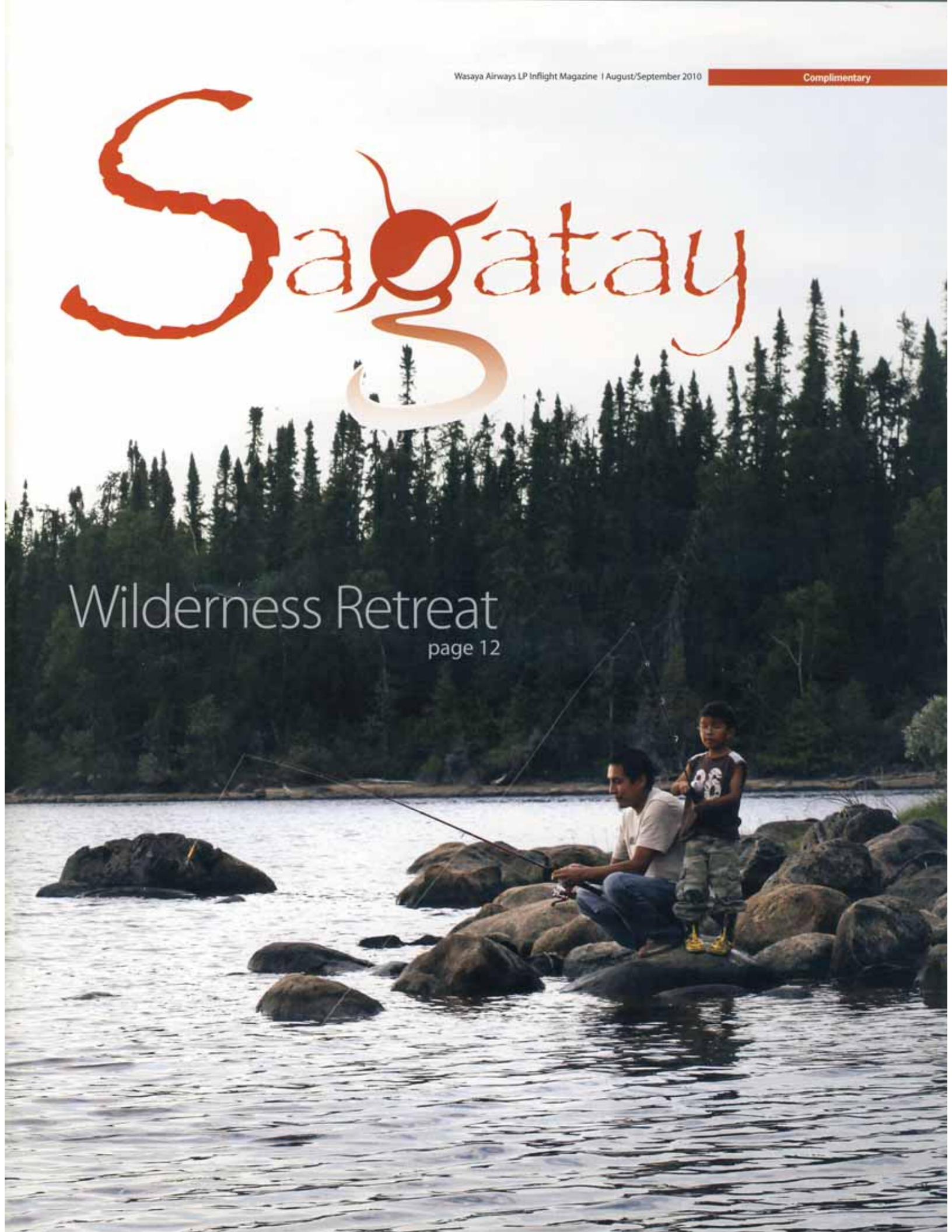


# Sagatay

Wilderness Retreat  
page 12





# Celebrating the canoe

## Trout Lake wiikwaasichimaan centrepiece of Red Lake exhibit

Story and Photos by Pamela O'Neill

It began as a community project by the Namekosipiw Anishinaapek (people of Trout Lake) to build a traditional birchbark canoe but also became an enlightening journey of discovery.

With the vision of Kaaren Dannenmann and support of a dedicated team of volunteer organizers, the Trout Lake canoe inspired *Celebrating the Canoe: Honouring the Original Technicians*, a weeklong exhibit and educational tour at the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre. The Trout Lake canoe was the centre-piece of the exhibit, which opened on National Aboriginal Day (June 21) and concluded

on National Canoe Day (June 26).

