

# RED LAKE WOODLAND ARTS FESTIVAL:

## A TRIBUTE TO NORVAL MORRISSEAU AND THE WOODLAND ARTISTS



The weekend of July 4 - 6, 2008, the Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre hosted the Red Lake Woodland Arts Festival: A Tribute to Norval Morrisseau and the Woodland Artists. The main purpose of the event was to instill pride in Red Lake's rich Aboriginal art history and to recognize the Aboriginal artists who emerged from the Red Lake area in the 1960s and 70s. We also wanted to acknowledge the many non-Aboriginal people who played a major role in this story, by supporting the artists in various ways.

The festival was a tremendous success. Many people, including Morrisseau's children, told us they felt privileged to be taking part in this historic event. The following are excerpts from e-mails and blog entries we received following the festival. The photos highlight some of the most memorable moments of the weekend.



A visitor admires an early work done by Norval Morrisseau on birch bark at the opening of the Festival.

*"I just want to say a huge and tremendous "Thank You" for an exceptional and wonderful festival. It was absolutely amazing. I would have to describe it as: alive, steeped in culture and history, progressive, current, enriching, deeply moving, beautiful, satisfying, and necessary. I feel like I was present at an event that was very important."*

*Lisa Clouston,  
Cypress River, Manitoba*



A t-shirt contest was organized to promote the festival. Contestants were asked to draw their personal interpretation of Woodland Art. Nine lucky winners were selected from over fifty entries! Heritage staff show off the finished product!

*"..I must tell you how amazing the event was for the people that were so lucky to experience this very special event. It was inspiring to see people from the ROM, Community Arts Ontario, Toronto galleries, arts and heritage enthusiasts, artists and the First Nation community turn out to Red Lake to share the important story of Norval and the Woodland artists. It has affected me very deeply and I will contemplate the experience for a long time to come."*

*Elaine Lynch,  
Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*





*The re-creation of Norval's painting studio from the basement of Okanski's store, complete with the many notes he wrote at that time, was something we could only see at the Red Lake Heritage Centre."*

*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



Christine with high school co-op student and research assistant Reggie Bacon.

*Far left, Author Christine Penner Polle displays her completed book, *Norval Morrisseau and the Woodland Artists: the Red Lake years 1959-1980*. This book was published as a special project to celebrate the Festival. A complimentary copy was presented to each of Morrisseau's children who had attended the Festival.*

*"...The book researched and published by the Centre may be coil bound for now, but the quality of the work I am sure will find a major publisher as it is one of a kind and builds on the significant story of the Woodland artists and their relationship to Red Lake. The inclusion of people's memories of Norval from that period add richness to this remarkable story."*

*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*

*"... thanks for all the effort in vision and leadership you put into making last weekend's festival a 'winner' for all of those of us in attendance. Its legacy is yet to be determined, but there will be one, and in the end it can only benefit the District and the Heritage Centre and woodland art in general.*

*Please also pass on our congratulations to Christine Penner Polle - she did simply an excellent job in pulling together "The Red Lake Years"; logical in its outline, efficient and effective in its style, and detailed in its content, it so well collates what had been formerly scattered bits and pieces of information on not only Morrisseau but also Triple K and its members.*

*Ray Riley, Thunder Bay*



Red Lake Mayor Phil Vinet, fashion icon Linda Lundstrom and Levi Sam Beardy standing in front of the Norval Morrisseau painting, *Thunderbird*, which is part of the Heritage Centre Collection. This painting was one of twenty-five original Morrisseau works exhibited at the Heritage Centre over the Festival weekend.

These former Cochenour classmates were also the guides for the historic walking tours where visitors could see the places where Norval Morrisseau met his first patrons and created some of his most memorable paintings.





Quilter Alice Williams, of Curve Lake First Nation, ON, in front of the quilt exhibited at the Heritage Centre, with her mother Sarah Olsen. Alice was a guest speaker and also displayed 15 of her quilts at the Art Fair.



Christi Belcourt, of Whitefish Falls, ON, participated in the Art Fair and was also a guest speaker.



Guest artist, speaker and former Triple K Co-operative member, Goyce Kakegamic of Thunder Bay, ON.

*"The art show at the gym was top notch with a great opportunity for participants to be aware of these important contemporary artists and their work."*

*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*

*"Wayne and I are still reeling from the festival. Ideas are swirling in our head, and I'm "seeing" many many new paintings in my head. I've been dreaming of doing a retreat for emerging artists for about a year and we talked about all the artists at the festival and the idea of a future retreat all the way home! Your event will surely result in some wonderful future works of art!"*

*Christi Belcourt, Guest Artist, Whitefish Falls.*



Guest artist, Ahmoo Angecone of Lac Seul.



