Talon mine could lay waste to the Sandy Lake Watershed

BY WINONA LADUKE

It’s almost time for manoominikewag, when we make wild rice. Many of us, like Veronica Skinaway of the Sandy Lake community, begin our harvest at Minnewawa and the Sandy Lake Flowage, two of the richest wild rice territories in northern Minnesota. The rice comes in early and is a constant and secure source of food.

Ancient villages of mounds remind us of our 4,000-year-old history in the region and birch-bark scrolls demarcate Big Sandy for travel and migration routes. All would become permanent Ojibwe villages from 1730s. These lakes are a part of the sacred landscape of the Anishinaabe.

The lake and water remember the Anishinaabeg, those who come to fish and harvest wild rice, and those who perished here. More than 400 Anishinaabeg starved to death during the America’s genocide against the Ojibwe in the winter of 1850, their spirits and bodies remain. The Anishinaabe universe contains a complex world of beings, above and below. That world is not known by Minnesota, or by multinational mining corporations, and those two worlds are about to collide. The Talon mine could lay to waste the Sandy Lake Watershed, inundating it with sulfuric acid, sucking down the lake levels like those on shallow Lake Minnewawa, and contaminating the waters of the 1855 treaty territory, now called Aitkin County.

The Mine

Talon Mining is after nickel and cobalt, allegedly for the electric car market. The project is pitched as “green mining,” framed to pit the people and the water against renewable energy. The fact is that the minerals the companies pursue may be obsolete in the battery market due to the time this mine would be operational. In the aftermath, all we would have is a hole in the ground, contaminated water, and a superfund site. That’s not so green.

Talon Mining Corporation is a junior mining company based out of the British Virgin Islands, a place where corporate money is protected. With Canadian ownership, the company is considered a junior Canadian mining corporation. Junior Canadian mining corporations have the worst human rights and environmental records in the world. Talon with its big backer, Rio Tinto (RT) have leased or purchased over 90,000 acres of Aitkin County, in the heart of the 1855 treaty territory and the East Lake and Sandy Lake communities. The impact will stretch from the 1855 to the 1837 territory, as the company plans to pump groundwater, contaminate it, clean it, and then return it. That changes the water. Talon estimates it will need to pump between 1.1 and 1.6 million gallons of water a day out of the wetlands. Those waters recharge the shallow lakes, and neither the company, nor Minnesota’s DNR, have any idea of the impact of such a mine on Big Sandy and Minnewawa. Nor does anyone have a plan about the potential of 1,800 gallons-a-minute of mine seepage water and how that would impact the shallow aquifers which serve these communities. Minnewawa Lake is not likely to survive this mine.

Rio Tinto’s Checked Past

RT is one of the most controversial mining corporations in the world. Talon holds the majority of project shares, but is in effect, an exploratory and marketing company. Talon has no experience in mining, nor in clean-up. The problem with junior mining corporations is their liability. And it seems that Rio Tinto is not known for cleaning up their mess either.

--- CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ---
The Senior LinkAge Line is a free, statewide service of the Minnesota Board on Aging in partnership with Minnesota’s area agencies on aging. The Senior LinkAge Line helps older Minnesotans and caregivers find answers and connect to the services and support they need.

The Senior LinkAge Line is a free, statewide service of the Minnesota Board on Aging in partnership with Minnesota’s area agencies on aging. The Senior LinkAge Line helps older Minnesotans and caregivers find answers and connect to the services and support they need.
I'm walking to Owamni again, though this time from the opposite direction. I was here a year ago to interview Sean Sherman (The Sioux Chef) before the grand opening, walking alongside the Mississippi from the north. I'm approaching the restaurant now from the south, having to park all the way down the river at Augsburg University because participants in the Stone Arch Bridge festival took up all the available parking. I don't mind, though — I've never been one to turn down a walk on a nice day, especially when the destination promises a great meal.

A year ago when I first came to meet Sherman (Oglala Lakota), the restaurant was gearing up to open its doors for the first time in order to provide Indigenous foods to their customers. They're clearly excelling in this endeavor given that, just a year later, I'm back to discuss their most recent success: Owamni has won the James Beard award for Best New Restaurant.

The James Beard Foundation seeks to celebrate and support those excelling in America's food culture, as well as promote equity in the food industry. The fact that Owamni has been recognized by them is no small feat, especially considering the nature of the food that Owamni serves. There has historically been little room for Indigenous-based dishes in American cuisine, despite the fact that the ingredients used in them have been present on this continent long before European contact. However, Owamni’s success seems to mark a shift in the tide, one that will hopefully usher in more Indigenous restaurants and chefs in the years to come.

When I approach the restaurant, I see Sherman leaning against the rail on the rooftop balcony, looking, along with some of the other employees, at a demonstration occurring across the street. Two men hold picket signs with biblical phrases on them, while one speaks into a microphone, informing pedestrians of the fiery nature of Hell. Speaking into a microphone, informing us up.

“Did you have a little speech prepared or anything?”

“Dana [Dana Thompson is co-owner of Owamni, and is a descendant of the Wahpeton-Sisseton and Mdewakanton Dakota] had prepared a speech, but I didn’t have anything prepared. I kinda just said whatever felt right and basically told that crowd that we've been through 200 years of white supremacy and that we've got a lot of work to do, and that this was only the beginning.”

As we continue talking, I look down to see the traditional plants Sherman was planning on having planted along Water Works Park, bright and full of life with insects buzzing around them. “How is the garden coming in, anyway?”

“Oh, they're coming in great. And you can see that they have the Dakota names on there, so if you walk around, you can see the original names of the plants that were originally on this land.” The goal behind this was to increase awareness around Indigenous presence.

Despite the many successes that Owamni has experienced this past year — reservations booked out for months, media coverage, and the winning of their latest award — they're hit the occasional roadblock.

“There's always the occasional person who just doesn't get it,” Sherman said, referring to the food that Owamni offers and the reasoning behind using the ingredients that they do. “If you read some of the online reviews, you can just tell, but we're just showcasing what's possible in modern Indigenous foods. Nobody has to do it like us if they don't want to. We're trying to modernize and normalize Indigenous foods.”

Looking ahead, Owamni is set to open up an Indigenous ingredients-focused market in Midtown Global Market in August. “It's part of our non-profit NATIFS [North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems], and its goal will be to provide Native foods.” Sherman mentioned that he's hoping to use some of the profits, but it'll be a “pay what you can” sort of thing, so we hope to eliminate any kind of financial barriers that may be in place. And all of these classes will be recorded, so people can go onto our website and access them anyways, or join a live class that's being streamed.

We chat for a little while longer before I get back to the rest of the Stone Arch Bridge Festival. Just in time too, because someone needed some help inside the restaurant. I walk back down the steps and get in line at the Tatanka Truck, Owamni’s food truck. While standing there, I see my friend and former classmate Ziz from across the crowd. We stand in line together, catching up, reminiscing about college. I'm reminded of the power that these places can hold, the community building that can occur at them and recommend it to all. And with all the plans that Owamni has for the future, this is clearly only the beginning.

