



MISHKEEGOGAMANG Community Update

Local Heroes Win Canada Bravery Medals

Bernard Keetash, Mark Montour, and Jeffrey Neekan have all been awarded the Canadian Medal of Bravery for their actions during a house fire in Mishkeegogamang. Canada's Governor General, David Johnston, announced all the medal winners on September 8, 2011. Besides the three men from Mish, 21 other Canadians won Medals of Bravery, and three others were given the Star of Courage.

The Medal of Bravery recognizes people who risk their lives to save or protect the lives of others. Bernard, Mark, and Jeffrey were given the honour because they helped save Joey Wesley from the fire on January 28, 2008. When the blaze broke out, the family was able to evacuate everybody except Joey, who was trapped upstairs. Keetash, Montour, and Neekan were among several people who responded to the parents' desperate cries for help.

Bernard Keetash is the only one of the three who is still living in Mishkeegogamang. "At around two or three in the morning, Jeffrey Neekan woke me up and we grabbed a ladder from my place, but it didn't reach up

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Raymond Muckuck surveying water levels back in September in preparation for the fall hunt

PHOTO BY KENNETH WAVY

Mish Student Thinking Big

Tanya Bottle has taken up the challenge of getting a diploma in Early Childhood Education. Her goal is to develop a Headstart program for the children of Mishkeegogamang. "I want to get a pre-school going in Oz and I need to get my diploma before I do that," she said.

The program has five semesters and finishes up in the spring of 2013. Twice every semester, for two weeks each time, she goes to Oshki-Pimache-O-Win in Thunder Bay for classes. When she's back home, she attends online classes and emails assignments to teachers. The program includes a practicum in a pre-school.

Tanya's favourite

thing about working with children is being able to spend lots of time with them and witness their amazing abilities. "Just basically seeing them learn every day and how fast they pick up on new things. I like to see that happen."

The new routine has been both challenging and rewarding. Tanya is maintaining her full-time job, caring for her three-year-old daughter and taking a full course-load. "It's been stressful," she said, "but it's been very good too. I'm glad I was able to take this course and I'm learning a lot. I think it will really benefit the community, especially the children."

Alice Keesickquayash and

Daisy Spade are also studying right now, both taking Personal Support Worker training. Personal Support Workers work under a nurse to provide health care for those who can't manage on their own.

When asked what kind of advice she would give to others from Mish thinking about going after training, Tanya said, "Do it. Just go to school and get it. It will be worth it in the end."



Bernard Keetash, M.B., taking a break from work at Ace Lake

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Tanya Bottle is wired into an education track

Around the Community

Journey to Oz Wins Best Doc
“Journey to Oz,” a documentary on Mishkeegogamang, recently won the Best Documentary award at the York Region Multimedia Film Festival. The film was made by a group of young people who came to Mishkeegogamang as part of a Canadian Roots Exchange. Canadian Roots is dedicated to promoting dialogue and positive interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. You can see the documentary online at <http://yorkregionfilmfestival.ca/films/journey-oz>

Notice to Off-Reserve Members
All Mishkeegogamang band members living off-reserve should fax or phone in their current address and phone number to the band office (928-2414) as soon as possible. This will ensure that people get their notices, elders can receive their payouts, and everyone is able to make nominations and vote in elections.

Girl Power Powering Up
A group of 12 girls ages 8-14 has begun to meet for Girl Power, a pilot project in Mishkeegogamang that “prepares girls for a future that offers well being, empowerment and a sense of belonging.” Girl Power leader Destani Skunk is working with a coordinator via teleconference to get the program established. She says the girls all like the idea of learning how to hold events and activities so she hopes to mentor them with hands-on experience in organizing community events, “or even just soccer games.”



Fishing on a Youth Retreat led by Mervyn Masakeyash and Ken Wavy in September

PHOTO BY KENNETH WAVY

Name a Power Company
Thought of any good names lately? The band needs to name two companies the community is involved in, so it is seeking suggestions from all band members. The first company we need a name for will be involved in operating the new power transmission line from Ignace to Pickle Lake. The second name is for the management company that will supervise the first company. Preferably, the company names will be Anishinabe, but all ideas will be considered. Members are asked to participate in this ASAP and contact the band office with your suggestions.

Beautification Contest Extended
The Pum-Itoo Taashikaywin (Let’s Take Care of our Land) Beautification Contest has been extended because of the fire and power situation. \$5000 in cash and prizes will still be up for grabs next spring so remember to get involved next year and help beautify Mishkeegogamang.