Art Fair participant, Guest speaker and member of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group, Josh Peltier of Wikwemikong, Manitoulin Island, ON.



Art Fair participant and former Triple K Co-operative member, Saul Williams of Weagamow Lake, ON.

*"...the Red Lake Heritage Centre organized and hosted what can only be described as a world class event. The Red Lake Woodland Festival really was a unique and wonderful experience that brought people from all over Canada to both participate and to observe. The festival provided a multi-faceted way to learn about the origin of woodland art. It did this by providing different ways to come to know Morrisseau. The festival provided a profound experience for those of us that attended, and provided an important retrospect of this important style of art."*

*Jamie Boulton,  
Ministry of Culture, Kenora*





Art Fair participant Gordon Fiddler of Elliot Lake, ON.



Left, Dr. Ruth Phillips, professor of Art History, Carleton University, Ottawa and member of the Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society, with Armand Ruffo, Morrisseau's biographer, at the Art Fair, held at the High School Gymnasium.

*"The Norval Morrisseau Heritage Society (NMHS) was well represented by Ruth Phillips and Greg Hill. Dr. Phillips was very generous, taking a great deal of time to go through the works of local collectors who wanted their Morrisseau paintings listed in the catalogue raisonn e. By taking down the stories associated with those pieces and recording them as provenance for each drawing and painting, history was preserved."*

*John Newman, Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto*

*"The art exhibit at the Heritage Centre improved our appreciation of the origins of Woodland art and its origins in Red Lake. It allowed us all a glimpse of works from the local people's private collections and to hear the stories of how they were acquired."*

*Elaine Lynch,  
Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



Kaaren Dannenmann and Linda Lundstrom sharing a special moment at the scared fire.

*"... I felt part of something very special...something significant, both historically and personally. The weekend will be forever locked in my memory, a turning point, a moment when the past, present and future collided to create a beautiful whole...the alchemist's dream."*

*Linda Lundstrom*



Gallery owner Louise Thomas of Thunder Bay ON, participated in the Art Fair to represent her late husband, Roy Thomas, also a Woodland Artist.

*"It was a privilege for me to be able to participate and Kinsman Robinson Galleries was honoured to be of assistance. I am still decompressing from all that went on, it felt like a week, not a weekend. I would like to keep in touch and continue to try and help move this event forward for the future."*

*John Newman, Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto*





Visitors boarded the Goldcorp bus at the Heritage Centre Saturday morning to begin their historic walking tour, retracing the footsteps of Norval Morrisseau. They toured Cochenour, McMarmac and finally McKenzie Island to see the places where Morrisseau met his first patrons and created some of his most memorable paintings.



*(The walking tour) .. "gave us insights to what it was like to live in Red Lake during the 60's in a very honest and forthright way. Linda explained that for the three of them it was a very important experience to reconnect with their past and to come full circle to the place that made them who they are today."*

*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



Phil Vinet and Linda Lundstrom

*"Many came and for many reasons, some were artists, some collectors, others were writers and academics. For others, it was a journey down one of the roads in the life of an exceptional artist, lived vicariously through one weekend's series of events. It was about the man who made Vincent Van Gogh's life look like that of your average suburbanite. Let the myth begin!"*

*John Newman,  
Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto*



Levi Beardy



Dr. Trudy Nicks, Senior Curator of Ethnohistory, North America, Royal Ontario Museum, enjoying the historic walking tour on McKenzie Island.

*"Levi Beardy, one of the guest speakers on the tour through Morrisseau's old haunts, was a 10-year-old boy at the time he knew Norval Morrisseau. He lived in Cochenour, on Hiawatha Drive next door to Norval and his family, for a number of years. He enlightened us on Norval's life in the late sixties and provided some social context.*

*These firsthand remembrances by Levi Beardy, and a few others, were invaluable for me to get a real sense of Norval's early years as an artist in this small, Northern Ontario community of Cochenour and McKenzie Island. Mr. Beardy is a highly regarded Christian Minister within the First Nations community."*

*John Newman,  
Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto*





Gonrah Desgohwah  
White Pine Dancers,  
meaning 'tree with  
five needles' of  
Brantford, Ontario,  
treated the crowds  
to beautiful  
traditional dance  
performances and  
conducted craft  
workshops.