Owamni is located inside the Water Works Pavilion in Mill Ruins Park, between 3rd Avenue South and 5th Avenue South, in Minneapolis. For more information, see: https://owamni.com.
St. Cloud State programs prove educators want more Native knowledge

BY LEE EGERSTROM

Iyikiyapiwin Darlene St. Clair spent the last week of June directing a workshop for educators at Grand Portage in Northern Minnesota. It marked the second time educators have gathered to study the history and culture of the Grand Portage Anishinaabe in her workshops.

St. Clair is an educator who teaches other educators and future generations of teachers at St. Cloud State University. There is a lesson all educators should learn, she said, “If you are teaching in this area (Minnesota), you are teaching on indigenous land.”

She has taken workshops to all 11 reservations in the state. While some attendees work at museums or have other positions where Native knowledge is crucial, most are K-12 or higher education teachers who often return for more workshops to broaden their knowledge of Dakota and Ojibwe history and culture.

What St. Clair has learned over the years is that conscientious educators really do want to learn more and teach more about Minnesota’s indigenous people and, as a result, more about Minnesota’s history for all interconnected people.

St. Clair is a highly-qualified educator and stimulator of Native Minnesota education who is doing precisely what the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and education consultant Odia Wood-Krueger are encouraging. See companion article about SMSC’s Understand Native Minnesota project and Wood-Krueger’s report, “Restoring Our Place: An analysis of Native American resources used in Minnesota’s classrooms.”

St. Clair could easily be called a whirlwind. That is shown in the Spring-Summer 2022 edition of St. Cloud State Magazine that salutes SCSU faculty members for their work in assisting teacher-scholars on a number of subjects. An associate professor of American Indian Studies and director of the Multicultural Resources Center at St. Cloud State, St. Clair runs the summer workshops for educators who want to learn more to improve their classes and to help their students. The workshops can also be taken as a credit course.

From her campus base at St. Cloud State, she also works with students on specific projects. These include research and learning about Dakota and Ojibwe history in Central Minnesota, and, for the past 10 years, with projects in the Twin Cities identifying and explaining historic and sacred places for Dakota people.

The SCSU magazine article notes that she addresses inherent racism in educational experiences with both her work as a classroom teacher and with the Multicultural Resources Center. The latter supports students, SCSU faculty and the larger St. Cloud-Central Minnesota community.

One course she teaches is called Native Nations of Minnesota. It has students explore how the university’s campus, St. Cloud community itself, and all of Central Minnesota are indigenous places, she said.

“St. Cloud State sits on the banks of the Mississippi River that has endless ties to the Dakota and Ojibwe,” she said an interview with The Circle. “The Beaver Islands are part of that history.”

Those islands were named by Zebulon Pike in 1805 on his exploration of the Mississippi River, stretch for about five miles from the SCSU campus to below the city. Some of them are SCSU property.

This history becomes personal for St. Clair, a member of the Lower Sioux Indian Community who actually grew up in Minneapolis. On that same exploration of the river, Pike negotiated a treaty with Dakota leaders for land at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers.

It was to allow for a fort (Fort St. Anthony) to be constructed to protect the waterways if needed in a possible war with England that became the War of 1812. That fort later became Fort Snelling – a place steeped in history for Dakota people.

Central Minnesota has deep Native roots that come as a surprise to some students. Beyond the role the river has played with Dakota and Ojibwe people, there are other nearby places clearly linked with Minnesota’s Native populations. “Our nearby institutions, or campuses, operated as Indian boarding schools,” she said.

Indeed, Saint John’s Abbey at St. John’s University and the College of Saint Benedict, at nearby Collegeville and St. Joseph, were part of the federal government’s forced assimilation program by separating families and sending children to boarding schools. Nuns from the Order of Saint Benedict also operated two boarding schools on the White Earth and Red Lake reservations.

“Not all our history was about or ended with the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862,” she said.

St. Clair teaches classes on Native arts and cultural expressions. She is adding a side group (a “cohort”) in education speak) of Native American students and art education students who want more knowledge of Native arts and their ties to history. This cohort is with a class she teaches on Native arts and cultural expressions.

“They are Native students. Some are art or art education majors. A non-Native student might say, ‘I went to a powwow as a child and I want to learn more.’

“We (Native Americans) are still here. We still care about the land and our traditions. There’s a big intellectual shift underway. A lot of students (in the past) believed Native people were a long time ago.

“We can dismiss stereotypes,” she said.

St. Clair also teaches using Native American literature, a point of importance emphasized in the Wood-Krueger education report. “We think about poetry. This is a fun class to teach. The students want to read more literature from diverse authors.”

For those culturally broadening reasons, she finds her classes also appeal to international students. Some of these students have experiences with colonization did to their own indigenous cultures, or what their countries did to indigenous people. “It is historical what colonialism did all over the world,” she said.

“It’s amazing how similar our stories are.

St. Clair suspects many Minnesotans who don’t know about the impact of colonialism on Native people are products of “intentional forgetting.” “It is the erasure of Native people from public consciousness,” she said.

Getting to know the professor is a cultural lesson in itself. Her Dakota name, Iyikiyapiwin, means “recognized woman” and was given to her as a young adult at a Lower Sioux community naming ceremony.

In Dakota, she said, it has a different meaning than what it implies in English. “It means I recognize things as they are. This is a chair. This is a cup. It is something I think about a lot.”

The English translation conveys the image that she is a woman, an educator, who stands out and is recognized, as she was in the St. Cloud State magazine. Both definitions seem especially accurate.
The Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) will be launching a new exhibit titled “Our Homes: Reframing our Stories” in Fall 2023 that will showcase photos of Native Americans around Minnesota from as early as the 1920s to the 1990s. The photos were initially being stored by the Star Tribune and discovered in a box simply titled “Indians.” After their discovery, MHS staff sorted the photos into the corresponding decades during which they were taken. Some photos were published previously, while others have never been seen by the public.

Amber Annis (Cheyenne River Lakota) and Rita Walaszek Arndt (White Earth Ojibwe), the MHS staff with whom I spoke, were intrigued to find that some of the notes written alongside these photos were less than kind, with mentions of “young braves” and obvious negative feelings toward AIM activity at the time.

Their findings sparked the question: To what extent has media coverage affected the narrative that surrounds Native Americans, and how can it be rectified? The goal of this exhibit is to answer that question and to offer a first step on the road to a solution by reclaiming our narratives as Native people through telling our own stories that go along with the photos.

While the launch date of the official exhibit is still over a year away, MHS is beginning to prepare for it now by seeking community engagement with the photos. They intend to provide a space and a platform for members of the Native community to come together and share stories of anyone whom they recognize in the pictures, stories that may yet to have been told.

They will be holding an event on July 28th from 5:30pm-8:00pm at the Minnesota History Center (345 W Kellogg Blvd, St. Paul) for people to view the photos from the collection, to reminisce, to share a story, and perhaps hear a new one, and maybe most importantly, to reclaim our story.

A Google Form has been created by MHS for people to view some of the photos ahead of time and leave comments on them. It can be found here: https://forms.gle/ZaFt1G5eRrK69Eqx:

For more information on the MHS’s Native American art collection, see: https://www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/museum/our-home.
“Custer Had It Coming!” showcases Native Nations resistance

BY DAN NINHAM

The Hook and Ladder theater and lounge venue in Minneapolis, MN was the location of the “Custer Had it Coming!” event on June 26th. It was held on the anniversary of “Custer’s Last Stand” on June 25-26, 1876. The theme of the event was to encourage an audience “to celebrate Native Nations resistance and resilience with Poets, Writers and Hip Hop Artists.”