Pilot Passes Away
Trevor Jonasson, the fiancé of former Missabay teacher Betsy Lucko, passed away in a plane crash on September 22. Jonasson was piloting a plane in Yellowknife when

he was suddenly killed along with his co-pilot, Nicole Stacey. All seven passengers onboard the Twin Otter floatplane survived the crash, although several were seriously injured.
Funeral services for Mr. Jonasson were held in Yellowknife on September 28. Many people in Mishkeegogamang were shocked and saddened by the tragedy. Tammy Mulroney-Walsh, Gr. 1 teacher at Missabay, flew to Yellowknife to support Betsy and represent the school and community. If anyone would like to send condolences to Betsy, feel free to contact Tammy at the school or 928-0420.



William Mallery playing for the Thunder Bay All-Stars in the Red River Cup this summer

Mish Stars Soccer

The Second Annual Future Stars Soccer Tournament, held on September 24, was a huge success. There were four teams with about 10 players on each team. “It was the talk of the week,” said organizer Destani Skunk. “All the kids were talking about going to soccer.” Awards and medallions were given for all places – the Grey team took first, Red was second, third went to the Blue team and Orange ended up fourth.

Best of Tournament

- Best forward - Shawn Kwandibens
- Best Centre - Tristan Loon
- Best Defence - Tamara Kaminawaish
- Most Sportsmanlike - Jennifer Panacheese
- Best Goalie - Zuriel Keetash
- Most Valuable Player - Sidney Neekan
- Top Scorer - Quinton Loon

Mishkeegogamang
Community Update
October 2011 Volume 3 Issue 5

Jointly funded by PC Gold Inc. and
Mishkeegogamang Ojibway First
Nation

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Everyone is welcome to submit an
article, photo, or write a letter to
the Mishkeegogamang Community
Update. Share your opinion or ideas
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length.

Missabay Welcomes New Teachers



Nerina Facca, Missabay’s new Grade 5-6 teacher, is glad she decided to move up to Mishkeegogamang. “Everybody’s been really kind to me, I’m extremely happy here and everything’s going really well,” she said. “I’m definitely happy that I made this choice and looking forward to spending the year with my students and watching them grow both academically and socially.”

Missabay’s students and teachers quickly made Nerina feel at home. “The teachers really bonded quickly, sharing ideas and interests. We were all very excited to implement new strategies,” she said. “My first week here, I got some really nice letters from students thanking me for coming, which they did on their own. My favourite thing about teaching at Missabay are the kids – they brighten my day.”

Nerina has been teaching for the past three years at Scholars Education Centre in her

hometown of Thunder Bay. She was originally planning to teach here last year, but delayed those plans when her grandmother became ill. Nerina first heard about Missabay from her friend Amanda Kraft, and thought the school would be a good place for her to fulfill a long-term goal. “I’ve always wanted to teach in the north. I have a high interest in First Nations culture, and I share similar interests, so I thought it would be nice to form a relationship with my students.”

Having a relaxed classroom setting and staying flexible are two of Nerina’s key approaches to teaching. “There’s an appropriate time to be silly and an appropriate time to be strict, so I think it’s important to be versatile. I try and gauge whatever is working at the moment,” Nerina said. “My goal is to be calm and positive all the time. I like it to be a relaxed environment so that everyone’s learning.”



Jonas Masakeyash is the new TA for Junior Kingergarten

Amanda Pedalino is the new Grade 7-8 teacher at Missabay this year, and she’s excited to be here. “The students and teachers have been so welcoming,” she said. “A lot of times I’ve felt like an outsider but they have really made me feel like part of the group. I want to say thank you to everybody at Missabay for making me feel so welcome and for the great start to the school year.”

Originally from Sault Ste. Marie, Amanda got her teaching degree at Lake Superior State University in Michigan. She decided to move

to Mishkeegogamang for her first teaching job and took on some new hobbies right away. “Since I’ve been here I’ve been learning how to fish, which is strange because I’ve never done it before even though I’m from Northern Ontario. I’m learning how to cook too, so I’m spending a lot of time learning new things,” she said.

Amanda has also been enjoying the natural surroundings of her new home. “I’m really interested in the outdoors, science was my favourite school subject, and particularly

rocks and trees,” Amanda said. “I’m into the biology of plants and geology. Anything to do with nature I really like.”

One of the things Amanda focuses on in the classroom is to get all the students involved and learning from each other. “I like to do things together as a class in a learning environment that’s like a community,” said Amanda. “Having everyone share their own ideas can help each student learn from every other student in the room, instead of just hearing what I have to say.”

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Bravery Award Winner Doesn’t Feel Like a Hero

to the window upstairs, which was around 14 feet up,” he said. “When I first got there, there was no fire on the main floor. I saw Donnie Kwandibens and Elizabeth Wesley crying and saying there was one kid missing. I had no time to think, I just acted. I just threw on a wet blanket and ran upstairs.