The celebration, the first of its kind in the Red Lake area, paid tribute to the invention of the canoe, its Indigenous creators and its experts. Several canoes were displayed, including Kevlar, aluminum, Royalex, cedar, and fibreglass models. Presenters on hand all week explained how the canoe evolved over time, and discussed the numerous types available on the market today.

Indigenous peoples of North America created the first canoes made from the lightweight bark of birch trees – and sometimes from cedar and spruce bark,

### Building a Birchbark Canoe

1. Collect bark, lay flat, soak to make pliable.
2. Place pre-built frame on top, pile stones on frame.
3. Carefully fold bark up, drive stakes into ground along sides to hold bark upright around frame.
4. Build inner and outer gunwales, sandwich bark and clamp in place.
5. Gather and prepare black spruce roots, used for stitching and lashing.
6. Lash gunwales to the bark with spruce root.
7. Stitch bark pieces.
8. Add and shape stem pieces at bow and stern, lash together.
9. Line the inside with two-inch strips of cedar, carefully apply ribs made pliable by soaking, add and secure thwarts, remove rocks from inside canoe.
10. Collect, prepare and spread spruce gum over all seams to render waterproof.
11. Add creative touches.

– *Celebrating the Canoe: Honouring the Original Technicians*  
organizing committee



submitted photo

Kaaren Dannenmann pulls tree roots used for stitching and lashing when building a canoe. Dannenmann and community members from Trout Lake, a small community near Red Lake, constructed a canoe displayed at the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre.



or even moosehide – covering a frame of wooden ribs. Birchbark proved to be the perfect choice for building canoes because it is lightweight and smooth, waterproof and resilient. Environmentally friendly in its construction, use and maintenance, the canoe remains virtually unchanged in design after thousands of years. Throughout history, it has proven to be ideal for travelling the numerous streams, rivers and lakes of the continent.

For *Celebrating the Canoe: Honouring the Original Technicians* in Red Lake, more than 200 students from Grades 1 through 8 attended.

Artisans shared their expertise in paddle making, wood burning and birchbark sewing. Andrew Keewatin from Grassy Narrows stayed throughout the week to build a miniature birchbark canoe on site.

"I want the younger generations to know the process," Keewatin said, as Travis Moose, 21, looked on with his older brother Pardemus Owen, 28, of Poplar Hill.

## National Canoe Day

National Canoe Day was founded with the aim of increasing participation in paddle travel in Canada, engaging new enthusiasts and reaching across generational and cultural divides.

On June 26, 2008, Chief Keith Knott of Curve Lake First Nation on behalf of the First Nations of Canada, the County and City of Peterborough and surrounding municipalities, called on governments and the people of Canada to mark June 26 as National Canoe Day from that day forth.

The canoe was given freely as a gift to Canada from the Aboriginal peoples of east, south, west and north. It was adopted by the visitors and has become a symbol of the founding contribution of Aboriginal peoples to Canada.

In 2007, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation polled Canadians who declared the canoe one of the Seven Wonders of Canada.

A special addition and heartfelt touch to the event was Ryan's Cedar Canoe, made by a young man in his basement just before his suicidal death several years ago.

"It was the last project of his life," said

Kathy Tetlock, mother of Ryan and author of *The Cedar Canoe: What happened to Ryan?* Tetlock was at the exhibit to speak about her son's experience building the canoe.

► 10



Youth from the Red Lake Indian Friendship centre at the Celebrating the Canoe exhibit check out the work of Trout Lake residents who built a canoe during a community gathering.



## Canoe Types

**Kevlar**, Carbon/Graphite Blends – These are called high-end composites. They are strong and light, resistant to abrasion and tearing, and have nice lines, although they can be quite expensive and home repairs are difficult. They are typically used by trippers and racers, and are widely popular among backcountry campers.

**Fibreglass** – These are made with plastic resin reinforced with fibres of glass and other materials. While they are relatively inexpensive and easily maintained, can be repaired at home and have glossy exteriors, they are also heavy and not very strong. They are mostly used by recreational and sport canoeists.