The Battle of the Little Bighorn, known to the Lakota and other Plains tribes as the Battle of the Greasy Grass, was also known as Custer’s Last Stand. It happened along the Little Bighorn River in southeastern Montana Territory. This was the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer and five of the 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. It was an overwhelming victory for the 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. This was the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer and five of the 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. It was an overwhelming victory for the 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army. This was the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer and five of the 12 companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army.

The Master of Ceremony and event initiator was Zibiquah Denny, Potawatomi/Ho-Chunk tribal member and poet/writer. In one of Denny’s Facebook posts, she thanked the talented writers, poets and hip hop artists that came to the “Custer Had it Coming!” event “to share their visions, words, and artistry.” A few of the performers shared their current and future work as a part of the gathering as well as how the event went.

Austin Owen

Austin Owen (Prairie Island Dakota) lives in St. Paul, MN. His Dakota name is Tasia popo down and means Meadowlark Singer. For this event he was asked to showcase his music as a writer in hip hop. “I’ve been in the entertainment industry over twenty years working events of all kinds, especially concerts and community events,” said Owen. “Fortunate to have opened up for the likes of Nelly, Wiz Khalifa, Bizzy Bone, Ghostface Killah, and DMX.”

“Most of my music I write and speak consciously about who I am, what I embody as an artist, while integrating aspects of culture into the hip hop elements,” said Owen. “The event went well, it was great to see the different aspects of writing between all the performances,” said Owen. “Poetry, spoken word, and book reading showcased our similarities on how we create environments with our words.”

“My future plans are to continue DJ’ing which I’m most committed to in my career at this moment,” said Owen. “As a hip hop artist, I will continue to make music that represents who I am, what I stand for, and combining native and hip hop culture to prove we have a space in the art.”

Utuhu Can Cistinna Teresa Peterson

Utuhu Can Cistinna (Little Oak) Teresa Peterson (Sisitunwan Wahpetunwan Dakota) is a citizen of the Upper Sioux Community. She works as a Program Manager for the Collective Abundance Fund in the Foundation at NDN Collective.

“I shared excerpts from me and my Uncle’s book, Voices from Pejuhutazizi: Dakota Stories and Storytellers, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press, some poetry that was published in the Racism issue of the Yellow Medicine Review, and two short stories from a draft manuscript I am working on.”

“Creative writing for me really started when I was doing research on sense of belonging and the potential role and impact storytelling has,” said Peterson. “I experimented with story and wrote a historical fiction piece that ended up being published as a children’s story, Grasshopper Girl, published by Black Bears & Blueberries Publishing in 2018.”

Peterson continued, “It is one of the unkitomi (trickster) stories my mom heard growing up nestled within a story that lifts up the tradition and role of storytelling. The experience provided me an opportunity to explore writing outside of academia and reporting.”

The last two years Peterson was involved in a Native women writers group facilitated by writer and author Diane Wilson. It gave her the support and space to finish a 20+ year project that resulted in Voices from Pejuhutazizi: Dakota Stories and Storytellers. She said, “It was a lengthy process because it was basically a big healing journey. You have to read the book to understand how stories can have such a profound role in healing.”

Peterson talked about the “Custer Had it Coming!” event. She said, “The event was a wonderful opportunity for Natives to share our work coming from all different kinds of genres, ages, tribes yet some common themes were present and gave honor to the historic victory - the Battle of the Little Bighorn.”

“Many of us are familiar with the generational traumas our people have endured yet we are still here - telling our stories, amplifying our voices, speaking up,” said Peterson. “It is an opportunity to further our individual and collective healing.”

Bay Quaderer

Bay Quaderer (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe) is a poet and writer. “My greatest life accomplishment putting it together as a whole is really plain and simple,” said Quaderer. “Surviving life as it came and went thus far.” “Thanking that we created every day that I’ve survived my choices in life.”

Quaderer is a former wildfire fighter that followed being in the military service. “I have no formal education other than the boots on the ground type of life and the experience that it has shown me,” said Quaderer. “I have no big letters behind my name.”

“My family and I survived my father’s service in Vietnam, and with this also became a higher learning ground for me as an adolescent. My own knowledge has come later. I started writing after my own discharge, vowing never to be silent after falling ill to that which made me ill,” added Quaderer.

Quaderer continued, “Writing poetry has been my champion and allows me to reach out to others that struggle every day to find beauty in all that is ugly in our world and its many struggles. I write on a broad range of topics that we all inherit from our surroundings and upbringing with mine being here at Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe.”

The “Custer Had it Coming!” event effectively shared the words and voices of talented native poets, writers, and hip hop artists.

See some of Austin Owen’s work at: https://youtu.be/Lf9pM2fXHmY

The public performance recently featured poets, writers, and hip hop artists in a show of Native Nations resistance and resilience in Minneapolis. (Image courtesy of Zibiquah Denny)

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We Are Water Protectors

We Are Water Protectors is a children’s picture book about the importance of water and threats to its future. The narrator, a small American Indian girl, explains how water nurtures all human life as our first “medicine.”

She warns readers about threats to the earth’s water supply, including the “black snake” which is a metaphor for the oil lines that leak and pollute water, and the critical need to defend the water. This call to action for five-year-old children will affect the adults reading it to children, also. The book is a well-illustrated, and a blunt reminder why water needs protection now.

The story, by Carole Lindstrom (Anishinaabe/Metis) and illustrated by Michaela Goade (Tlingit), starts with the little girl explaining that her Nokomis (grandmother) told her that humans come from water, and it is sacred. Water is the first medicine that nourished us in the womb. Defiance flows through the book, as readers are reminded that American Indians stand with their songs and drums and are still here.

An Ojibwe prophecy predicted that a “black snake” would destroy the land and make water unfit to drink, and that snake must be destroyed. Some beings can’t fight for themselves, like animals and plants and trees and rivers and lakes, so humans must fight for what can’t fight for itself.

Water has its own spirit, Lindstrom writes. “Water is alive. Water remembers our ancestors who came before us. We are stewards of the Earth, our spirits have not been broken.”

An author’s note recounts the 2016 Standing Rock Sioux effort to resist the presence of oil pipelines anywhere near Dakota land. The retelling of that story, coupled with the narrator’s young voice, creates a reminder to all of the power of collective voices to right a wrong.


Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story

Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story is a picture book so cute and full of meaning that you’ll want to run out and buy a copy for every three-year-old in your life.

Sure, its plot is on the thin side. It’s about making fry bread and why we love fry bread and the history of fry bread.

It is also about tradition and longevity, family, taste, texture, and place. In fact, there’s more about American Indian life in this little book than you’ll find in adult fiction purporting to explain some tragic but noble American Indian point of view. Writer Kevin Maillard (Seminole Nation), and illustrator Juana Martinez-Neal neatly show children the way traditions define them. Here’s an example of that from the section, “Fry Bread Is Us.”

“We are still here, Elder and young, Friend and neighbor. We strengthen each other to learn, change and survive.”

