

Aboriginal Day offers opportunity to learn about First Nations culture



By Brian Lockhart

You couldn't miss the temporary landmark at Alexandria Park in Orangeville during the National Aboriginal People's Day celebration on Saturday, June 23.

A full size teepee was erected on site that pretty much gave anyone driving by a good idea that something special was happening. It was the fourth year the event was celebrated in Orangeville.

People in colourful native dress danced, and elders spoke on various subjects that are important to First Nations people.

Vendors offered different native crafts and many people came just to enjoy the day and talk to others attending the event.

Several bands took the stage throughout the afternoon.

"This is our fourth year. We're planning our fifth anniversary (next year) and it's going to be massive," said Debbie Sipkema, of the Dufferin County Cultural Resource Circle. "Today is just as exciting. It's a national event. It's an opportunity to learn about the traditional cultures and we bring elders here to help us with that. We have a chief from Nawash and one from the Saugeen nation, and we also have the Mohawks here."

Many people in attendance have been involved with the event and support it every year.

Ms. Sipkema referenced the bands on stage, saying "We have the Supply and Deman (band) and Larry Kurtz and the Lawbreakers. These are guys who have supported us over the last four years."

Although the actual date of National Aboriginal Peoples Day is June 21, locally it is celebrated on the weekend to give more people the opportunity to take part. The June 21, date was chosen as it corresponds with the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, and many Indigenous People's groups have celebrated their culture and heritage at this time of year.

The event takes place nationally and is an opportunity to become better acquainted with the cultural diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across the country.