“Once I got upstairs I checked under the bed, but somehow I missed him. The smoke was making my eyes water and I

couldn’t really see Joey because of all the smoke. I accidentally stepped on his chest, that’s how I found him. I took off the wet blanket I had and covered him, then yelled at the others to keep pouring water on the walls downstairs.” Mark Montour, Jeffrey Neekan, and Errol Thompson were on the stairway, and Errol was hauling water back and forth with a bucket from the tub in the bathroom downstairs. With help from two others, Bernard dragged Joey down the

stairs to safety.

Despite the intense heat and smoke, all the rescuers emerged from the incident uninjured. Joey suffered from burns and smoke inhalation, but recovered quickly and is now dating Bernard’s niece. Bernard says he doesn’t feel like a hero and was simply acting on instinct. “No, I don’t consider myself a hero,” he said. “Anybody could have done it. I didn’t feel a lot of fear going up the stairs. It was just a fast

reaction, I guess you would call it. Most of the cops said I was crazy, but they said I did a great job doing that.”

Even though Bernard hasn’t paid a lot of mind to all the attention his brave action has received, he did mention one small way that the honour has changed him. “I have the right to use ‘M.B.’ (for Medal of Bravery) after my name whenever I need to sign something. I guess that’s pretty cool.”

Bones Discovered on Lake St. Joseph

Charlie Lawson lives on Ace Lake, and has often visited an island nearby in Lake St. Joseph. One afternoon in late July this year, he was at the island with his family when they made a disturbing discovery. “My nieces and nephews were swimming and having fun at the beach. My niece Allison’s boyfriend found a human jaw, and he brought it back to me,” Charlie said. “He wasn’t quite sure what it was, but it had teeth in it and was clearly human. We went back to the spot where the jawbone was and noticed there were bones scattered all over the beach area.”

Having bones wash up on shore evokes especially bad memories for Mishkeegogamang, which has seen many gravesites destroyed by human-caused flooding on Lake St. Joe. The problem goes back to the 1930s, when Ontario Hydro built power dams at Rat Rapids and Cedar Rapids. The lake was flooded at night without warning the Mish people, and the results were devastating. Everyone lost their homes, trap lines, wild rice fields – everything they had known since being forced onto the reserve in the first place. The entire community needed to move three times because of the flooding, and the rising waters stripped long-standing gravesites of their bones.

More than 75 years later, the band is suing Ontario Hydro and the Canadian government for damages resulting from the flooding of Lake St. Joe. And all this time later, bones are still washing up because the elevated water levels are eroding existing

and Mervyn Masakeyash, elder Levius Loon, and Merle Loon from NAPS went out there with me,” Charlie said. “Levius mentioned that he remembered being told that five or six babies were buried near the beach, along with a medicine man who was buried on a

up. Even though Charlie realizes that the band, NAPS, and the Coroner’s Office have to follow specific procedures, he’s impatient for action on the matter. “Nobody wanted to step forward, but I’m not going to give up; I’m doing it for the future generation. I respect those bones, that’s a human body there and I feel like I have to put them away,” Charlie said. “Nobody has been able to tell me how long it will take to get a decision about this, and I’d clean them up myself after talking to the elders. I think we’re still losing some bodies yet; when it’s raining heavily, water is washing in and the erosion on that bluff increases. When it dries out, it begins to show the bones and you can see them scattered all over the place.”

Charlie has been making phone calls to elders seeking advice on the issue, and has suggested getting an underground detector to find more of the bones. He has considered wrapping the bones in a shroud and placing them in a coffin or birch container. “This is an ongoing problem that needs to be solved as soon as possible,” Charlie said. “Now, today, we have a chance to put it all away.” In the meantime, he’s posted a sign on the beach with a fitting Bible passage: Ezekiel 13.1-14, the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones.



David Masakeyash and Charlie Lawson checking out the beach in late July

PHOTO BY KENNETH WAVY

gravesites. In the case of the island near Ace Lake, Charlie believes that there may be more bodies that could soon be washed away as well. “About two months ago, David

high point of the island so that people could see his gravesite when they travelled by.”

As of late September, the investigation into the bones still hasn’t been wrapped

Soccer Season Wrap Up

Mishkeegogamang’s adult soccer program finished up a great season with some close finishes in the standings. The Men’s Soccer League was wrapped up in August with the Bombers taking top overall spot, followed by Domination and Ten Houses.

The Women’s Soccer League came right down to the wire and ended up with an extremely close finish in the final standings. Two teams, Thunder and Chanimas, each finished the season with 14 points, but Chanimas had one less loss to break the tie. The Ladyhawks ended up in third for the year.