How powerful is that, and wouldn’t a reader of any age gain with a reminder that Indian survival means strengthening each other? Then there’s this segment: “Fry Bread Is History.”

“The long walk, the stolen land. Strangers in our own world with unknown food. We made new recipes from what we had.”

What better way to introduce sophisticated concepts to a toddler? Additionally, the pictures are as meaningful as the words. Martinez-Neal’s engaging illustrations are so fetching that you’ll want to frame a couple of them. As I read the story, I imagined the chubby hand of a small child in my lap, pointing at the book’s pile of delicious fry bread on a platter.

Maillard and Martinez-Neal won nearly every children’s literature award that exists for their small masterpiece. That begs this question. When will we see a sequel?


Noojimo (She Heals)

Noojimo (She Heals) celebrates the importance of Auntsies in Indigenous spaces. In many Indigenous communities, the Auntie serves as an extra parental role – one who provides mental, physical, and spiritual support to younger relatives. Though faced with discrimination and patriarchy, women continue to be protectors of family, culture, and Aki (earth), taking on roles as caretakers, leaders, cultivators, mentors, mediators, and innovators.

Curator, Hillary Kempenich, invites artists to center their work around the empowerment of Indigenous Auntsies – how we were raised by them; how we honor their legacy; how we are them; how we make space for those who need us as Auntsies; and how we respect one another.

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The Circle: News from a Native American Perspective

July 2022
Wood-Krueger said 37 percent of Minnesota educators who teach about Native Americans responded in a survey that they have not had professional development training for what they are teaching. In addition, they lack comprehensive access to books, websites and other materials that could help them prepare for classes on Native American subject matter.

Appendix 2 in the report will help educators secure some materials. Wood-Krueger and a group of academic advisors for the study have assembled the 12-page appendix from survey respondents listing books and other sources that might be of help.

The list also has shortcomings. It contains sources that she recommends, some which she doesn’t recommend, and others that were merely brought to her attention and she hasn’t studied to offer a recommendation.

“I don’t mean to bash book publishers,” she said, but she wants to see more materials that don’t perpetuate stereotypes of Native Americans and their culture. “I want to push for more authentic authors … books and materials by Native people, not about Native people.”

The research project is built on surveys of teachers and education officials that drew 617 responses from 235 Minnesota teachers and education officials that might be of help.

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Appendix 2 in the report will help educators secure some materials. Wood-Krueger and a group of academic advisors for the study have assembled the 12-page appendix from survey respondents listing books and other sources that might be of help.

The list also has shortcomings. It contains sources that she recommends, some which she doesn’t recommend, and others that were merely brought to her attention and she hasn’t studied to offer a recommendation.

“I don’t mean to bash book publishers,” she said, but she wants to see more materials that don’t perpetuate stereotypes of Native Americans and their culture. “I want to push for more authentic authors … books and materials by Native people, not about Native people.”

The research project is built on surveys of teachers and education officials that drew 617 responses from 235 Minnesota teachers and education officials that might be of help.
Witness the story of Bougainville, part of Papua New Guinea, and the war the company did not win. I went to visit the former RT mine in Bougainville a decade ago. The Indigenous Melanesian people gave a tour of the mine which had plagued their community and explained how people armed with bows and arrows had defeated the Australian military. And closed the mine.

Panguna was previously one of the world’s largest copper and gold mines. The mine provided $2 billion for Rio Tinto and the Papua New Guinea Government until 1989 when an uprising against the environmental destruction caused by the mine’s closure was brutally suppressed by the Australian military. Ten thousand people died in the RT war in Papua New Guinea.

A long-term plan for remediation was laid out by the government. Conveniences in 2014, RT divested from the mine before it could be implemented, completely avoiding the cost of the clean-up. The Panguna Mine is now a toxic disaster site. According to Thonila Roka Matbob, a Makosi villager elected to the Bougainville parliament, “We live with the impacts of Panguna every day. Our rivers are poisoned with copper, our homes get filled with dust from the tailing mounds, our kids get sick from the pollution. Some communities now have to spend two hours a day walking just to get clean drinking water because their nearby creeks are clogged up with mine waste.”

### Beyond Dirty Mining for Batteries

Let’s assume Minnesota’s Talon Mine is all about batteries and battery storage for renewable energy and the growing electric car industry. The fact is that lithium/nickel batteries are sort of last year’s technology. The next generation of batteries will be on the market before Talon and their expensive project is even producing one. New batteries could be made of hemp, recycled battery materials, or sodium ion batteries, all of which are much less destructive than trading an ecosystem to a junior Canadian mining corporation.

The hemp plant has the ability to sequester carbon at one of the highest levels of any plant, and it makes an excellent graphene for batteries. According to the UK’s The Quarter Leaf, British scientist Robert Murray Smith has been studying hemp batteries and electricity for decades.

He discovered that hemp’s waste fibers can be transformed into “ultrafast” supercapacitors that are better than graphene, a synthetic carbon material lighter than foil yet bulletproof. The hemp version isn’t simply better, it costs one-thousandth of the price. Smith also found that hemp batteries perform eight times better than lithium-ion: the power underneath the hemp cell had a value of 31 while that of the lithium cell had a value of just 4.

### Sodium Ion and Recycled Batteries

Then there are materials substitutions that can eliminate ecologically destructive green mining by using less destructive components. “Replacing lithium and cobalt in lithium-ion batteries would result in a more environmentally and socially conscious technology,” according to a new report issued by the National Science Foundation. “University of Texas at Austin researchers, funded in part by the U.S. National Science Foundation, have developed a sodium-based battery material that is stable, can recharge as fast as a traditional lithium-ion battery, and has the potential for a higher energy output than current lithium-ion battery technologies.”

Meanwhile, the battery recycling industry is starting to take off. And Minnesota could be in the forefront. “By and large, there’s an impression that recycled material is not as good as virgin material,” as Yan Wang, a professor of mechanical engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, explains in a technical journal.

A new study by Wang and his team shows that batteries with recycled cathodes can be as good as or even better than those using new state-of-the-art materials. The recycled material showed a more porous microscopic structure that is better for lithium ions to slip in and out of. The result: batteries with an energy density similar to those made with commercial cathodes, but which also showed up to 53% longer cycle life. Sort of like upsaling leftovers.

In Europe, Battery Resources is already selling their recycled materials to battery manufacturers at a small scale. The company plans to open its first commercial plant, which will be able to process 10,000 tons of batteries, in 2022. Last September, they raised $70 million, with which they plan to launch two more facilities. That’s the kind of investment we need in Minnesota — solving the toxic waste problem and creating energy storage in one fell swoop. That is the definition of sustainability.

We have a chance to move ahead in the circular economy, to be innovators in the electric vehicle market, that’s what Minnesota should do. The other option: dig a big hole in the ground, destroy Native cultural wealth, and contaminate water forever, while the Canadian mining corporations and RT make a big profit. The Canadian corporations have already made enough of a mess of northern Minnesota. Now is the time to move towards what the Anishinaabe would call the Green Path. That’s a good path for our water and our future.

