

NWAC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This publication highlights the various activities the President has undertaken throughout the month of September.



LORRAINE WHITMAN

Lorraine Whitman was elected as the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada on September 14, 2019. Prior to her presidency at NWAC, Ms. Whitman served as President of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and has been advocating for Indigenous women's rights over the past 45 years.

September 2020 President's Report

My Dear Friends,

Autumn is a time of year when all that is around us changes so dramatically. This September, change is in the air for different reasons and, more specifically, due to COVID. My thoughts are with our children and grandchildren as they return to school and with those who have a certain amount of anxiety in sending their children back out into the world. Whether we have chosen to send them out the door to school or have opted to keep our children at home within our “bubble,” the meaning and the thought is the same—keeping them safe both physically and mentally. It has been a trying year for students of all ages. My recent visit to —Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, revealed eager university students making the choice to self-isolate on campus for 14 days so they would be able to pursue their dreams in further education. It is important to check in on our youth just as it is equally important to check in on our Elders during this time, always with health safety in mind.

As fall progresses, I find myself once again enjoying the changing leaves and I feel the pull of reconnecting with the land. I sit in a space without outside world distractions, taking in the beauty of nature, the peace and solitude in the smell of the pines and the undergrowth of the ferns, the old trees and the softness of the moss beneath my feet, and I walk barefoot thinking of the teachings of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. My hope is that our children are able to experience this too. There is great meaning and joy found in the sounds, sights, and smells of our Mother Earth, and reconnecting with the land is vital to rekindling one's spirit.

This year my friends, Todd Labrador and his daughter Melissa began a special project in crafting a traditional birch bark canoe. Each year they take on a project to build one to two canoes, and in my occasional visits to their workshop this year, I watched the work progress in wonderful detail through the use of ancient techniques and tools including spruce roots, birch bark, and tree sap. The entire project was created completely from nature and I am so excited to see that this tradition is still held close in the hands of our artisans and makers. These tried-and-true methods

are still being upheld, and the 21-foot seaworthy canoe will be launched into the seawaters soon! We are looking forward to the possibility of launching into the St. Peter Canal in celebration of treaty day with our Mi'kmaw fishermen. This canoe brings back memories of stories told by my grandfather, who used to hunt porpoise as a young man using a similar canoe. I support the fishermen; the canoe launch is an ideal way to showcase the cultural component and the treaty rights to fish and lobster.

The Sipekne'katik First Nation launched its own self-regulated fishery on September 17, the anniversary of the 1999 Marshall decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, which recognized the First Nations' right to earn a moderate livelihood from fishing and lobster trapping. It is unfortunate that there are those who were not educated about the 1999 court decision and the Mi'kmaw rights in Nova Scotia. It is problematic moderate livelihood is not clearly defined since it does make such a difference to all sides.

We kept a watchful eye on the Speech from the Throne to open the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament of Canada in response to our September 10 letter to the Ministers—all the while pressing on, always speaking for the voiceless.

This month included a visit with families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls where we had a chance to get together from a “social-distance.”





President Annie Daisley NDNWA PTMA , myself and previous President of NSNWA Cheryl Maloney at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia announcement.

It was nice to be able to visit with some of the families and see some sparkle in their eyes after all the hurt and pain. There is hope: they are moving on with their lives and are now able to smile and laugh a little more freely. It is a joy to see in person that families are healing and to know other friends and families have given them the support they need. This October 4, NWAC will launch a virtual Vigil for Sisters in Spirit with family members participating.

On September 30, our country rose up in a single outcry after learning that a couple of hospital staff at Joliette Hospital, Quebec, had taunted Joyce Echaquan, an Indigenous 37-year-old mother of seven as she live-streamed her terrible experience on Facebook. This incident is not an isolated event; we all saw the discrimination and systemic racism that exists even in our health system—the very place where one should be able to go for safety and care. It is tragic and it does not stop there. It is in law enforcement; it is everywhere. It reinforces why we do what we do for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We must continue to speak for the voiceless and to continue pressing for real change. We will not sideline from the MMIWG cause nor from practices and policies that impact the future of Indigenous women and girls and all who are treated in a discriminatory manner.

Although September is now at an end and the snow will fly (soon), I took some time to travel to my ancestral home. On the land of Kejimikujik, many wigwams would have been seen inland there, close to the water's edge. It brought me back to my ancestors and the spirit of my journey that led me to remembering the 7 sacred teachings as I continue to walk in today's world. The teachings and my visit home helped me to remember where I have come from. It is important to always show compassion and LOVE, RESPECT, COURAGE, HONESTY, HUMILITY, TRUTH, and WISDOM to all humankind. This is my own walk each day, and it is my hope that it may be yours as well.

Thank you, Wela'lin


President Lorraine Whitman
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My September Agenda

Sept. 1 – MMIWG Family Healing Gathering and support all of our families: I attended the small MMIWG gathering in Baddeck supporting families in person. It is important for them to know that someone is there for them.

