

Mi'kmaw Basketry Celebration Draws Community Together



The miniature baskets of Virick Francis (Eskasoni First Nation). Photo by Holly Brown Bear.

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With support from the Community Activities Program, more than a hundred guests gathered to celebrate and honour the cultural strength of Mi'kmaw artistry. Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (MDCC) hosted the event, *Celebrating Mi'kmaw Basketry*, which featured film, conversation, and a gathering of artisans whose work continues a long-held Mi'kmaw practice.

The day began at the

cinplex in Millbrook with a screening of *Basketmaker*, the documentary by award-winning, Mi'kmaw filmmaker Catherine Martin (Millbrook First Nation). MDCC staff welcomed invited attendees with tea, coffee, Luskini'kn, and a program outlining the events to come. The theatre quickly filled with Elders, families, and artisans, creating a warm atmosphere as people reconnected and shared stories before the film. The screening prompted laughter, reflection, and remembrance of basketmakers who have passed. A prose piece by Anna Nibby-Woods (Sipekne'katik First Nation)

was shared, followed by an open sharing circle.

In the afternoon, the celebration moved to Legends Gaming and Convention Centre, where MDCC shared an update on its Build the Vision campaign — an effort to establish a world-class cultural centre in Debert dedicated to story, healing, and community. The event also included the announcement of a \$500,000 gift over five years from BMO, strengthening support for MDCC's long-term goals.

A highlight of the gathering was a conversation with artisans featured in the book, *The*

Art of Mi'kmaw Basketry (Formac Publishing Company Limited). Malglit Pelletier (We'koqma'q First Nation), Della Maguire (Glooscap First Nation), Nora Richard (Lennox Island First Nation), Peter J. Clair (Elsipogtog First Nation), Virick Francis (Eskasoni First Nation), and Ashley Sanipass (Indian Island First Nation) spoke about their beginnings, influences, and the teachings they hope future basketmakers will carry. Peter J. Clair also shared a poem with guests.

Shalan Joudry (Bear River First Nation) who facilitated the creation of the book, reflected on the importance of ensuring artisans' voices are carried forward. "My passion is making sure artists' stories and voices are truly present — as if we're sitting beside them, listening to how they

create and what they carry into their work," she said.

Tim Bernard, Executive Director of Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre, shared how deeply basketmaking remains rooted in community. "For a lot of our communities, our Grandparents were basketmakers or came from a basketmaking family. I'm happy that we continue to honour them and now have the opportunity to honour those who continue to carry on this important way of connection to our culture," he said. Bernard then thanked each artisan and presented ash pens crafted by Chief Bob Gloade (Millbrook First Nation) before Elder Patsy Paul-Martin (Millbrook First Nation) closed the day in prayer.

The celebration was held as part of Mi'kmaw History Month and was

warmly received by all who attended, offering a meaningful space to honour Mi'kmaw artisans, storytellers, and the knowledge carried forward through basketry. As shalan joudry shared in her reflections, the day was also a reminder of the strength and continuity of Mi'kmaw storytelling:

"Let's celebrate these artists and the art of Mi'kmaw basketry, because storytelling in all its forms is not only part of our past — it is who we are now and who we will continue to be into the future."

This event was made possible with support from Mi'kmaw History Month, Communities, Culture and Heritage / Support4Culture, and the Province of Nova Scotia.



Attendees at the Legends Gaming and Convention Centre listen as the basketmakers featured in *The Art of Mi'kmaw Basketry* discuss the process of their art.



Left to right: Peter J. Clair (Elsipogtog First Nation), shalan joudry (Bear River First Nation), Nora Richard (Lennox Island First Nation), Della Maguire (Glooscap First Nation), Malglit Pelletier (We'koqma'q First Nation), Virick Francis (Eskasoni First Nation), Ashley Sanipass (Indian Island First Nation), Catherine Martin (Millbrook First Nation), Holly Brown Bear (Neqotkuk First Nation).



Award winning Mi'kmaw filmmaker, Catherine Martin, was honoured in her home community of Millbrook for her role as one of our Mi'kmaw Storytellers.