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**Join Our Team at the FDL Substance Disorder Department**

The Fond du Lac Human Services Division/Substance Disorder Department’s treatment programs are now available in Cloquet, Duluth and Minneapolis. Both adolescent and adult programs are culturally based, co-occurring intensive outpatient programs. Staff will be a part of a treatment team designed to address all areas of their clients life and will work along with FDLHS medical staff, behavioral health and social services departments.

- **Cloquet**
  - Recovery Case Manager
  - Secretary
  - 1 Treatment Aide (sign-on $1,500)
  - 3 Treatment Technician (sign-on $1,150)

- **Duluth**
  - ADC III (4 yr degree) (sign on $3,500)
  - ADC II (2 yr degree/ACD-T) (sign on $3,500)
  - Lead Recovery Case Manager
  - Recovery Case Manager
  - Treatment Aide (sign-on $1,500)

- **Minneapolis**
  - ADC IV (Dual License LADC/MHT) (sign-on $4,500)
  - ADC III (4 yr degree) (sign-on $3,500)
  - ADC II (2 yr degree/ACD-T) (sign on $3,500)
  - Lead Recovery Case Manager
  - Recovery Case Manager

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For more information on tribal licensure, email richardcolsen@fdlrez.com

For information on open positions and job descriptions go to: http://www.fdlrez.com/HR/Employment.htm and download an application.

Apply to: Fond du Lac Human Resources, 1720 Big Lake Road, Cloquet, MN 55720. 218-878-2653

For more information on Minneapolis postings you can also contact Sheliajohnson@fdlrez.com or call 612-977-3441.

Fond du Lac Human Services – Substance Use Disorder Department

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https://thecirclenews.org  
**The Circle: News from a Native American Perspective**  
July 2022  
9
Staples Fairbanks appointed to the MN State High School League BOD

LeRoy Staples Fairbanks, a member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, has been appointed to the Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors. He lives in Cass Lake, MN, with his family.

“I’ve worked in the various areas in my professional career including construction, human services, and executive leadership positions, but none of these areas were necessarily about youth sport and activity,” said LeRoy Staples Fairbanks. “I’ve spent my entire adult years trying to give back in the areas of youth development, but because it didn’t involve my work, I’ve had to do it all in a volunteer status.”

“I’ve tried to identify areas of need and where community programming was falling short in regard to our youth,” added Staples Fairbanks.

“My passion is working with basketball, golf and wrestling, but I understood at a younger age the importance of all sports and physical and extracurricular activities,” said Staples Fairbanks. “I started coaching teams when I was much younger, but as I learned how to organize better, I created the Leech Lakers Youth Sports organization.”

Indigenous leaders use their native core values to define who they are in their career and leadership capacities.

“A value that I prioritize is the value of family,” Staples Fairbanks said. “I am a son, a nephew, an uncle, a brother, a husband, and a father. I take a deep care for my responsibility in each one of those roles. Family is the foundation of everything that I do. When I look at youth in my community, I view them as family, and as family it is our responsibility to care for one another. That is what drives me to do this type of work.”

“My involvement in youth sports and also my work in policy development was the qualifying factors why I was selected for the position,” said Staples Fairbanks.

“The Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors is a 22 person board consisting of people from various areas of scholastic and sport in the state, as well as four public representatives appointed by the Governor. I was appointed to a public representative position from 2022-2026.”

Mentors are primary support figures that guide leaders to do the right thing right.

“My mother Bonnie Fairbanks-Stangel is my primary mentor,” said Staples Fairbanks. “She has been the person who has shown me throughout my life, that life is good, and here’s how we can live that good life. She not only talked the talk, but walks it as well. When we want to raise healthy, respectful, decent human beings, we have to show the children by example.”

“I call him Waagosh (fox) … his original name,” said his mom Bonnie Fairbanks-Stangel. “Waagosh has always stood out ever since he was very young. Waagosh really walks his walk with much curiosity about everything. His listening skills are amazing! You always feel heard. The youth are truly in his heart. Amazing heart he has.”

Staples Fairbanks also looks up to his older brother Cedric. He said, “I didn’t have my father in the household very much growing up and Cedric had to take on the role of the ‘man of the house’ at a very young age. He kept me in line and gave me someone to look up to as I grew up. He is also the one I followed along with to the local parks in Minneapolis where we got involved in sports.”

Cedric talked about his brother, saying, “LeRoy always had leadership qualities. After LeRoy IV was born he got married and got his family a house.”

“After his son was old enough to play in basketball tournaments, he started a team in Cass Lake called the Leech Lakers. LeRoy took the duty of coaching them. Today the Leech Lakers are a big part of the community and reservation,” added Cedric.

“Finally I would say my uncle LeRoy Fairbanks was another great mentor for me,” said Staples Fairbanks. “He was someone my family had a deep admiration for, he was a very accomplished man. He served many years in the Navy, and served in three wars. After the military, he came home and helped work in education for the rest of his career back in Leech Lake. He was our Warrior! He is someone I will always strive to be like.”

Visit TheFalls.org to share your story & help us create a shared vision for the future of the Falls.
SCOTUS out of control

It’s becoming clear that the Republican partisans are trying to kill us.

A radical, right-wing faction in thrall to Trump has taken control of the GOP. By supporting Trump, the amoral, sexual predator, they got three appointments to the Supreme Court (SCOTUS); and it has become clear that the new supermajority is taking a wrecking ball to what’s left of democracy in the United States. Several recent decisions combine to paint a troubling picture of a high court out of control.

On June 24, the Supremes, in a 6-3 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson, overturned Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that affirmed the right to abortion across the U.S. The precedent stood for nearly 50 years, and now the nation has been plunged into uncertainty about the legality of abortion, especially as several states passed “trigger laws” that immediately (or within 30 days) ban abortion procedures when the Supreme Court overturns Roe.

The U.S., or parts thereof, will soon resemble the Republic of Gillead, the military dictatorship in Margaret Atwood’s novel The Handmaid’s Tale, where women are subjugated and assigned to produce children for ruling class men. Fortunately, Minnesota is the lone state in the Upper Midwest where abortion will remain legal – unless the Republicans can take over the Legislature and the governor’s office.

(An excellent documentary, “The Janes,” streaming on HBO Max, tells the story of a feminist collective in Chicago that provided illegal abortions to girls and women from 1968 to 1973. The film couldn’t be more topical, as it provides a look at the bad old days, pre-Roe, when desperate women took their lives in their hands to get abortions.)

The right-wing justices were just getting warmed up with Dobbs. On June 29, in a 5-4 vote, the high court justices took a whack at tribal sovereignty in Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta. The Washington Post reported that the decision “blunts the effects of the court’s 2020 ruling in McGirt v. Oklahoma, which reinforced that much of Oklahoma was, legally, Indian country, where many crimes were beyond the reach of the state and its laws. With its new, sweeping ruling, the court reinstates a piece of Oklahoma’s pre-McGirt power over this territory by upending the law on reservations throughout the country.”

The court decision, according to the newspaper, “held ... that all states have, as a matter of state sovereignty, the power to prosecute non-Indian crimes within Native lands. And in a bold claim that departs from centuries of federal Indian law precedent, Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh wrote for the majority, ‘Indian country is part of the State, not separate from the State.’”

Apparently, Kavanaugh went to a kegger and missed a crucial federal Indian law class explaining how treaties work.