*"We enjoyed the activities that we participated in and also had a chance to visit with others over the weekend. It is always good to pay a visit to Red Lake. There is something about making the turn at Vermilion Bay that has always been uplifting for me. One of the more important aspects of the festival from my perspective was the exposure of some of the academics, experts and gallery owners to the context within which this artistic movement evolved. It should help insert a larger dosage of reality into their thinking and their writing - which can only help future generations get a more balanced picture."*

*John Vincett,  
Toronto. Presenter, Triple K Gallery*

*Michelle, A big CONGRATULATIONS to you, your staff and the committee for a job well done!!"*

*Gibbet (Stevens), Volunteer,  
Northern Chiefs Council*



Youth interns with Debaj, performing creation pieces for the walking groups on McKenzie Island. *Left, Reggie Bacon, Liz Mochrie, Alex Gagnon and Kate Polle. Below, Emily Hinton and Isaac Kakegamic.*

*".. local interns who performed skits related to Norval's life on McKenzie Island gave us a glimpse of the pride and confidence they instill in youth. Actors and interns side by side smilingly served the dinner buffet before taking to the stage to perform a production that was so human and moving."*

*Elaine Lynch,  
Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*





*"Actors and interns side by side smilingly served the dinner buffet before taking to the stage to perform a production that was so human and moving. Norval's children and grandchildren watched from a stage set that created their living room of long ago, the walls of which were their father's canvas. The event organizers even started a collection and carried out a silent auction of an artwork done on moose antler by Goyce Kakegamic to raise money to buy a headstone for the artist's grave.*

*The community supported this event in ways that only northerners can, driving people, donating fish, deer, moose and stewed wild blueberries for the feast and breakfast. Many people commented to me that they felt they were so privileged to experience something so very special. And I am not even describing the traditional dance, the printmaking and dream catcher workshops, and many many stories from the heart that we shared this past weekend."*

*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



Visitors take in the delicious meal and wait for the play to begin!

*"....All in all, Michele Alderton, director of the Red Lake Heritage Center and her exceptional crew of assistants, helpers and volunteers put on a non-stop, power-packed weekend of events. Particularly, I thank them for the dinner Saturday night in the Legion hall. The venison stew and fresh Pickerel were delicious, followed by fresh blueberries and an inventive play based on Norval Morrisseau's life in Red Lake taken from stories and writings from that period."*

*John Newman, Kinsman Robinson Galleries, Toronto*

*The play and the entire weekend very poignantly reconnected the Morrisseau family rightfully back to their father and his legacy in a way they have not been.*

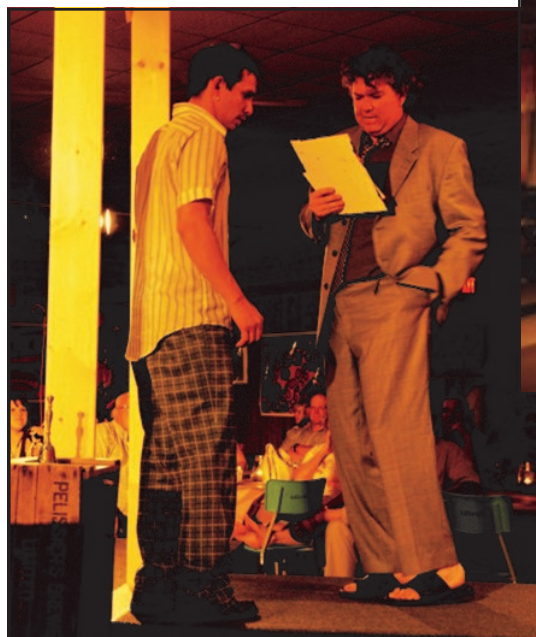
*Elaine Lynch, Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*

*"...I too must tell you how much I enjoyed this festival. The walking tours of McMarmac and McKenzie Island hosted and led by Phil Vinet, Linda Lundstrom and Levi Beardy added context, reality, and a human touch to those of us who met Norval Morrisseau and had brief interactions with him.*

*I particularly enjoyed the play by De-ba-jeh-mu-jig "Norval-a Born Artist" and told the actor playing Norval that his silhouette had an uncanny resemblance to Morrisseau himself as I remembered him.*

*This was all very well done and I can not wait to get a copy of Armand Ruffo's work 'Man changing into Thunderbird'. Kudos.*

*Judge Peter Bishop, Cochenour*



De-ba-jeh-mu-jig performing, Norval-A Born Artist.





Seated front and centre, Morriseau's family got to enjoy an original play about their father's artistic development and personal life while he lived in the Red Lake area. Written and performed by De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group from Manitoulin Island, the play brought together over 200 Morriseau supporters, collectors, artists, family and friends.



Linda Lundstrom and Victoria Morriseau standing in front of Morriseau art work, that were reproduced through the generosity of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines.

Twenty images were reproduced and displayed at the Red Lake Legion. Some of the posters were donated to Morriseau's children, while others were auctioned off.



Members of Norval's family with two of their former public school teachers. Left to right: (front) Mary-Jean McEwen, Lois Beck, Victoria Morriseau, Julia (Victoria's granddaughter), (back) Michael Morriseau (son), Peter Morriseau (son), and Julian (Peter's son).



Taking a final bow after performing an original play called *Norval-A Born Artist*.

