

## Press Release

### **Municipality of the District of St. Mary's unveils commissioned artwork to commemorate victims and survivors of residential schools in Canada.**

**Sherbrooke N.S.** – The Municipality of the District of St. Mary's will mark an important milestone in its efforts towards Truth and Reconciliation on Wednesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. An original piece of artwork that will serve to recognize the impact of residential schools in Canada will be officially unveiled at the Municipal Office following a meeting of council.

This project has been 3 years in the making. On Monday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Municipal Council passed a motion to explore the development of a plaque with proper wording and placement to acknowledge Truth and Reconciliation moving forward. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Municipal Council passed a motion to provide Elder Geri LeBlanc an honorarium to work with staff to develop a commemorative piece to recognize the impact of residential schools in Canada.

Over the fall and winter months, Elder Geri spent time discussing the project with many Elders and residential school survivors. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, municipal staff met with Geri to review the information and opinions collected from elders and residential school survivors. Together, a vision for the piece was developed including the wording and potential visuals.

In lieu of a plaque, it was recommended that the piece be an original painting created by an indigenous artist in Nova Scotia. Based on the recommendation of Elder Geri, Municipal Council commissioned Mi'kmaq Artist Natasha Root to complete the painting. Natasha describes herself as "a Two-spirited Mi'gmaq woman from Listuguj First Nation, which is in the traditional district of Gespeg, in the unceded territory of the Mi'gmaq, known as Mi'gma'gi. She is a Mixed Media Artist who specializes in painting & digital designs.

The wording included in the piece was created based on specific feedback from Elders and Survivors, who felt that the inscription should use simple wording so that it is accessible to all. Elders did not feel the word "Survivor" should be included in the piece, but instead focus on their endurance to make it through the residential school system. The painting includes the following inscription: "In honour of the children who were taken from their families and sent to residential schools and the families left behind. We are still here."

Council and staff were very excited to welcome Elder Geri LeBlanc to the Municipal Office to officially unveil the piece for the very first time. Community Development and Recreation Director Kerri Jack said the project took longer than anticipated to get here, but the process was the most important element of this undertaking, "Truth and reconciliation takes time. It is important to work in collaboration with indigenous individuals and communities when it comes to truth and reconciliation projects. Working towards the completion of this painting has helped the Municipality to create and learn proper procedures and practices when working with indigenous partners that will continue after the completion of this project. This was about more than just creating a commemorative piece, the process to get here today is what Truth and Reconciliation can truly look like." The original motion that put this project into motion, was put forward by Deputy Warden Jim Fuller, he says, "The Residential School era is a very difficult piece of history. It is not an ancient story that we can view with a modern eye, survivors of this travesty are still living throughout our province. They have to live every day carrying the memories. The trials that these children endured cannot be excused or ever repeated. If this artwork can start a conversation and encourage critical study of this period, then it has performed a great service."

Following the unveiling of the commemorative piece, staff and council will participate in a KAIROS Blanket exercise. The Municipality received funding to support this workshop through the Province of Nova Scotia's Diversity and Community Capacity Fund and Community and Cultural Identities Fund. KAIROS Blanket is an

experiential workshop that explores the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Chief Administrative Officer Doug Patterson says the workshop is an opportunity for the Municipality to respond to the National Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action, "Number 57 asks for all levels of government to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples. The KAIROS Blanket exercise is a great first step towards responding to this call to action."

The commemorative piece will be on display in the Municipal Offices front lobby for residents to view. Municipal Council would like to make the piece available for display throughout the community. Information on that process will be made available at a later date.

For further comment, please contact:

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Photo from left to right: Councillor Everett Baker, Deputy Warden Jim Fuller, Elder Geri LeBlanc, Councillor Beulah Malloy, Councillor Courtney Mailman.