



## Area school children celebrate Aboriginal Earth Day

By Jean Sarrazin

**BOURGET** – More than 60 students from two schools in the region attended Earth Day celebrations at an Aboriginal cultural centre near Bourget on Monday.

Students from St. Jude Catholic School in Vankleek Hill as well as from Pope John Paul II Catholic School in Hammond took part in ceremonies honouring Mother Earth.

Students planted 200 pine tree seedlings, in the traditional native way – with a pinch of tobacco leaves placed into the hole prepared for each seedling. The seedlings were furnished by South Nation Conservation.

The Assinibika Women’s Drum Circle led by Heather Wiggs performed several pieces for the students, followed by the “Carriers of the Words”, a drumming group from Ahkwesahsne. That group exists to ensure the survival of the Mohawk language and most of the songs they sang were written in Mohawk by Th eresa “Bear” Fox.

According to a web page dedicated to the “Carriers of the Words” their songs are meant to “honour their Mother the Earth, their Grandmother the Moon, their grandparents from every generation, the teachers in schools who teach the language and the Great Law of Peace.”



More than 60 school children from St. Jude Catholic School in Vankleek Hill and Pope John Paul II Catholic School in Hammond celebrated Earth Day at the Cultural Foundations Native Expressions cultural centre near Bourget on Monday. These children were mesmerized by the singing and drumming of the “Carriers of the Words” drumming group from Ahkwesahsne. (photo J. Sarrazin)



See and hear sounds and more photos from this event on Friday, April 25 on The Review’s website. (photo J. Sarrazin)

Pope John Paul II teacher Francis Scholten says the event was definitely a learning experience for the 30 students attending from his school.

Cultural Foundation Native Expressions manager Yvan St-Jean reported that although United Counties of Prescott-Russell Warden and Russell Mayor Ken Hill made a brief morning appearance at the CFNE event, other invited mayors did not attend the event.

St-Jean says the activity was designed to help the Eastern Ontario school boards meet new requirements of the province’s Aboriginal Education Strategy and says he was surprised that only the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario chose to send students and teachers to participate in the aboriginal cultural event.

He says all four area school boards were invited to attend and he felt sure more would take advantage of the opportunity; pointing out that school boards have been mandated to cultivate partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organizations like CFNE.

Elizabeth Bigwin from the Ministry of Education’s Aboriginal Education Office also attended the event. Bigwin is an Aboriginal Education Officer with the ministry and has over 20 years of teaching experience on and off-reserve. She has served as education advisor for the Ogemawahj Tribal Council in Rama and has been a member of the Chiefs of Ontario Education Coordination Unit for the past five years.



Ron Handfield of Hawkesbury’s TV Cogeco was on hand to shoot footage of the event for future broadcast on TV Cogeco channel 11. Stay tuned to The Review for the dates and times of that special program. In the meantime, a slide show of images and sounds from this event will be posted on The Review’s website on Friday April 25.