**Fabric** – Aptly-named the folding pak-canoe, these are waterproof and skin wrapped over a frame of tubular aluminum. They are extremely lightweight, easy to pack in vehicles or aircraft, and ride well over waves or in whitewater. However, assembly is required before use and the skin is prone to abrasion. They are mostly used by recreational aircraft owners who drop in and fish at remote locations.

**Wood or Canvas** – These are enjoyable and quiet on the water, and will help you stay cool in the hot sun. They can be easily damaged in rough use, require yearly maintenance and are heavy. Those willing to pay the price for quiet elegance would use this type of canoe.

**Royalex** – Also called ABS, these are made of a foam-cored plastic. This is the most durable of all canoe materials and can even bend in half and spring back to shape. They are nearly indestructible. But they come at a high price, are heavy on land and slow in water. They are most popular with whitewater canoeists.

## ► FROM 9

Joining Dannenmann on the organizing committee that planned the exhibit and related presentations were Claire Quewezence, Michelle Shephard, Sara Cuthbertson, Harlan Schwarz and Carolyn Spicer. Countless other volunteers also helped bring the event to life, supported by four local partners – the KIISHIK Community Association, Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre, Ontario Parks, and Ministry of Natural Resources.

Leslie King, a relative of Dannenmann's now living in Toronto, spent his vacation volunteering at the exhibit.

"I am really proud of the event, the people who organized the event, and am grateful for the opportunity to be able to contribute to it," he said. "I was even more proud of the fact that I participated in the construction of the centerpiece of the event – the wiikwaasichimaan or birchbark canoe. The original construction of the wiikwaasichimaan brought the community of Namekosipiw Anishinaapek together, and helped me realize that our ancestors were indeed technicians in the science of efficient and effective watercraft construction."

Dannenmann suggested the canoe

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exhibit would likely be displayed again, perhaps every second year or even annually.

"We definitely don't want this to be the one and only."

Dannenmann, a Trout Lake resident, is described as the main influence behind *Celebrating the Canoe: Honouring the Original Technicians*.

"Because of her, this weeklong display evolved," said fellow organizer Claire Quewezence of Ontario Parks.

Before anything else, Dannenmann is a teacher first. Much of her life has been dedicated to sharing her wisdom and her knowledge of the values, language and ways of her Aboriginal ancestors.

Dannenmann sat beside a strikingly beautiful birchbark canoe while talking about the importance of the canoe exhibit to her community.

"Trout Lake was once a very viable and functional community," she said.

She briefly mentions some of the major events that eventually led to Trout Lake's demise – the Red Lake gold rush, the residential school system, and the alcoholism that ensued and polluted the minds and spirits of those affected.

"By the 1990s there were just a few people living in Trout Lake; the rest of them were scattered clear across the continent," Dannenmann said.

### *The construction of the wiikwaasichimaan brought the community ... together.*

"In 1999 we decided to try to bring the community back together at least once a year. Since then we've been having community gatherings and during those gatherings we have different projects that we do. In 2007, we did the birchbark canoe."

While building the wiikwaasichimaan, the Namekosipiw Anishinaapek learned much more than the physical and technical skills. They also learned traditional teachings of balance about the Seven Grandfathers, local history and the teachings of gifts from the land.

Awareness of their people's ancient technologies soon transformed into pride.

A seed of knowledge had been planted and it would be up to Dannenmann to nurture and watch it grow.

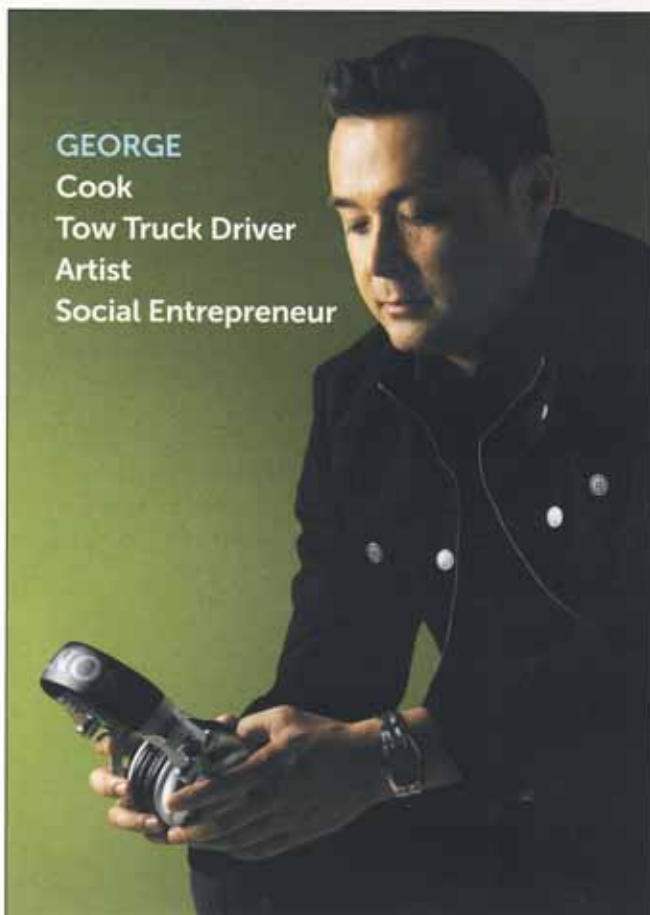
"I was noticing that when people talked about canoeing up in the (Woodland Caribou Provincial) Park or going to a canoe sport show, anything to do with canoeing, they never mentioned where the canoe came from," she said, "and that always bothered me."