“The Supreme Court’s decision to rule in favor of an anti-Native administration [in Oklahoma] is infuriating, but not at all shocking,” wrote Crystal Echo Hawk (Pawnee Nation), founder and executive director of IllumiNative. “There has never been a Native justice on the bench of the highest court in the land, and their lack of understanding of tribal sovereignty is clear. Nothing has changed in 244 years – white supremacy continues to be a cornerstone of the United States government.”

Finally, on June 30, the court’s super majority ruled in West Virginia v. EPA that the Environmental Protection Agency does not have the power to regulate greenhouse gases. This is a bad decision for anyone who breathes. Of course, the decision provided Republicans and coal company owners with a moment to celebrate.

According to SCOTUS Blog (scotusblog.com), the justices decided that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit “was wrong when it interpreted the Clean Air Act to give the EPA expansive power over carbon emissions. The decision, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, was handed down on the final opinion day of the 2021-22 term.”

SCOTUS Blog added that “Roberts wrote that the EPA’s effort to regulate greenhouse gases by making industry-wide changes violated the ‘major-questions’ doctrine – the idea that if Congress wants to give an administrative agency the power to make ‘decisions of vast economic and political significance,’ it must say so clearly.”

Some observers see this decision as extending to other actions by federal agencies and potentially crippling government efforts to remediate environmental harms.

Justice Elena Kagan dissented in the EPA decision, “in an opinion joined by Justices Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor,” as per SCOTUS Blog. Kagan wrote that [the June 30] ruling “prevents congressionally authorized agency action to curb power plants’ carbon dioxide emissions. The Court appoints itself – instead of Congress or the expert agency – the decision-maker on climate policy. I cannot think of many things more frightening.”

ARE YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER WORRIED ABOUT THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF BEING OVERWEIGHT AND/OR HAVING DIABETES?

“My passion is helping members of the Native community with issues related to weight loss and endocrine problems, such as diabetes.”

— Tiffany Beckman, MD, MPH
Member of Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
Thru Sept 16
“Indigenous” Solo Art Exhibition by Shaun Chosa
Shaun Chosa, a Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa tribal citizen and painter/graphic design artist, will show 30+ large scale paintings that mostly feature new works depicting Indigenous portraits, some with his added “Classic Shaun Chosa Style” pop culture artistic influence for an extended period of time in the AICHO Galleries. $10 suggested donation at the door. Gallery viewing hours: Fridays from 4pm – 6pm between June 10 - Sept. 16.
AICHO’s Dr. Robert Povlless Cultural Center, 212 W. 2nd St, Duluth, MN.
For info, see: http://www.aicho.org/shaun-chosa-2022.html. Or see Facebook page: https://fb.me/e/6kAHXoE8Z.

Thru Oct 1
AICHO Food and Art Market
The American Indian Community Housing Organization’s (AICHO) Food and Art Markets will host eight Food and Art Markets every two weeks, starting October 1. Family fun cultural hands-on activities including birch bark basket making, a fun educational activity tent on nutrition, and Indigenous music. The market will be held at 1414 E. Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. For info, see: ddelille@nacdi.org or 218-721-7442.

Thru Oct 27th
Four Sisters Farmers Market
The Four Sisters Farmers Market is an Indigenous-focused farmers market centered on providing increased access to affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate local foods within the American Indian Cultural Corridor. The Four Sisters Farmers Market believes in a market that simultaneously builds community health and wealth for community consumers and farmer vendors. The Four Sisters Farmers Market accepts SNAP/EBT benefits, Market Bucks, and Four Sisters Farmers Market Vouchers. The Market is open on Thursdays through October 27th, from 11am – 3pm. The market will be held at 1414 E. Franklin Ave, Minneapolis. For info, contact Darek Delille at ddelille@nacdi.org or 218-721-7442.

Thru Oct
Dako Play Project
Language Classes
Language and theatre classes will be held from 6:30 – 8:30pm on Zoom. These classes will take place every Tuesday through October online and are open to Dakota community members who are interested in helping create our Dakota language play with Lower Phalen Creek Project. If you are interested in taking the language class or getting involved in other ways with Dakota Play Project, please contact sarah@nenaatetheatre.org https://whiteearth.com/home.

Thru Nov 27
Alexandra Buffalohead: Shifting the Perspective
How do museum narratives obscure some histories in preference of others? In her installation, guest curator Alexandra Buffalohead (Biekwakantwin Dakota/Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) examines this dynamic through the prism of Indigenous history and knowledge. Placing the James J. Hill presentation tray (Tiffany and Co., 1884) in dialogue with Native artworks, Buffalohead offers a more complex and accurate framing of the history of St. Anthony Falls and Wita Buffalohead offers a more complex and accurate framing of the history of St. Anthony Falls and Wita.

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Culture Through Cuisine: July 14

UMD Summer Institute in July 8 - 10 of the prestigious James Beard The Sioux Chef! The recent recipient Culture Through Cuisine series is Walker, MN. For info, see: https://www.bellemuseum.umd.edu/gaia.

July 19 – Sept 17 Noojimo (She Heals) Noojimo (She Heals) art exhibition celebrates the importance of Auntie in Indigenous spaces. In many Indigenous communities, the Auntie serves as an extra parental role - one who provides mental, physical, and spiritual support to younger relatives. Noojimo is a powerful tribute to courageous women (both historically and modern) stepping into the role of Aunties; who influence, create, and strengthen bonds of obligation, trust, and solidarity both inside the home and community. Participating artists: Nedahness Rose Green, Karen Savage Blue, Tara Keanunee Guampac, Eve LafiAntun, Tanaya Widner, Agnus Woodward, Sharon Day, Somah Haaland, April Holder, Rachael Banasac, Dyna Dyess, Raychelle Kanke, Valana Tatera, Deanda L Croaker, Teresa McDowell, Lorel Kippen, Rita Erich, Rick Kaggebi, Penny Kaggebi, Cynthia Hamilton, Melissa Widner, and Natakn White Opening Reception: July 19, from 6 – 8pm. Curator’s Talk with Hilary Kempenich: Aug 11 at 6:30pm. Closing Reception and Artists Panel. Sept. 9, from 6 – 8 pm. All My Relations Art, NACDI, 1414 S 2nd St, Minneapolis. For info: for all. For more info, see: https://www.artfest-minneapolis.com/attend. For tickets: eventbrl.com/e/animalnahe-red-artfestival-sanfordcenter-bemidji-mn-july-22-23-tickets-312571790887.

July 24 & 30 Bluedog Minnesota based Bluedog plays original music influenced by life experiences of Native people. They have been nominated multiple times, and won a Native American Music Award (NAMMY). For info, see: https://www.bluedogbluesband.com/Bluedog. They will be playing on these dates:
- July 24th: Lock And Dam Eatery in Hastings, MN. 3pm to 6pm.
- July 30: Forayre Brewery, 1005 6th St NW, Rochester, MN. 7pm to 11pm.