Full season stats can be seen at www.michaeljamesbottle.myknet.org/. Thanks to everyone who came out to help make the year a success!

Mish Quartet Get Water Training

Four people from Mish have gone through a one-week training program called the Operator-In-Training Water Treatment and Distribution Preparation Course. Reggie Roundhead, Chelsea Ottertail, Shanna Neekan, and Dan Sabko all passed the preliminary test for the class, which was held at Missabay school in the last week of August. The final exam, proctored by Blair Fowler, was scheduled for October 12.

“It was a lot of fun and the trainer, Jason Leblanc, was excellent; I can’t say enough about him,” said Mishkeegogamang Technical Services manager Dan Sabko. “As a class, we went around and looked at the water treatment plant at Ten Houses, which uses groundwater, and the one attached to the school, which processes surface water from the lake.”

Many Canadian First Nations suffer from inadequate water systems, and the tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario in 2000 has led to many changes to water regulations in the province. Seven

people died and 2500 became sick in Walkerton when e. coli bacteria from farm runoff mixed with the town’s water supply. “Everything we’re doing now, the training and everything, is because of Walkerton,” said Sabko. “Things changed by leaps and bounds because of that incident.”

Leonard Wavy, Mishkeegogamang’s Water Treatment manager, also completed a Drinking Water Operator Course at the beginning of August. “He worked his butt off taking his high school equivalency so he could be able to go on to get the next levels of certification,” Dan said.

Sabko recommends that housing managers in other communities should take the water treatment course to get a better understanding of their local water issues. “I was really surprised by how much I learned in that course. Knowing what they have to deal with and the importance of their job really opened my eyes,” he said. “Anybody who’s a housing manager and oversees water management, I recommend they take the OIT course to get an overview of what they’re dealing with.”



New Council Portfolios



Each councillor has a portfolio or list of departments he or she is responsible for. New councillor Michael James Bottle talked about the duties of the councillor as he understands them. The councillor is in a position of oversight. “People working under me,” said Bottle, “they know their job.” And even though each councillor has his or her own portfolios, councillors are responsible to be engaged in all areas of interest and concern to the community. Bottle said part of the role of councillors is to know what’s going on and then to get that out to the public.

Bottle’s new portfolios are administration, and operations and maintenance. Although his background is in education, he did not take that portfolio, as Maryanne Panacheese Skunk had already been looking after it and will continue in that role. Councillor Bottle works as a teacher at Saugeen, so he does not receive the regular honoraria that the other councillors get. “My pay comes from Saugeen,” he explained, “and when I go to meetings, my honoraria kicks in. If I have to take time off from work here, the band will compensate me for time and travel and wage loss.” So far he said the system is working well.

Chief and Council Portfolios 2011-2013 Term
David Masakeyash Lands and Resources (negotiator) Economic Development
Michael Bottle Operations and Maintenance / Housing Administration / HR / Welfare
Maryanne Panacheese-Skunk Health and Social Education
Tom Wassaykeesic – Head Councillor All internal affairs and issues
Connie Gray-McKay – Chief All internal and external issues

Health News



Nurse Nicola Phipps-Wetelainen reminds parents to look out for RSV

Watch for RSV in Babies and Children

Parents of young children should be alert for respiratory tract infections this fall and winter. “Respiratory” has to do with breathing, and the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs are part of the respiratory tract.

Community Health Nurse Nicola Phipps-Wetelainen says the virus to watch for is called RSV, which stands for respiratory syncytial virus.

RSV can be serious. In most young children, it results in a mild respiratory infection, but babies who have the virus may get much sicker and occasionally it’s best to have a severe infection managed in the hospital.

A runny, stuffy nose, coughing (up to three weeks), noisy or rapid breathing, fever, red eyes, and/or sore ears are all signs of RSV.

Chiefs Committee on Health

The Chiefs Committee on Health (CCOH) brings together chiefs from around the region to find ways to improve health care delivery to communities. It was formed by the Sioux Lookout Zone Chiefs in 2004 and is responsible for developing a strategic work plan and budget and lobbying for resources to fill the gaps in Health Services for First Nations members.

The CCOH passed several important resolutions in 2011. The committee resolved to:

- 1) Recognize the problem of opiate drug abuse in the region
- 2) Develop an action plan to address its far-reaching impacts on the families and lives of all community members
- 3) Increase resources and narcotics treatment options within communities
- 4) Establish a treatment centre in the Sioux Lookout Zone to deal directly with prescription drug addiction.

