

For Immediate Release (January 23, 2022):

Jury Selects Neyaashiinigiing Artist for Community-funded Public Art Project

Charmaine Jenner (Tauchkwe), a self-taught Woodland Style artist from Neyaashiinigiing has been selected to have one of her paintings installed as a piece of public art as a community-funded symbol of reconciliation efforts.

[The project](#) grew from conversations among a group of neighbours in the village of Oxenden at a summer picnic intended to celebrate Canada's 150, where they quickly realized that if we are looking back at the early inhabitants of the village, the last 150 years is only one part the story, with First Nations people having stewarded it for over 10,000 years. As a group of neighbours, they set to work to figure out what they could do to honour the much longer history of the First Nations who originally lived here and to begin an effort to help right the many historic wrongs in First Nations / settler relations.

They researched the Treaties and held a gathering to learn from renowned local First Nations historian Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and put together a Call for Proposals for First Nations artists to propose a piece of large-scale public art. Installing the art on the property that they now own marks a public acknowledgement that the drive for private land ownership by settlers and colonizers is exactly what forced the relocation and dispersion of the local First Nations onto reserves. In this case the residents of the South Side of Colpoys Bay in Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory were relocated to Neyaashiinigiing and to Beausoleil First Nation on the Christian, Beckwith and Hope Islands, so the Call for Proposals was directed at artists with connection to these regions.

The project received three very strong submissions, and the Jury, including local residents and Indigenous artists, youth and leaders, settled on Charmaine's Crane because of both the beauty of the piece and the layers of symbolism and teachings embedded within it. Crane (Ajijak) represents leadership and speaks on behalf of the people for the good of the Community and Nation.

The Crane lives in harmony with the land, the water and takes to the air with grace and ease. We can all learn how to speak up for, and take care of the land, air and waters, so that our future generations may enjoy the beauty and sacredness of Creation.



“As an Indigenous Anishnaabeh Kwe,” Charmaine says, “my heart is filled with gratitude, to be connected with the message of awareness and help in educating our non-Indigenous neighbors in the Spirit of reconciliation and allyship, building strong foundations for future generations.”

The organizers envision this piece of art speaking directly to the hearts of passers-by on this busy hiking, cycling, and traffic route for generations to come and a symbol of peace, strength and collaboration.

Chief Veronica Smith, one of the Jury members said: “What a pleasure to be part of the group to select a work of art from one of our local Indigenous artisans that depicts the Ojibway presence at Oxenden which was once a settlement for the Saugeen Ojibway. Akijaak, the crane represents leadership which is necessary for everyone, especially our youth as we strengthen our path towards reconciliation and partnerships. I’m sure everyone will enjoy seeing Akijaak at Oxenden!

Heidi Tones, High school teacher and Oxenden resident, says “This serene, yet thought-provoking, Crane mural will not only beautify the corners of Oxenden, it will also be a lasting legacy to the First Nations people who settled here long before the settlers. This symbolic gesture is only the start of the much-needed building of relations in this wonderful area known as the Saugeen Peninsula.”

Sandy Ashton, local resident of First Nations heritage says, “We are all treaty people, and the message shared through this mural will be important for every tourist, every hiker, and every local passing by to recognize and contemplate.”

Local resident of Métis heritage, Kelsey Carriere, upon whose house the piece will be affixed says “I’m so honoured to be part of this project. Having worked on many community art projects over the years I know the power of public art and am so happy to see First Nation and settler neighbours come together in the spirit of reconciliation to celebrate our commitment to building a strong, caring and collaborative future together. There are so many historical wrongs to be righted and this project brings this deep and complex work to the surface in a meaningful and celebratory way.”

The group is currently fundraising for the artist commission and installation. You can learn more about the project at <https://oxendenindigenousartproject.weebly.com/> or donate directly through their charitable partner at [Elephant Thoughts](#) (select **Oxenden Indigenous Art Project** as the Designation).

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