July 28 MHS Native American photos Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) will be launching a new exhibit titled “Our Homes: Reframing our Stories” in Fall 2023 that will showcase photos of Native Americans around Minnesota from as early as the 1930s to the 1990s. They will be holding an event on July 28th from 5:30pm to 8:00pm at the Minnesota History Center for people to view the photos from the collection, to reminiscence, to share a story, and perhaps hear a new one, and maybe most importantly, to reclaim our story. A Google Form has been created by MHS for people to view some of the photos ahead of time and leave comments on them. It can be found here: https://forms.gle/ZaFt1G5eRrK69Eqx. Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd, St. Paul. For info on the MHS’s Native American collection, see: https://www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/museum/our.home.

July 22 Anishinaabe Art Festival 2022 Celebrate the beautiful Anishinaabe culture, art, history, and people of our lands. This festival seeks to build intercultural knowledge and respect for diversity throughout our communities. The Anishinaabe Art Festival offers exceptional art in all media available for purchase directly from artists. An array of Indigenous activities and entertainment will be on hand: artist demonstrations, traditional tea bar, stage performances of traditional dance, singing and teachings, and authentic Indigenous foods served each day. Register from the website or from Eventbrite. Those who will register will be entered into a raffle drawing! Entry is FREE for all ages. For more info, see: https://www.artfest-minneapolis.com/attend. For tickets: eventbrl.com/e/animalnahe-red-artfestival-sanfordcenter-bemidji-mn-july-22-23-tickets-312571790887.

Community Plaza 709 Central Ave West, St Paul, MN 55104 651-379-5084

NOTICE: OPENING of the Two Bedroom Waitlist Project based Section 8; rent based on income for qualified applicants.

Applications may be picked up at: 709 Central Ave West St Paul, MN 55104 starting at BAM Monday June 27th 2022, until 4PM July 18th , 2022. Completed applications must be received by mail on or before August 1st, 2022. All qualified applicants will be placed on the Waiting List in the order they are received. CommonBond Communities Equal Housing Opportunity

https://thestoiclenews.org The Circle: News from a Native American Perspective July 2022 13
It's never too late to save things

BY ARNE VAINIO, MD

“D
r. Vainio, you don't know me, but I watch you on Native Report. I know you've talked about cancer and colon cancer in particular, but I need to tell you that you have to keep saying it.”

I'd been working on a 1987 Honda Accord I dug out of a snow bank a couple weeks earlier. How I ended up with the car is a fairly long and overall beautiful story and it was finally time to start driving it. I had picked up a transmission from a junkyard the winter before and I always meant to put it into the car, but somehow time got away from me. A good friend of mine works on cars in his garage and he was able to do in a week what I wasn’t able to do in three years. I was rustproofing the car with some spray rustproofing and a three foot plastic wand I got on eBay and about half of the rustproofing was on the car and the other half was on me.

I was covered in grease when he came up to me and my hair was knotted with leaves and dirt from working on the car. I surprised him even recognized me as a doctor. His wife was with him and both had the look of heavy smokers. She had a tired and almost haunted look and she let him do most of the talking.

“My mother died from colon cancer when she was 43 and my brother had colon cancer in his mid-forties. I saw Walking into the Unknown seven or eight years ago and I knew I should have gone in for a colonoscopy then. I didn’t go because I didn’t want to quit smoking and I knew if I started trying to avoid cancer, it was going to lead to a whole bunch of things I didn’t want to do.”

We were standing in line at a store that sold tools and hardware. I was carrying windshield wiper blades and tail light bulbs and my cart was holding a roll of pink fiber-glass insulation, caulking supplies, two cans of paint and some brushes.

“I was getting some pains in my belly off and on and a couple of times I had a little bit of blood in my stool. I didn’t tell my wife about it because she makes a big deal out of everything and the bleeding stopped after a week or so.” She was looking at him with a little bit of a scowl, but was otherwise expressionless.

The line moved forward.

“I started sweating at night. At first it was just a little bit and I blamed it on the weather. The sweating got worse and I didn’t say anything. Then I started losing weight. I tried to eat more so she wouldn’t worry, but nothing tasted good. The blood in my stools came back off and on and I knew I made a mistake by not going to see my doctor.”

His wife looked at him. “And did you go in to see him?”

“No.” He said. “Even with my family history, I didn’t want to believe I could get cancer. I thought about quitting smoking and I remembered when I tried to quit about ten years earlier. I was so crabby we almost got divorced.”

The line inched forward and he looked down and steadied the roll of insulation in his cart, even though it was in no danger of falling over. He picked up one of the cans of paint and moved it toward the front of the cart. He didn’t look up as he started talking again.

“I thought maybe if I ignored it, everything would get better, like a bad cold or a bad dream. I’ve always worked and supported my family. I built our house the year we got married. I put two of our sons through tech school and they both have good jobs. I didn’t owe anyone anything and I didn’t want to start depending on people.”

The line moved forward again and he had to look up to move his cart. His eyes were misty as he looked into mine. “I thought about what you said in that movie. You remember, that we do these things for the people we love. Even that was hard for me to think about, because I don’t use the word love very often. My father raised me tough and he would have seen that as being soft.”

The line moved forward again and I was at the checkout counter. The cashier put the bulbs and the wiper blades into a bag and gave me my receipt. I moved out of the way and he started unloading his cart. He lifted the first can of paint onto the counter and he started talking again.

“This insulation and caulking are for my daughter’s house. She left home when she was seventeen and she was never coming back. She has a daughter who’s just going into the fourth grade. When I found out I had cancer, I called my daughter and I asked her to forgive me and she did. I have so much to make up for and I want her and my granddaughter to have a warm house. I want them to remember I’m the one who gave that to them.”

The cashier wasn’t trying to hide her interest in the conversation and the cans of paint and the brushes sat on the counter as she waited for him to go on.

“I could have avoided all of this.” He patted his shirt and I could hear the crinkly plastic of a colostomy bag. “This bag I can live with and I was able to quit smoking and I told my wife I was trying hard to quit.”

He took off his hat and he was almost completely bald with just a few delicate white hairs remaining. “The chemo is the worst part. The first cycle wasn’t so bad and I thought I was going to be OK. The second one made me so sick I wasn’t sure I wanted to go for any more, but I have a granddaughter and she wants me in her life. I don’t know what the future holds for me and I’ll get scans to see where things are as we go along.”

The cashier rang up his items and I walked with them to the parking lot. I opened the door to my thirty year-old Honda and he smiled. “Pretty fancy car, Dr. Vainio.”

“There’s a story behind it,” I said. “I don’t doubt that a bit. Don’t forget what I told you. You need to keep talking about cancer and keep telling people to get screened. A colonoscopy five years earlier would have made all the difference for me and I don’t want to see this happen to anyone else. They’ll listen if you keep telling them.”

I started my car and he pushed the cart toward his truck, then he stopped and came back. I rolled the window down and he said. “We’re a lot the same, aren’t we? We’ve both learned it’s never too late to save things.”

He patted my car gently on the roof and smiled. “Good luck with your project.”

I reached out the window and we shook hands. “Good luck with yours.”

Arne Vainio, M.D. is an enrolled member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and is a family practice physician on the Fond du Lac Ojibwe reservation in Cloquet, Minnesota. He can be contacted at arne.vainio@hotmail.com.
Okay, so no more Debbie Downer for now. Well....

My Gramma had stories about everyone in her family. This one is when I was but a wee child. I was with my grandparents driving who knows where on a dirt road, and I was in the back seat of the rickety car — which is what Indians could afford then. Gramma Rose looked back at me and I was covered in dirt and had little red eyes. Their car had rusted out on the bottom.

