

## A Cree-style Canada Day in Georgeville

Georgeville, Quebec. When visitors arrived in Georgeville for this year's Canada Day festivities, they discovered an unusual sight—two large teepees in the public park. Inside the teepees three artisans from Oujé-Bougoumou were giving demonstrations of Cree crafts.

The presence of teepees and of Cree artisans in this small, but prosperous, resort on Lake Memphremagog in southern Quebec was the result of a partnership between Studio Georgeville, an art gallery and cultural centre in Georgeville, and COTA (Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association).

"We thought that it was important to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action in the domain of culture," Studio Georgeville president Louise Abbott explains. "We wanted to bring the work of aboriginal artists and artisans to a non-native audience and promote an understanding of aboriginal life and culture. At the same time, we wanted to give aboriginal artists and artisans the opportunity to learn more about life and culture here in the Eastern Townships.

"We decided to hold an Aboriginal Arts Festival with a month-long art exhibition, a two-day film festival, and crafts demonstrations over the Canada Day weekend."

Abbott and her husband, Niels Jensen, have a longstanding relationship with COTA; they produced a book, *Eeyou Istchee: Land of the Cree*, as well as a film, *Nunaaluk: A Forgotten Story*, for the Oujé-Bougoumou-based organization. Thus they approached Robin McGinley, the executive director of COTA, about collaborating with Studio Georgeville on the Aboriginal Arts Festival.

McGinley saw the festival as an opportunity to promote Cree culture and Cree cultural tourism all at once. "We're used to setting up a booth at trade shows in urban centres," she explains. "But we've never offered on-site demonstrations before. We saw it as a way of reaching visitors on a much more personal level."

Niels Jensen, who sits on the executive of Studio Georgeville, was aware that indigenous peoples had travelled on and around Lake Memphremagog for thousands of years. Relics of their encampments have been found in many places along the lakeshore, including Georgeville. He felt that teepees in the public park in the village would remind visitors of the indigenous history of the region and also provide quarters for the craftspeople to work. He was able to borrow two teepees from local residents.

In one teepee, Anna Bosum gave cooking demonstrations and smoked a moose hide, while her husband, David Bosum, carved paddles with a traditional crooked knife. In the second teepee, Harold Bosum made tamarack decoys, while Robin McGinley and Victoria Crowe, COTA's marketing assistant, talked to visitors about Eeyou Istchee and a newly launched weekend getaway package that showcases the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute in Ouje-Bougoumou and a visit with Anna and David Bosum, who run Nuuhchimi Wiinuu Cree Cultural Tours.

"Anna gave a workshop to some of the visitors in Georgeville on how to make bannock on a stick," McGinley points out. "That was a great success: people appreciated being able to participate in the activity, which is what we want to encourage."

On Saturday, July 2, well-known sculptor Louis St-Cyr presented one of his stunning bronze sculptures of a Canada goose to the Cree of Eeyou Istchee on behalf of the arts community of Georgeville. "We're hoping that the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute might be able to display the sculpture temporarily before the Grand Council puts it on permanent display," McGinley says.

On Sunday, July 3, Harold Bosum presented Louis St-Cyr with a flying goose of tamarack that he had made in a reciprocal gesture of friendship. Jean Boucher, the MNA for Ungava, was on hand for the presentation.

"I believe that Studio Georgeville has accomplished what we set out to do with the Aboriginal Arts Festival," Louise Abbott concludes. "We have helped to provide a mutual cultural exchange, educate people, and build bridges."

Robin McGinley adds: "We met a lot of people over the weekend in Georgeville and talked to them about coming to see us in Eeyou Istchee. Hopefully it's the start of many new friendships."