The following is an excerpt from the Chiefs Committee on Health 2011 report:

Chief Connie Gray-McKay has participated on the CCOH since its inception, sharing the role at times with Councillor Mary Ann Panacheese-Skunk. She appreciates that the committee “gives a forum for chiefs to be able to directly address health issues.” The CCOH, she notes, connects chiefs with health professionals who explain the complexities, and meets with politicians who have the ability to

change the current health policies.

Chief Gray-McKay thinks that the CCOH has assisted with making some positive changes in health services. She points to the increase of doctor days in the north as an example.



However, she feels that there is still much to work on. “Mould in houses, overcrowding, drug addictions – these gravely impact the health of our people,” she says. “The spirits of our people are down and when that happens they are vulnerable to sickness.”

Her prescription for improving First Nations health: focus more on prevention. “Let’s exercise more and improve our lifestyles. Let’s develop really good parenting programs. Let’s try harder to address lifestyle issues before they become health concerns.”

Important Health Announcements

School Immunization Time

It’s time for school age immunization. Parents, please:

- Complete and sign the consent form that will be sent out shortly.
- Return the signed forms to the school in the provided envelope. Students will miss out on important immunizations if forms are not signed and returned.
- Call the clinic with any questions or concerns regarding any immunizations.
- Read all the information included in the package on the vaccines your child will be receiving.

Bring your Medications

Whenever you come in to see a nurse or the doctor, please bring all your medication with you.

Pick up Medication during Clinic Hours

Your chronic medication needs to be picked up during clinic hours, 9 - 5. Call Virginia at 928-2298.

Flu Vaccines Coming

Flu vaccine should become available in October – November.

Immunization for Babies and Pre-Schoolers

There is a new (August 2011) Ministry of Health Immunizations Schedule. Please call the clinic if you have any questions about what immunizations your baby or pre-schooler needs. Immunization clinic and well baby checks are usually done every Monday and Friday from 1 - 4 p.m.

Hope and Healing for Narcotics Addiction

Dr. Larry Willms talks about the trauma of narcotic addiction and the help that’s available

Prescription drug abuse in the community has exploded

Narcotic addiction has moved from “less severe” to “quite severe” in Mishkeegogamang in a very short period of time. It used to be that alcohol was the major concern here, and it remains in the background as a real struggle for many people. But narcotics are affecting a whole different group of people, many of whom haven’t struggled with alcohol the way they struggle with narcotics now. We’re also noting that women who are pregnant find it much more difficult to stop narcotics than alcohol. 95% of women who find out they’re pregnant stop or curtail booze, but for people who have a regular narcotic habit, it’s not something they are able to do as often.

Narcotics hurt people and relationships

A narcotic habit disrupts social routines and relationships. It is so expensive and so tenacious that it often leads to conflicts related to money. Relationships that were previously good relationships are disrupted. Patients will tell me “family members are not talking to me because of this.” For some people underlying mental health problems that gave rise to the addiction are at risk of getting worse. Things like depression and grief can be heightened by the low after the euphoria of a narcotic wears off. People are losing jobs, having employment troubles, and going to jail for stealing.

Healing takes time

One of the things people should keep in mind is that drug addiction is just a symptom of an underlying problem, such as grief, past trauma, and complicated or chaotic social environments. So it’s not just a question of stopping the substance abuse, but healing the underlying issues that are driving the addiction. It’s that underlying healing that takes time and often requires an intensely focused program that can be provided in a treatment facility.

People have successfully quit

When people tell me what they’re up against, what shocks me is how much progress they are making despite their circumstances. Some are taking care of sick elders, there’s a lack of money, overcrowding in houses, and so on, but they’re still moving forward. It’s important to not lose sight of the fact that we routinely see people that have stopped drugs and are doing much better. There’s no shortage of hope stories here. This community has many, many people that wake up every morning, work, enjoy life, are not using alcohol or drugs, and are happy with their decisions. And there are a lot of people who have seen what’s happening with narcotics and are staying clear of it. They say, “No way, I’ve seen what it does.”

There is hope and help

I think it’s very important for people to know that no matter how desperate or difficult their circumstance seems, they are not alone and there are others who have struggled with the same thing. Our experience as health advisors is that those who are determined to overcome these problems eventually do. So people should believe in their ability to experience a better life.

Where to get help for addictions

- **Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program:** There’s a NADAP worker here in the community
- **The Resource Centre** offers counseling services and treatment centre options
- **Pashkokogan** has healing programs for individuals and families
- **The Meno-Ya-Win Health Centre** has a program called called “Community counseling and addictions services.” A counsellor from this program is in Pickle Lake two days a month

Raising Our Children Together

“Bring your children to Mamo-Ombiggi-Owsowin.” That’s the message Maxine Wassaykeesic would like to send out to all parents of babies and young children. Mamo-Ombiggi-Owsowin (which means “raising our children together” in English) is a daycare and child health centre that’s been in operation in Mishkeegogamang since 2002.