*"The members of De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group were magnificent. The play cleverly worked in a blank and symbolic canvas that during the play was worked on by an artist/actor to become a stylized portrait of Norval with his signature Thunderbird on his head. This painting was presented to Norval's children at the conclusion of the performance. The play and the entire weekend very poignantly reconnected the Morriseau family rightfully back to their father and his legacy in a way they have not been."*

*Elaine Lynch,  
Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



*"I would like to commend the organizers, participating artists and performers and the volunteers of the Red Lake Woodland Arts Festival for their hard work and dedication to promoting the arts and commemorating the memory of a truly great artist."*

*Peter Fonseca,  
Minister of Tourism*

*"The insightful presentations by the guest artists and the retired bureaucrat who helped launch the Triple K Co-operative increased everyone's understanding of this important school of art. It also made me realize (again) the importance of public funding to culture outside the major cities, to nurture artists, contribute to economic development and create access to art for all people no matter where they live. The art show at the gym was top notch with a great opportunity for participants to be aware of these important contemporary artists and their work."*

*Elaine Lynch,  
Ministry of Culture, Thunder Bay*



The weekend featured art talks by guest artists and other members of the arts community.

Approximately 45 people gathered together on Sunday afternoon for a wrap up session to discuss the legacy of Norval Morrisseau.



Ahmoo Angeconeb of Lac Seul, speaking at the wrap up session.

*"The history of the Triple K Co-op, which Morrisseau was a member which involved other artists such as Saul Williams, Paddy Peters, Goyce Kakegamic, Barry Peters some of whom attended both to speak of Morrisseau, of their involvement in woodland art and to show their current work. We heard the history of woodland art through the individual who had been the consultant that had funded the Triple K Co-op, as well as art historians and people who had a long association with this type of art. This was against the backdrop of a large collection of Morrisseau's art that included both his early and latter pieces. Also included were works from Goyce Kakegamic, and Christie Belcourt."*

*Jamie Boulton,  
Ministry of Culture, Kenora*



*"Congratulations on a very successful world class arts weekend! I hope this is the beginning of many more to come. It makes Red Lake the "new emerging Arts centre of north western Ontario." Thank you for providing a great opportunity to so many people."*

*Luba Cargill, Thunder Bay*

#### Woodland Arts Festival

##### Committee Members:

Michele Alderton  
Rhonda Bobinski  
Gwyneth Carlson  
Kaaren Dannenmann  
Janet Hager  
Christine Penner Polle  
Sara Petko  
Claire Quewezence  
Albert Sandberg  
Michelle Sandberg  
Debra Shushack  
Carolyn Spicer  
Jim Teskey

##### Staff:

Michele Alderton, Director/Curator;  
Sara Petko, Assistant Curator;  
Caroline Upward, Heritage Assistant

##### Photos courtesy of:

Kevin Sandberg, Northern Sun News,  
Red Lake Heritage Centre, Rudy Bies  
and Tim Alderton



The Heritage Centre has a small display in the lobby highlighting some of the most memorable moments that took place during the festival.

*"It was a fabulous experience. I am happy that I attended. The weekend provided me an incredible amount of information for the biography as well as an opportunity to compare notes with Armand (Ruffo). Good job and it was nice to see a community pull together and find pride in its heritage. Red Lake is truly a remarkable place. I plan to visit again in the future."*

*John Zemanovich, Writer, Toronto*

*I have just arrived home and I couldn't wait to write and say congratulations and thank you, for hosting such a terrific event. The Woodland Arts Festival was an overwhelming success, I'd say. The entire event was as well-run as any similar events I have attended in large cities. Please extend my thanks to your wonderful staff, as well. I sincerely appreciate your efforts to include my parents' story at the last minute. Also, your personal warmth, and Christine's welcome, made my visit that much more special. I hope we will stay in touch, as you continue with the dream of holding more events at the Red Lake Heritage Centre that will tell the rest of Canada and the world, about the rich history of that area. If there is anything I might be able to help with, from this distance, please do let me know.*

*Sandra Hogarth, Kelowna*

## THANK YOU!

This event has been made possible with the help of many volunteers and through generous financial and in-kind support of the following organizations:

Municipality of Red Lake • Linda Lundstrom • De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group •  
Ministry of Northern Development and Mines • Red Lake District High School •  
Red Lake Royal Canadian Legion • Ministry of Natural Resources •  
Red Lake Fire Management Headquarters • Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre •  
Keewaytinook Okimakinak—Northern Chiefs Council •  
Thunder Bay Art Gallery • Wasaya Airways

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For more information about the Red Lake Heritage Centre or about the Woodland Arts Festival, contact us at (807)727-3006, by email at [rlhc@goredlake.com](mailto:rlhc@goredlake.com) or visit our website at [www.redlakemuseum.com](http://www.redlakemuseum.com)