

First Nations drum-making demonstrated at Alder arena



By Brian Lockhart

There's a lot more time and effort involved in making a drum than you probably realize.

The manufactured kits you see in a music store are stamped out in a factory somewhere but the traditional hand and pow wow drums used by First Nations people required a lot of knowledge and skill.

It's a process that takes weeks and starts with creating wooden frame.

That in itself is quite an endeavour.

The frames are usually circular, but also come in eight sided frames or up to 12 sides that have to be individually cut, shaped and placed and glued into position for the drum skin can be attached.

Leon Fleury, a First Nations traditional drum maker gave a demonstration of the craft in the TD room at the Alder Street arena in Orangeville last Saturday, May 26.

Assisted by his wife Margaret, he also gives demonstrations at schools and other venues.

"This is a joint effort between the Town of Orangeville and the Dufferin County Cultural Resource Circle," explained organizer Debbie Sipkema. "We've received a grant from the Town of Orangeville to run some programming. We're working in partnership with them through Parks and Recreation to bring these types of programs to the citizens of Orangeville. Today is a drum-making workshop. Today, Leon and his wife Margaret will teach us traditional ways to make a drum. They also brought some of the other crafts they make as well."

Leon, who is originally from Northern Quebec, has an Algonquin background and made the drums in that style although most other First Nations techniques are similar.

He sources the animal hides from hunters or farmers who won't have a need for them.

He then goes through the process of tanning the hide which in his case includes soaking it in the Grand River behind his home for several days, where the river current does a natural job. He removes the fat and remaining tissue so only the bare hide remains.

During the demonstration Leon produced a wet, rather smelly, piece of hide that is pliable and shaped over the drum. The smell goes away once the drum is complete.

He used a thin strip of the hide to attach it to the drum frame, tying it tightly and working it into a lattice on the underside of the drum.

The drum is then dried out and the hide rests tightly over the frame.

It was an interesting demonstration of a tradition that goes back thousands of years.

Leon uses his basement as a home operation for his drum-making and has quite a large collection of the smaller hand drums and the much larger drums used by several drummers at once during a traditional powwow.