Maxine, the Centre’s manager, started in January 2010. She works together with Tanya Bottle, Maureen Mishenene, Chelsea Fox, and Amy Neekan to offer six programs to improve the health of babies and children.

Tanya Bottle, who manages ECD and Head Start, is currently taking a two-year course to earn an ECD certificate.

Maxine especially enjoys about her work is the opportunity to mentor young expecting mothers. “Sometimes pregnant moms don’t know about what smoking and alcohol do to the unborn child. And sometimes they won’t listen, but you have to try. You just gotta get the message out there.”

Many activities are offered within the various programs, among them:

- Programs at
Mama-Ombiggi-Owsowin**
1. Healthy Babies/Healthy Children

2. Early Childhood Development (ECD)

3. Aboriginal Head Start

4. FASD/Child Nutrition

5. Maternal Child Health (MCH)

6. Canada Prenatal Nutrition

- Mother and daughter night, 2 hours every Wednesday night, 6-8 p.m., earlier in the winter months, with various activities like sewing and making dream catchers
- Father and son nights, new this year, running Thursday nights 6-8 p.m.
- A child snack program, community kitchens, and soup and bannock day.
- \$25 gift card for the Northern Store for prenatals every 2 weeks to buy nutritious food
- Pamper Hamper program given out monthly as needed
- Baby Gear Lending program lends out strollers, playpens, baby bath tubs, jolly jumpers
- Four community kitchens in October
- First Aid parenting workshop

Mamo-Ombiggi-Owsowin has been hit with a plague of vandalism, with three incidents of break-in and theft this year. Space is limited, with the five employees sharing one office and two computers. One of the Centre’s biggest challenges is transportation – being able to get kids to the Centre for activities and bring them back home. “We usually get about 10 children,” said Maxine, “but we should have more.”

Maxine frequently works together with other community programs and also organizes special events for kids with guests like Ronnie and Evelyn Beaver.

The Centre is open to everybody Monday to Friday, 9-5. “There’s always somebody here. We encourage them to come – there are lots of mothers out there that come to us; a lot of them are in their 20s, single, with two kids or more, and we give them a hand. They’re always welcome here.”



Evelyn Beaver demonstrates kneading dough at the bannock bake

Teaching Cultural Traditions to Young People

Ronnie Beaver and his wife Evelyn have been coming to Mishkeegogamang for the past three years to teach traditional values and practices to children and youth. They were recently in the community to hold a bannock bake-off for boy-girl teams, with the boys building the fire and girls doing the cooking.

“I enjoy seeing these young people here this evening, seeing them smile,” Ronnie said. “It’s something no one has ever showed most of them, how to make bannock on an open fire, so they can do it now when they go camping.”

“Most of the things me and Evelyn have done here are through programs with Destani Skunk and Maxine Wassaykeesic. I do most of the cultural stuff and my wife does life-skills training, like we’re doing right now. We teach kids about baking bannock, lighting cooking fires, how to make a moss bag for babies, and making other traditional foods like wild rice. We also tell them about the history and customs of our traditional teaching, and the spiritual aspects of the teachings. It’s very important for the children and young people to know their culture and heritage; we need to understand the history of our people. The reason I share this with young people is they are the ones who will change things. I can’t make those changes, people have to make change themselves. All I can do is provide the teachings.”

Now living in Sioux Lookout, Ronnie is from

Eabametoong Ojibway Nation and first started coming to Mish regularly in the mid-1990s. His years working here as a Child Welfare supervisor and manager for Tikinagan have given him an appreciation for how far the



Ronnie Beaver at the bannock bake-off near Missabay School in September

community has come since then. “I’ve worked with a lot of families and I know the community was struggling back then. Things were pretty tough here but it’s not like that anymore. There have been a lot of changes in the last 15 years,” Ronnie said.

One of the changes Ronnie has seen is a renewed interest, especially among young people, in cultural traditions like the sweat lodge. “There are a lot of young people and parents that are getting interested and going back to their culture. In the ceremonies I do in the sweat lodge, I’m often able to get information that they are searching for. If you are on a healing journey the sweat lodge is a good place to begin,” said Ronnie. Everybody in Mish is welcomed to take part in a ceremony or just come by the sweat lodge to observe. Destani, Maxine, or Isaiah Roundhead can tell you when the next one is happening.

