

Opening Ceremony for SPIRIT GARDEN at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto



As my grandson was setting out on **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation** to go to his daycare wearing his **Orange Shirt**, I was arriving at Union Station on my way to the Opening Ceremony of **SPIRIT GARDEN** at Nathan Phillips Square wearing an **Orange Shirt**.

In the fulfilment of Call to Action #82 from the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published in 2015, Council Fire Native Cultural Centre established the Restorative Relations Working Group to draw worshipping communities in the Greater Toronto Area together to support the construction of a monument to Honour the residential school survivors in the capital city of the province of Ontario. The National

Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg identifies 18 residential schools located in Ontario.

The Opening Ceremony of **SPIRIT GARDEN** was underway. A young woman in a wheelchair with a powerful voice sang an Honour Song. Appreciation was given to the representatives of the federal, provincial, and municipal governments for their leadership and financial support.

The Principal Architect Brian On'yota:ka Porter from **Two Row Architects** was recognized along with the construction company who did the work. A number of family members showed pictures of residential school survivors who have journeyed to the Spirit World, including some children and youth who did not return to the families or communities.



The Sculpturers, Artisans, and Knowledge Keepers who made and contributed to the various works of art on this 19,250 square foot cultural site were introduced and spoke about their respective creations. A ten-ton limestone sculpture of a giant turtle climbing out of a reflective pool connected the Creation Stories of Indigenous Peoples and has become a central feature for **SPIRIT GARDEN**.

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Solomon King from Neyaashiingmiing (the Chippewas of Nawash on Cape Croker on the Bruce (Saugeen) Peninsula). A Two-Row Wampum Walkway **KASWENTHA** connects the Tree of Peace with the Peace Garden and was created by Raymond Skye of Tuscarora and Seneca heritage from Six Nations of the Grand River. This Two-Row Wampum Walkway reminds all about the original treaties between first the Dutch and then the British and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, indicating the parallel journeys as sovereign nations of those who arrived in tall ships and those who travelled by canoes.

The Treaty of Niagara in 1764 was one example of such a treaty between the British Crown and representatives of 24 First Nations around the Great Lakes watershed. The original Kaswenthas were made of purple and white quahog shells. A 36-foot-long Voyager Canoe was created by Tannis Nielsen of Sohto, Anishnawbe, and Danish heritage. This Voyager Canoe was made of polished stainless steel, decorated with laser cut painted symbols significant to the Metis of Ontario.

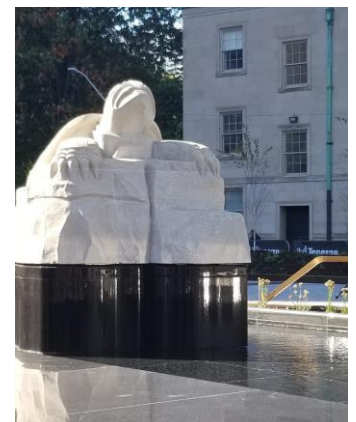


An Inuit Artist Henry Kudluk created a 5-foot-tall granite stone landmark of a traditional structure, used to guide those on a lengthy journey across the land. The Three Sisters, corn, beans, and squash, are planted, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between these three plants as a model of the work of caring for the land and waters for future generations.

The Knowledge Keeper John Keeshig Maya-waasige from Neyaashiingmiing also provided direction for the construction of a Teaching Lodge with laminated ash beams and white cedar tongue-and-groove exterior sheathing.

This Teaching Lodge becomes a place for learning, seating about 60 people. The Teaching Lodge illustrated the importance of living together in multifamily dwellings while supporting each member to contribute to the health and well-being of their community.

On the Main Stage under the Jumbotron, **Mayor Olivia Chow** pledged CAN\$100,000 to cover the operational costs for the first year. On September 30, a variety of musicians, drummers, and dancers were featured. The Manitou Makwa Family Singers featured four generations together singing in Anishinaabemowin, honouring Creator/Divine Mystery/Great Spirit as well as the Ancestors. Sadie Buck wore a Jingle Dress while



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dancing and singing for particular people who have requested prayers for healing of a variety of afflictions. The All Nations Drummers sang several Honour Songs. Nimkii Oaawamick demonstrated an Anishinaabe Hoop Dance with all its intricate footwork and manipulation of all the hoops, signifying the interdependence and unity of all living Beings in the work of renewal. Of the thousands of people present, only about 1 or 2 percent did not wear an Orange Shirt. All the performers expressed appreciation for the crowds who demonstrated solidarity with residential school survivors and honoured those children and youth who did not return to their families and Indigenous communities.



From the Diocese of Toronto, **Bishops Riscylla Shaw** and **Andrew Asbil** as well as the **Reverend Leigh Kern** and Knowledge Keeper **Sandra Campbell** attended the Opening Ceremony. **Bishop Andrew Asbil** was wearing the **Orange Shirt** presented to him at the 175th Anniversary Celebration for Trinity in Aurora. The **Reverend Leigh Kern** has returned as the Diocesan Indigenous Animator.

It was good to meet again **Canon Andrew Wesley** and his wife **Esther Wesley** at this event, spending some time in the Teaching Lodge catching up. It was good to also connect with the **Jesuit Father Bert Foliot** who has longstanding relationships with Wikwemikong and M'Chigeeng First Nations on Manitoulin Island and serves at the Martyrs Shrine in Midland and the Chippewas of Beausoliel on Christian Island.

The Opening Ceremony of **SPIRIT GARDEN** was the seventh annual Indigenous Legacy Gathering at Nathan Phillips Square.

