of their sealing skins."

Tuluqak said she enjoyed spending time with the elders and the other women in the program.

She said she learned a lot from both the elders and the other women.

"We learned from each other, and I'd highly recommend Somebody's Daughter to any woman thinking about applying to it. You really see what you learn when you go home, and I'm already working on making kamik for my son.

"I've made mats before, but this helped me learn how to prepare the sealskin for mats and kamik better.

"So, it's going to be a lot easier now and what I make will be a lot better too."

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Elders Taptua Panigaq Sheutgnuark and Alexina Nanordluk, back, of Repulse Bay work on a kamik during the Somebody's Daughter program earlier this month.

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Virden Empire Advance

Metis Red River carts roll to Fort Ellice

by Dawn Wickstrom

Four Red River carts left Virden early July 5, on the first week of the annual Metis Red River cart journey. This year, the carts and riders travel, as closely as possible, the route of the old Fort Ellice trail between Virden and Fort Ellice historic site, on the outskirts of St. Lazare.

Three of the carts used on the journey were made recently, in the traditional way, entirely of wood.

They paraded past The Sherwood, Evergreen and Westmen seniors' homes. About a dozen people got an up-close look at the carts. Helen Sutton-Elliott shared her own family history. She is the great-granddaughter of Hugh Sutton, who figured in helping put down the Riel Rebellion in Saskatchewan.

Armand Jerome, the trail boss, explained that the shafts and axles of the cart were the load-bearing parts of the cart. The shafts and their brakes were attached to the axles by dowels. The original carts were entirely built of oak, but today, elm wood or ash wood is used to make the tapered hubs. The hub design, from an engineering standpoint, is well worth a second look. The spokes of the wheels flare out from the hubs at a precise 25-degree angle, and the wheels vary in diameter from five and a half feet, for horse-drawn carts, to more than six feet in diameter for ox-driven carts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

"Elm was a favourite wood back then, but with the Dutch Elm Disease, it's harder to obtain. Elm was like fibreglass, with extremely long strands, and very strong and springy. The spokes are made of oak." He added, the shafts and the axles had to be made of perfect wood (no knots), or the whole cart would fall apart. Oak was valued for its strength and hardness. The wheels were carved into six curved sections, called fellows, and always have 12 spokes. "The carts are designed with a great deal of engineering precision."

There are no nails, brackets or metal parts anywhere on the traditional Red River cart. The axles and hubs are tapered from 3.25 inches on the inside edge of the wheel hub, to 2.25 inches on the outside edge, where the wooden pin is set. This gives the wheels added stability and strength. "There is no machine that can make an axle like that," said Lactair. The corner supports of the cart are made of oak, but the cart rails were made of willow.

"These carts and their drivers were the Reimers (trucking company) of the industry in the 1800s," said Fabien Lactair. "There were about 1,000 of these carts and drivers travelling between Winnipeg and Edmonton."

Each cart would carry about 800-700 pounds of freight, grain or furs.

Norman Fleury of Woodworth, a noted linguist in the Michif language, the traditional language of the Metis, and his sister, Sabrina, of Milnesbow are taking the ride this year. For Sabrina, it's the first time she has participated in the annual journey, which covers a different route each year.

Fleury said his grandmother, Flora Fleury of Brandon, is 101 years old this year, and her grandmother had learned the language as a little girl in the early 1800s. The language is believed to date back to possibly the mid-1700s. All the words in Michif are Cree verbs, and all the nouns, with the exception of a few modern English loan-words such as "television," are French.

Michif evolved as an oral language, but for about 20 years Fleury has been working with a Danish linguist and others to compile a standardized written form of the language. He and other linguists are also developing a Michif dictionary and phrasebook, and several stories such as Chokecherrie and poems and songs, have been produced in book and CD form.

Two local riders, Doug Scotte and Rob Andrew, are going "just for the ride," Andrew said he is not Metis. "I'm just along for the ride. It's a trail ride and it's all week long. Most of our rides are just weekends." The route is going to take them via Hemsworth and Moosola, where a contingent of riders and carts from the Russell area are expected to join up in St. Lazare. Those proceeding to the second stage of the ride will start in the Qu'Appelle valley about 100 kms southeast of St. Lazare, and set up in Regina for a ceremony commemorating the anniversary of Louis Riel's trial in 1885.

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LED BY OUTRIDER Kelly Poppot of Beausejour, the Red River cart driven by Brian Kuyper, with passenger Sabrina Fleury of Minnedosa, turns the corner in front of the Virden skating rink during the group's impromptu parade through Virden north of the tracks. This cart, built entirely of wood, is made in the exact method used by Metis builders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Photo/Dawn Wickstrom

THE METIS RED RIVER CART contingent, including at least three Virden riders, paraded past The Sherwood seniors' home on July 5. They left Virden early Monday morning and were expected to arrive in St. Lazare on July 11. The contingent will start the second stage of their cart journey from Lebret to Regina from July 13 to 20. Photo/Dawn Wickstrom