

Exhibition on Aboriginal people opens at PAMA



Jennifer Alorut and her mother Raigelee, Inuit throat singers led the procession to the exhibit. Photos by Bill Rea



Rather than cutting a ribbon to officially open the Exhibition on Aboriginal people at PAMA, organizers held a Ribbon-Joining ceremony. Those taking part included Vince Musson, France Picotte, Carolyn King and Garry Sault.



Councillor Allan Thompson was representing the Town at the opening ceremonies.

By Bill Rea

Aboriginal people have played a significant part in Peel Region's past and present.

Those contributions are being celebrated in an exhibit currently on display at the Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA). Entitled *We Are Here* – the story of Aboriginal People in Peel Region, the exhibit officially opened to the public Family Day, but there was preview and ribbon ceremony the previous Saturday. This permanent exhibition introduces visitors to the history, traditions and beliefs of the Aboriginal First Nations and Metis in Peel.

"Today, we celebrate the strengthening of the Aboriginal culture in Peel Region," commented Regional Chair and CEO Emil Kolb, as he reflected on the language, and historical ties with the area. For example, he cited the name Chinguacousy as being an Aboriginal word meaning "A place where young pines grow."

Brampton Mayor Susan Fennell was pleased the Region is recognizing and preserving its heritage. She pointed out it was Aboriginal people who helped found Peel.

"We value heritage and tradition here in the Region of Peel," she said.

Acting Caledon mayor Allan Thompson observed the traditions of living off the land continue with the farming community in Peel. Pama Manager Claire Loughheed observed the job of a museum is to tell stories and do it right.

She also praised members of the Aboriginal community for their assistance in setting up the exhibit, which was two years in the making. "They have always been at the heart of this experience," she said.

Geomatics Environmental Technician Carolyn King, representing the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations, said they are working to make sure their story is heard and that people know they are here.

"We are here now," declared France Picotte, chair of the Metis Nation of Ontario. "We have been here before and we will be here again."

"We have always been here, among everybody," she added.

Picotte said there was a time when Metis were discouraged from identifying themselves as members of the Nation, and have been oppressed.

"We are an old nation," she said. "Many of our people are now proud to say who they are."

Picotte was appreciative for the exhibit.

"It's going to bring light and life to our people in this area," she said.

Pat Chrisjohn, of the Oneida First Nation, said the Aboriginal population in Peel has been increasing. This not because of an influx, but because more of them are comfortable being self-aware.