"When Ontario Parks here in Red Lake agreed that it would be a good idea to do an exhibit and acknowledge the origin of the canoe, I was really excited because it was the beginning of a whole new relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginals based on acknowledgement and respect."

The hope is the canoe exhibit is another step forward in engaging individuals in intercultural dialogue, and just the start of building long-term, respectful cross-cultural relationships.

"For too long the work of Aboriginal people has not been acknowledged," Dannenmann said. "For us it is really important to be acknowledged because if it's not, it's appropriation."

*(Pamela O'Neill is special projects assistant at the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre.)*



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Artist  
Social Entrepreneur

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Kaaren Dannenmann discusses the use of tree root in the construction of a canoe with Grade 5 and 6 students from St. John's School in Red Lake, Ont.



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Pardemus Owen, 28, left, and Travis Moose, 21, centre, helped construct a miniature canoe with the guidance of Grassy Narrows' Andrew Keewatin during a weeklong Celebrating the Canoe exhibit at the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre.







# Sagatay IN SCHOOL

Students (and others who want to give it a try), answer these skill testing questions about the stories in this edition of Sagatay

## Celebrating the Canoe (page 8 & 14)

### Questions about the story and your community:

1. What factors influenced Kaaren's vision for the community project called "Celebrating the Canoe?"
2. Think about all the people you know in your community. Who would you think could make a birchbark canoe?
3. What type of action do you think is necessary to preserve the Indigenous creator's history of building a canoe in your community?
4. Do some local research and find out who you can speak to about the importance of keeping this tradition alive.

### Match the following words:

celebrate	Δ·b· <sup>h</sup>
moose hide	ᑭᑦᑲᑦ ᑕᑦᑲᑦ
Red Lake	Δ·b·ᑭᑦᑲᑦ
birchbark canoe	ᑕᑦᑲᑦ ᑭᑦᑲᑦ ᑕᑦᑲᑦ
spruce bark	ᑭᑦᑲᑦ ᑕᑦᑲᑦ
Trout Lake	ᑕᑦᑲᑦ
birchbark	ᑕᑦᑲᑦ ᑕᑦᑲᑦ



## Leader of a spiritual movement (page 4)

### Fill in the blanks:

1. Lydia Mamakwa is a member of which northern remote community \_\_\_\_\_ and a leader among her people.
2. She was recently chosen as bishop for the Aboriginal parish and is leading a \_\_\_\_\_ in northwestern Ontario.
3. Lydia was chosen for her years of service in the ministry; by her own \_\_\_\_\_ to lead the church.
4. As a chosen \_\_\_\_\_, her first priority is to fulfill the \_\_\_\_\_ of the elders in the area.
5. In years past, she has worked alongside Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ who is the first \_\_\_\_\_ in the northern Ontario region.



6. His years of service with the ministry has resulted in a \_\_\_\_\_ Ministry school in \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Selected candidates for the \_\_\_\_\_ have to be able to read, write and speak in their \_\_\_\_\_.
8. According to Archbishop David Ashdown, Ontario region could one day be its own \_\_\_\_\_.
9. It's official that Lydia will lead the Aboriginal parish and will have a seat alongside with other bishops across the \_\_\_\_\_.
10. She was consecrated as \_\_\_\_\_ for the northwestern Ontario region in \_\_\_\_\_ 2010.