In the past, communities like Mish have experienced tension between people practicing traditional beliefs and others who follow the Christian religion. Ronnie says Native spirituality has its own way of believing in God, and he thinks that there are ways to build bridges to ease those tensions. “It’s like that all over, in all of these communities around here, even within our families. I’ve got two sisters and a brother. My sisters don’t practice this, they go to church, but we still love each other,” he said. “You have to realize that God made you as a Native person, and we have our own way that we believe in God. I’ve talked to elders about this many times. It doesn’t matter if you’re a traditional person or a Christian – we all worship the same God.”



Kendra Roundhead getting the fire going at the sweat lodge in late September;
Above: Cooking over an open fire in the bannock bake-off; Right: Destani and friends



Kenneth Wavy took down the biggest bull he’s ever got this fall, with a 53-inch rack

Leader Foresees Brighter Future

Destani Skunk has a lot of ideas for promoting health in Mishkeegogamang, and she translates her ideas into successful actions and events. Destani manages the community’s Brighter Futures program. This is a government-funded, community-based health promotion program for First Nations and Inuit communities.

Soccer tournaments, a three-day community gathering after the fire, a healing walk, and a Girl Power group are just some of the health-promotion events Destani has helped to organize.

Nothing Can Stop Us

When the idea of a healing walk was first presented to Destani, she found herself asking what the purpose or message of such a walk would be.

Donna Roundhead and Chief Connie helped her define it – that the walk could symbolize healing as a community and working together as a people. The walk to Ten Houses from the Main Reserve one cold day last November was significant in many ways. “Nobody quit,” said Destani, even when it started to snow after four and a half hours, and support vehicles were right there if needed. Ronald Roundhead brought the walkers drinks and sandwiches at the halfway mark, and by the time the walk was over, Destani said the picture she got was “We can do anything we want, nothing can stop us if we put our minds to it.”

A good experience

Young people in Mish are asking for teachings on the sweat lodge as a place of healing and restoration. A significant part of the healing walk for Destani was an invitation after the walk to a sweat lodge. Until that point it wasn’t something she

participated in. “I respected it,” she said, “but I didn’t care to go.” She was a little afraid of the sweat lodge beforehand, wondering about escape routes, but it turned out to be a very good experience for her, both physically and mentally. Sore and cramped muscles from the walk were relieved, and she had a relaxed and worry-free sleep that night.

The sweat lodge has been moved from the sandpits into the community near Missabay School and transportation can be provided for those who want to come.



Everyone is welcome to come out, even just to observe. Ronnie Beaver of Fort Hope is the conductor. Contact Destani Skunk or Isaiah Roundhead for more information.

After Destani finished up organizing the three-day gathering this summer that got the community together after the fires, she participated in a sweat lodge in which she prayed for the youth and the community “that we find that path where we could work together as a community and find that healing.” She is optimistic about Mishkeegogamang’s future. “I think our people have a lot of potential to get big things done. You can hear it in their ideas. It’s just a matter of getting them motivated and bringing out their knowledge. I believe in our people: they will rise one day.” The young people she works with motivate her. “They have ideas, and things they would like to see, and I start to develop more ideas coming from them.”

Back Together Again

A lively three-day gathering suggested by Chief Connie and sponsored by Brighter Futures was just the right way to bring the community back together after all the tension and disruption of the fire, power outages and evacuation.

A stage for live music, a platform for square dancing and a cookout area kept everyone hopping for the three-day event. The children loved the inflatable castle with a velco wall from Funtastic Castles in Thunder Bay. Dr. Marilyn Koval took the top prize in the karaoke contest, with her rousing version of “Because You Love Me,” and Eric Mallory was close behind in second place with “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels.” Merle Loon won the poker tour, with Mike Skunk finding time to take second place in between taking turns with Elmer Neetumgeesic to drive the bus “night and day,” ferrying people to and from the festivities.

Special kudos to the kitchen crew – Susan Oombash, Sarah Jane Bottle, Isabel Spade, Evyln Beaver, Kenny Lawson, and James Kwandibens – who kept everyone well fed. Also a big thank-you to the fiddlers from Webequie, the OEM staff and their summer students, Ronnie Beaver, Isaiah Roundhead, Leon Fox, Mervyn Masakeyash, Maxine Wassaykeesic, staff from Tikinagan and the Healthy Babies program and many others who helped to make the event a huge success.



Ebony Gladu and Darnell Bottle were married this summer in Thunder Bay. Congratulations!



Who we are as Anishinabe People

Part Two of a talk with Ronald Roundhead

Me, as an Anishinabe person, I go out there on our traditional territory, every spring and every fall. That doesn't mean that I go out there and shoot until the gun barrel is red. We only take what we need, based on what I say. Hopefully our elders, before they all leave for the Anishinabe traditional paradise, we call it, hopefully they will leave something behind – how we should approach and understand



who we are as Anishinabe people. Spiritual knowledge, anything that we practice with a spiritual approach, you don't buy that, you earn that. Spiritual practice is not on sale – you can't buy that, or you get that in a Cracker Jack box or a gift shop. Spiritual issues are issues that you earn in a divine way. Nothing is on sale when it comes to spirituality. We have to make sure that what our forefathers believe is in place again and practiced again.