I have always laughed at that story, every time. Now I feel that, metaphorically, is how I am now. Not neglected or anything, it’s the existential dirt and oily grime that covers my entire being and is succumbing to it’s toxicity by the sick, sick people who hold power. Capitalists. They have to go and stop messing up the natural cycle of life.

Ya, ya, ya. For those whom are aware plz encourage people how to grow their own vegetable gardens. Go back to the old days of barter and community interests. As for myself, I want to help but I’m only good for fertilizer or shucking corn. Or a doorstep. Just saying I’m here for the people.

There is much going on in our world. It’s difficult to say what people, plants and animals, all sentient beings, are suffering most. Kinda hard to put that on a scale. Most people, including myself, have not yet been subjected to the wars, famine and political crises we Indigenous people have survived. And we ain’t going anywhere else. You all go back to your own countries of origin, and do plz write.

I’m really tired. Most of these European immigrants are fighting over and devastating OUR Turtle Island for temporary profits, which is how they determine their status in this greedy, global and unholy world. We’re here to love one another.

In no way am I gonna point out or screech about world events that are happening right now. My body shut down after too much trauma and I slept 14 hours in grief and horror at what humans do to each other. I pray we can all agree to share our blessings whatever they may be. All I have is my writing and the hope that someone, anyone, will say, “Hah.” And then seriously contemplate what they just read.

Ayy!!! I’m still so naive! Still, if I ever made a connection to any of my readers who are now in the second generation, chii miigwech! I appreciate that as an older Antie, you have my love and attention.

Your generation, and those after, will see what you all did for Indian Country. Sing, dance and make our Mother happy. I have good hopes for y’all. Make all the Anties proud!

As for myself, I am unable to dance in the circle but I can still powwow-chair boogie! There is only one powwow I will be at and that is the Fond du Lac Veterans Powwow this July 8-10 in Sawyer, MN. No. No one asked me for a promotion; it’s that I know a lot of the FDL veterans and I admire them. They all deserve recognition. AND...I have stories on a few of them so they better be nice to me!

Two years ago on July 4 I was on my back ‘porch’ when Purrince escaped outside. A year before, his brother died after being hit by a vehicle. So no one was gonna go out again. I, all wobbly, went to rescue Purrince and almost scruffed him when I put my left foot down and it shattered. I yelled for help but got no reply.

I was wearing a camisole and undies because it was so hot but I was able to boot- scoot my way up the stairs (without getting splinters) and into the house where my phone was.

So yeah, I don’t celebrate being overrun by those whom our eastern relatives kept alive only to turn on us.

My dogs and I will be hiding under the covers from a fake holiday. Y’ all do what you do, just wake up.
Anishinaabe Dibaajimowin: An Ojibwe Story

BY WINONA LADUKE

Say you dreamed up an Anishinaabe musical, forty or so musicians, actors and dancers and had some epic stories to tell. That’s a snap shot of Anishinaabe Dibaajimowin, an Anishinaabe Story, featured in Bayfield, Wis. at the Big Top Chautauqua.

Michael Laughing Fox Charette had such a dream. And in the heart of the pandemic, the dream gathered power, from tobacco to zoom to stage, into what is one of the most extraordinary plays I have seen. The play lifted hearts and stories in a time of immense change and uncertainty in our world. That, in itself, is a gift.

I caught up with Charette on Madeline Island where we spoke about his monumental tribute to Anishinaabe. He said, “Big Tops Chautauqua’s director [Terry Matier] approached me, asking if I thought we could have a show about the Indigenous culture. I thought that was a good idea considering what our current events were at this time in our history, ie: the deaths of George Floyd and Jason Pero [from Bad River at the hands of police].”

In many ways, this gift also came with Charette’s sobriety – six months without alcohol and the guy writes a 40 person cast, bi-lingual musical. That’s a pretty good testimony as to the potential of a sober Indian person.

“We were given spiritual tools to help us heal. Those tools reside in our language stories and culture,” Charette said.

In the musical play, Creation stories were told. Dylan Jennings, in an eloquent oratory, shares about the origin of agreements and treaties, and “We learn about the first treaty between Anishinaabe and Creator.”

Then there’s the song of the real names of the Apostle Islands, islands which should be returned to the Anishinaabe by the National Park Service. The song comes from a soulful Kevin Soulier, and was sung in Anishinaabemowin by Lye Jaakola and Lisa Clements. A second version of “Say their Names” came later with Keith Secola’s song of the same name, and the story of the Indian boarding schools.

Breathtaking music, stories and backdrops, featuring Rabbitt Strickland’s art, videos and photos (old and new) filled the audience with a depth of appreciation, in a diverse and moving production.

In the midst of it Robert Buffalo (Hereditary Chief of Red Cliff Nation in Wisconsin) told the story of his great grandfather, Chief Buffalo. Buffalo, after witnessing the death of 400 Anishinaabe at Sandy Lake, went to Washington to meet with president Fillmore. Buffalo (then 92-year-old) was able to stop the Anishinaabe removal and help establish reservation boundaries, and retain the Anishinaabe people’s rights to hunt, fish, and gather in the ceded territories. That’s why they are still there at Red Cliff. The story, like the family, transcends generations.

Marty Curry, another gifted Anishinaabe man, shared his storytelling style, which was born from a survivor’s ability to act and years on Stage North. This was a new space for Curry, who told me, “I was asked to be a part of it and I was nervous because there was a language component and language was not a strength of mine. Lisa Clements did translations and scripting, and gave me guidance on that and it made it much easier.”

The two night premiere at Big Top, held last summer, was followed by another show this year in June, filling the hearts and minds with appreciation for a land and the people. It left me hungry for more.

For those who performed, it was also healing, and much of the audience resonated and understood this. Martin Curry said, “Part of it for me was being accepted as an Indian man. I was both being acknowledged by my peers and I was accepting that as an Indian Man, I have standing. And to be able to express myself through this lens that Scooter (Charette) created... but no big pressure... I was just playing Wenaboozhoo.”

“It was pretty healing for me, there were several times when I teared up... when I cried, and it felt right... Native men, we have to be different things to different people, it’s kind of like acting. That’s where identity, and the identity of these stories, is so profound. You are a storyteller. You are someone who cries, who is angry... You can be all of these things and it’s acceptable. That’s the great thing about theater.”

The Anishinaabe Dibaajimowin was a spirit lifting joy for all of us. I hope it becomes part of the regular rotation of Big Top and finds a similar home in Duluth, Minneapolis and beyond.

The next performance will take place on Sept. 16 at the Big Top Chautauqua, 32525 Ski Hill Rd, Bayfield, WI. Show begins at 7pm. For info, call 715-373-5552 or 888-244-9368. Or see: https://www.travelwisc.com/events/performingarts/anishinaabe-dibaajimowin-an-ojibwe-story-214342.

Anishinaabe Dibaajimowin: An Ojibwe Story was created by Michael “Laughing Fox” Charette and Severin Behnen with the help of Native songwriters and storytellers. The musical theater honors the rich culture, history, hardships, and triumphs of the Ojibwe people. (Photos courtesy of Winona LaDuke.)