

OHIO INDIAN TIME

A VOICE FROM THE EASTERN DOOR

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Childrens Author Visits Local Students and Sites

Data Released on Breastmilk Study at Akwesasne



Photo: Teresa Davd.

Akwesasne Mohawk School students were successful in enticing well known children's author, Robert Munsch to visit the community. His host family, Margie and Brian Skidders, took him to tour the NAITC and the Akwesasne Library/Cultural Center after a luncheon provided by the AMS students. The evening included storytelling, a social dance presentation by student dancers and the play *Creation Story* by the drama Class. Picture is Teacher, Elizabeth Francis presenting Robert and his two children with gifts to remember their visit to Akwesasne. He is reported to have enjoyed his visit to this community as much as the students enjoyed the art of his storytelling.



Photo: Derrick Paul.

From L-r: Ken Jock, Director of Environment services at Katsi Cook and Dr. Ed Fitzgerald of the State of New York.

by Derrick Paul/Staff
"Safeguarding a Mohawk woman's health is to restore Traditional midwifery so that Mohawk women themselves can use the tools of science in their everyday lives."

This statement was made by Katsi Cook at the Kateri Hall Wednesday May 13 and was made in reference to the Breastmilk Study initiated by her.

A press conference was called in Hogsburg by the group "Akwesasne Mothers Milk Project" to release information about the study.

On Tuesday May 12 the New York Department of Health and the Akwesasne Task Force released results on the Breast Milk Study.

Of the 106 Mothers tested, the results on 57 participants were given their results.

The group was assured that it is safe to continue breastfeeding their babies despite very high concentrations of toxic chemicals found in local wildlife and fish.

Ward Stone, Wildlife Pathologist of New York State was also instrumental in the success of the project in the capacity of providing data which was necessary in the study.

Katsi Cook, also a Mohawk mid-wife, not only credited the Mohawk Mothers who took part in the study but Mothers all over Akwesasne. For years she and other women were concerned that the local companies ie: Reynolds, General Motors and Alcoa were putting theirs and their children's health in jeopardy. They felt that the soil, air and water were unfit for living. They were angered that the clean-up of dumpsites was going too slow.

In 1985 they decided to do something. The study was conducted with the help of volunteer mothers through the efforts of Cook, Priscilla Worswick and Patty Francis.

They invited as many Mohawk Mothers as they could. The participants were glad to help out.

Although the results of the study came back as positive, there was no agreement that the local environment is completely safe.

The Mothers who participated refrained from eating of fish out of the St. Lawrence and this contributed to the low amounts of toxic substances in their system.

These are PCB's (Polychlorinated biphenyls), and HCB's (hexachlorobenzene).

The various local governments advised the community, in particular to women of child bearing age, to stop eating fish from the St. Lawrence as early as 1985.

Concern was directed not only toward the local industries but the fact that the river is an important part of Native Culture.

Katsi Cook explained that importance. "The Mothers are to be congratulated (for the study) and they expressed anger to having always being the ones to make the adaptation that we have a human right to have access to our environment and the natural resources that are in it."

She added, "Our people have always maintained a cycle-social relationship with the fish and wildlife in our environment and it's easy to see the reflections and manifestations of that relationship in our culture, our ceremonies, our songs and dances that are Traditional Longhouse."

Dr. Edward Fitzgerald is an Epidemiologist of New York State and he assisted Cook in her study.

This same testing was done in Warren and Schoharie Counties in New York State and these were known as the comparisons group.

Dr. Fitzgerald agreed with Cook that when the Mohawk Mothers refrained from eating fish from the St. Lawrence River, they greatly reduced their level of PCB's in their body.

In addition, he said that there has to be remediation of the dump sites of the local industries.

"We feel quite strongly that the potential still exists for Mohawk Mothers to be exposed to PCB's for eating the fish and from breastfeeding since levels and wildlife remain high", he stated.

As stated earlier, 106 Mohawk Mothers took part in the project and the results came back for 57. The remaining 49 are still in the process of evaluation.

These volunteers are from all over Akwesasne. Although the location of Racquette Point is very close to one of these companies, the women who live on Kawehnoke were found to have higher PCB levels (40%).

"The Mohawk mothers who lived for one year of the last ten on Cornwall Island did have

somewhat higher levels of PCB's in their milk", concludes Dr. Fitzgerald.

"A difference between 4 parts per million which was the level for the comparison group and .55 parts per million which was the average level for the Mohawk mothers who lived on Cornwall Island."

Time also played a role as the study suggests that the Mother's PCB levels decreased dependent on how long they lived there.

