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## NEWS LOCAL

### Supporting indigenous people through art



By Andrew Philips, Special to Postmedia Network  
Tuesday, November 29, 2016 7:36:58 EST PM



Often times, the arts can provide a much-needed venue to bridge perceived divides and foster healing.

That's one of the principles behind a new art installation on display Wednesday at Georgian College's Orillia campus that will later be featured at a Barrie art gallery.

Dubbed a Call to Action #83, the display features the work of 16 artists from across Simcoe County who were inspired to initiate an art project that sprang from reflections relating to the federal government's report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The commission, which crisscrossed the country for a number of years, provided those directly or indirectly affected by the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools' system an opportunity to share their stories and experiences. Last year, it presented an executive summary of findings and included 94 calls to action (recommendations) to "further reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples."

Mary Louise Meiers, an artist and retired public school teacher and administrator, used that concept to spearhead the #83 exhibit.

"The TRC listed 94 calls to action at the end of their seven-year study," she said. "Those calls to action give every resident in Canada something that they can do."

According to Meiers, each work in the installation features the individual artist's personality and sensibilities, but shines through with the concept of "envisioning a future towards reconciliation."

The artists and four elders representing both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples first got together last September 21 during a "blood moon." After a two-round sweat lodge ceremony and feast, the artists chose by lot the order in which to make their works, non-indigenous artists alternating with indigenous.

The first artist, who was non-indigenous, set to work in late September, 2015 and two weeks later handed his woodcut to the first indigenous artist. As he did so, he spoke about his piece and the creative process he went through.

The second artist responded to the woodcut and in two weeks brought her painting to the third artist, who was non-indigenous. And so the process unfolded similar in nature to the broken-telephone game with each artist inspiring the next one in the line, but not seeing all the works that came before.

"We also had a nice balance of male and female artists," Meiers said, adding the participants didn't actually see all of the collected works until this past June when they reconvened back at the sweat lodge. "This focused on mutual respect, friendship and sharing."

Sponsored by the Orillia Campus Indigenous Resource Centre, Wednesday's event is open to the public as well as students and staff.

"Visitors are encouraged to view the artwork, ask questions of the artists and to ask themselves 'what can I do?'" said Dawn Ireland, Indigenous student advisor with the centre. "Call to Action #83 lays out a road map for communities to go together in harmony."

Presentations by artists take place hourly from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Orillia campus theatre, with viewing sessions at 10 a.m. and noon. A reception with the artists will be held from 2 to 3:30 p.m. in the Indigenous Resource Centre (room B201).

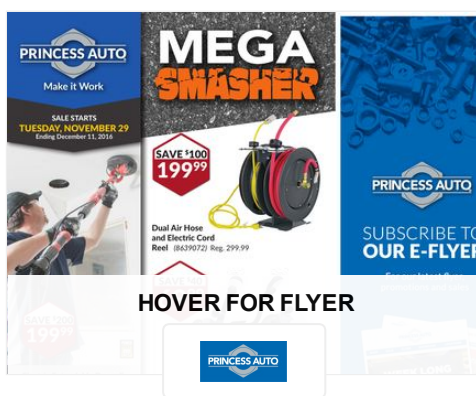
Besides Meiers, participating artists include: Peter Adams, Nathalie Bertin, Jennie Clark, Xavier Fernandes, Marilyn George, Robert Henry Clayton Samuel King, Nancy King, Jeanette Luchese, Christina Luck, Joanna McEwen, Jon Oelrichs, Mercedes Sandy, Paul Shilling and Paul Whittam.

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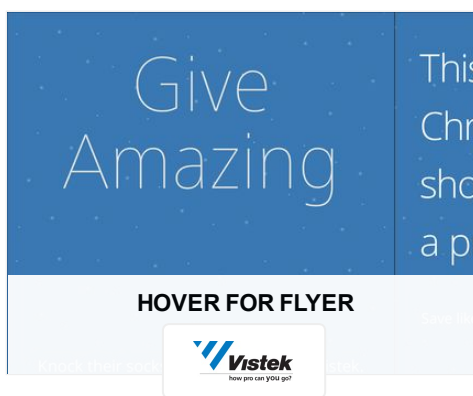
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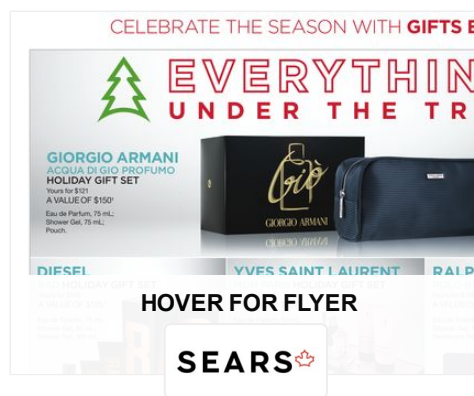
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