That doesn't mean that we're going to practice a worship of earthly objects like birds, animals, plants, or water. But we deeply respect what is given to us by the Creator. We also have to respect who we are as Anishinabe people, and also respect our visitors, our foreign brothers. When I call them foreign brothers, they're brothers to me because they have the same color of blood, and they breathe the same air that we breathe. Somewhere down the line we want to set aside our differences and get at the same level, because no group of humans should be dominant over another society. In our vision of how the world works, all men are at the same the level.

It doesn't matter what colour – black, white, yellow, or red – under one God we're all equal. That's our native teaching right there. I guess that's the reason why our forefathers signed that 1905 treaty, for as long as the grass grows, the river flows, and the sun shines – the treaty-signing was based on respect.

I'm a diabetic, and unfortunately I rely on things like chicken and hamburger and potatoes. Just as an example of how sensitive and important any traditional food is – when I prick my hand to make sure my blood sugar is at the right level, sometimes it shoots up, and then when I eat traditional food, especially fish, a straight diet on fish with no salt on it, my blood sugar level shoots down the way it should be. That's the diet we should try to go back to, more traditional food, as much as possible. Then we can go back to the cycle I'm talking about. It's important to start teaching these kinds of teachings that were practiced, our traditional laws, which are based on the nature itself, the cycle of life, the animals, the plants, the air, the water.

It was significant for me to see that picture of my grandson cutting up a moose in a previous edition of the paper. It's important to carry on our teaching as parents, as guardians, and also as grandparents. If we do that, eventually, then we can have what I call family sovereignty. The community must develop Ma-Mun-Oo-Bie-Ga-Of-Zowin, family sovereignties, in order to function accordingly. We have to regain that family sovereignty, and then we can be happy again.

If I misquoted anything, I'd like to people of Mish to forgive me – we can all make mistakes and I'm only human.

Meegwetch.

“Scooped” Band Member Talks About Adoption

Karen Kaminawaish was “scooped” as baby in the “Sixties Scoop” adoption wave. She has since reunited with her family in Mishkeegogamang and is currently working as a community liaison officer in Mishkeegogamang. She has been studying for a doctorate in Sociology at the Oklahoma State University (not University of Oklahoma, as previously printed in the Update). Karen prefers not to capitalize references to herself when she writes. This is the second in a series of four.

I was two years old when i was stolen as a toddler from the Bottle family. Today i have much respect and love for Jimmie and Charlie Bottle, because their family took care of me when i was small.

Growing up in a white world with me being the only dark person was very lonely. i can remember thinking i was only there for a duration and counting the years, months, weeks and days. Fortunately, i was adopted into a loving and caring Mennonite family, Devon and Florence Risser, who gave me the best, especially a Christian upbringing.

I was very lonely growing up and just wanted to have someone that I could identify with and my Grandma was that person. She always loved me rubbing her hands. One day we sat in the yard and i was rubbing her hands. I picked this one spot and looked at it and said, “Grandma i just know you are brown underneath.” She would always cook me chocolate or vanilla pudding for a special treat. I knew i was loved unconditionally by her and would spend huge amounts of time with her. Another favorite memory about her was sleeping over a lot and hearing her nightly recite Bible scriptures by heart.

My white family and friends never treated my sister, Connie,

who is Korean, and me any different. It was me that thought of myself as different and that resulted in somewhat turbulent teenage years.

Many people did care for me, but part of being adopted makes the adoptee push people away. Inside i was crying out to be loved. I remember always trying to fit in somewhere and for some reason i just did not seem to fit in anyplace. Being adopted means not being able to connect with your culture and traditions. Those opportunities are stripped from you when you are abruptly taken, and of course, this results in not being able to connect or bond with a lot of people and things. Now, i tell people i am bi-cultural, meaning that i am from



two cultures and i have acquired an ease of slipping in and out of both cultures. Today i feel complete and want to give to my people and mankind.

The big part of being adopted is the feeling your whole life that something must be wrong with you for someone to not want you. i struggled with this for many years while growing up and my teenage years were directly affected because of this. My white mom cared enough to send me to some good counselors. Today, i understand that a lot of my problems had to do with my numerous uprootings as a toddler and not fully bonding with my white mom.



Congratulations to Rachelle Wavy and Dan Macklin, married August 20, 2011 in Pickle Lake