"The mothers who lived on Cornwall Island the longest have highest PCB levels," states Fitzgerald.

Besides Akwesasne and the comparison group in Warren and Schoharie Counties Upstate, the Inuit of Northern Quebec as well as two cities in Michigan and North Carolina held their own studies.

The Inuit consume up to eight fish meals a month and their PCB levels, where the Akwesasne studies averaged out at .55 parts per million, the Inuit women studied had averages of 3.59 per million.

"If the Mohawk Women ate the same number of fish meals a month here, we would have much higher levels than the Inuit women", says Katsi Cook.

The Northern Quebec people also have seals and other marine mammals in their diet. The problem of contamination is universal and even the desolate area of Northern Quebec is not immune to the elements, according to Dr. Fitzgerald.

"Unfortunately, all of those animals, even in the Arctic, are contaminated with PCB's because PCB's are world wide."

It was found that women who had high PCB levels had children with similar defects.

These included problems with muscle tone, slight neurological symptoms at birth and in later stages, memory problems and poor motor coordination.

Kelly Brix, a researcher for SUNY at Albany, said that these PCB levels are much higher than those in Akwesasne and the Upstate Counties.

"I should emphasize that it does appear that exposure before birth

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Tribal Caucus Moved Up One Week Due to Holiday

The caucus for the June 6 Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Election has been moved up one week due to the Memorial Day holiday.

The caucus is usually held two weeks prior to the Tribal Election which is held annually on the first Saturday in June. This year, the caucus would have been held May 23.

But because that is Memorial Day weekend and an extensive schedule of festivities is slated on the reservation throughout the weekend, the caucus will be

moved up one week to May 16, starting promptly at 10 a.m.

The Tribal Election will still be held June 6.

At the caucus, candidates will be selected to run for one Tribal Chief position and one Tribal Sub-Chief. The terms currently held by Head chief Lincoln C. White and Sub-Chief John S. Loran will expire on June 30.

In order to be eligible to vote in the Tribal Election a Mohawk must meet the following qualifications:

* Be an enrolled member of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe;

* Be at least 18 years of age, and

* Reside on the American side of the line dividing the United States and Canada.

As usual, voting will take place at the Community Building on Route 37.

Anyone with questions regarding the caucus, the election or voter eligibility should contact Tribal Clerk Carol T. Herne at (518) 358-2272. Also, lists of eligible voters are available for review in the Tribal Clerk's Office.

Ransom Announces Bid for Tribal Chief

James W. Ransom announced this week his bid to run for the position of chief on the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Council.

"There are several reasons why I am running," Ransom stated. "The community must be part of the Tribal Council's decision making process and it's not happening." Ransom was referring to land claims and the Tribal-State Gaming Compact, which are being negotiated with no community input and no community participation.

"We need Tribal Chiefs who are open and honest with the community and this Council isn't," Ransom added referring to how the Tribal Council took money from Akwesasne tobacco shops and went into the tobacco business for themselves without letting the community know what they were doing.

"We need a Tribal Council that is accountable to its membership and this Council isn't," Ransom continued referring to how the Council has stopped issuing the Tribal budget for community

review and of how all Tribal accounts have been combined into one that makes it almost impossible to review individual programs.

"We need to protect Mohawk rights, not threaten them," Ransom stated referring to the Tribal-State Gaming Compact which is an agreement that will allow the further extension of New York State control into Akwesasne.

"We need a fair and impartial hiring system and we need to put Mohawk people in Mohawk jobs," he added referring to the practices of the Tribal Council of appointing people to key positions instead of giving community members the opportunity to apply for these positions. Ransom was also referring to the almost 70 percent unemployment rate in the community when over 25 percent of the Tribal work force are non-enrolled and non-Mohawk.

"We need leaders knowledgeable about the massive environmental problems facing this community

and we need leaders who are prepared and willing to protect our environment, not Chiefs who will cut deals with industry at the expense of our children's future," Ransom continued.

Ransom was referring to the over \$200 million in remediation costs needed to cleanup hazardous waste sites bordering Akwesasne and to the Tribal Council accepting money from General Motors when they supported containment of the GM landfill and of how now that they have changed their mind, GM has stopped giving them money.

"We need a Tribal Council that plans for the future instead of reacting to situations," Ransom stated referring to the effort by the Tribal Council to hire a Police Chief and court clerks when there are no community laws to enforce. James W. Ransom is a lifelong resident of Akwesasne and makes his home on Rt. 37. He is married to Karla Point and they have two children, Beynan and

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