Sept. 3 – MMIWG Core Working Group's first weekly meeting: We have had four meetings now, set up by the Government of Canada. We are committed to working together (Indigenous, provincial, and territorial partners) on the development of the National Action Plan and to driving transformative change to end systemic racism and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual people (2SLGBTQQIA).

Sept. 4 – Travelled to Halifax to meet with Elder Marie Sack for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia announcement of a design competition for the new Halifax waterfront arts district. I have been involved providing cultural input for a design submission that builds on Mi'kmaw concepts of inclusiveness and 'Mawiomi' – a gathering place and gathering of people. This is where feasting, powwows, ceremonies, and visiting happens. Our design is rooted within Mi'kmaw knowledge and culture, derived from universal wisdom and knowledge regarding all beings living in harmony with one another on Mother Earth, on Turtle Island. Our design responds to the call for new ways of thinking about how we build sustainable, inclusive spaces for future generations.



Sept. 7 – Labour Day: This is the time of year when we harvest at home. The harvest and vines grew tall and the zucchini and tomatoes seemed to take over. We picked many vegetables for drying, freezing, and preserving. Dozens of sweet loaf breads were made using our harvested zucchini to take to friends, family, and people in the community.

Sept. 8 – UN special procedural meeting: This meeting is a continuation of my UN international work supporting Indigenous women through the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Inter-American Commission Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Sept. 8 – Meeting with Minister Bennett about our agreements and funding, as well as having our own NWAC committee. Further work to come in this regard.



Sept. 10 – Submitted a letter to the Ministers regarding the upcoming Throne Speech. Our focus was on the desperate need to stop the ongoing violence being perpetrated against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people, and the obligation to improve their socio-economic well-being. The most crucial is the release of a National Action Plan as a starting point in addressing the violence; the Plan will be a living document that can be improved and updated over time.

Sept. 11 – Nova Scotia Native Women's Association meeting with Shalan Joudry, Knowledge Keeper with the Resiliency Centre that is going to be built.

Sept. 14 – MMIWG Core Working Group (meets weekly).

Sept. 17 – Emceed the swearing-in-ceremony of our Regional Chief PJ Prosper, at the Millbrook Cultural and Heritage Centre.

Sept. 17 – Delivered online matriculation speech at Acadia University and welcomed university students.

Sept. 19 – Fishing protests in southwestern Nova Scotia to support Mi'kmaw fishermen's treaty rights.

Sept. 21 – MMIWG Core Working Group meeting and letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about the fisheries dispute.

Sept. 22 – Gave a CanWaCH gender equality address (online) at the opening ceremony for Gender Equality Week, with a focus on equality in health (a topic near and dear to NWAC's heart). In Canada, there is a common belief that the public health system means everyone, no matter what race, colour, religion, and financial status, is afforded the same level of medical care.

Sept. 22 – Held a teleconference call with MP Leah Gazan regarding her request for support for some of her recommendations to the House of Commons, particularly around Universal Basic Income.

Sept. 24 – Attended virtually the final presentation of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia design competition.



Sept. 25 – Travelled to Digby, Nova Scotia, to meet with our Regional Chief PJ Prosper for the Assembly of First Nations: I was there for our Elders to support those who have been around and know much of our history. That evening I had an opportunity to sit by a campfire and enjoy a social visit with Marlene Thomas of the Nova Scotia PTMA; she and her husband were there to support the Mi'kmaw fishermen in Saulnierville.

Sept. 29 – While travelling to St. Peters, I dropped into a local Mi'kmaw community to attend a wake of one of our sisters. I have been unable to attend many events because of COVID, but our bubble is still open enough and we were still able to social distance. Remember our loved ones and our people physically (while following and respecting health standards).

Sept. 30 – I visited the Jane Paul Centre in Sydney, Nova Scotia, where I had the pleasure of attending the re-opening of its doors for vulnerable women who find themselves in high-risk situations. The centre offers programs for these women and 2SLGBTAAIA people in the community. I had a chance to get together with Karen Bernard, president of the centre, and Senator Dan Christmas, who focuses on Indigenous issues around human trafficking.

Sept. 30 – The Membertou Walk for Orange Shirt Day is held on the last day of September every year to commemorate the residential school experience, to witness and honour the healing journey of the survivors and their families, and to commit to the ongoing process of reconciliation.



Jane Paul Centre



Lorraine and Dan Christmas



Orange Shirt Day

“We have to recognize the knowledge of our sisters, our mothers, and our grandmothers, who have told us that those we have lost cannot be forgotten. We need to be able to support the families of those who have been taken from us and to let them know that we will continue to do that even though we are in a pandemic. We are not going to forget them.”

~ *Lorraine Whitman*



Native Women's
Association of Canada



L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

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