

## More than Fried Bread, Drumming and Pow-Wow Dancing

Don't get me wrong, fried bread, drumming and pow-wow dancing are all good things, but this Aboriginal Day (June 21<sup>st</sup>) there are many other exciting events to celebrate.

In 1996, the first Aboriginal Day was established through the combined efforts of the sacred assembly and Elijah Harper, a respected elder and speaker who left for the spirit world May 17, 2013. Aboriginal Day is a time of celebration in many Aboriginal and Metis communities. Anyone is welcome to join in and celebrate the accomplishments of First Nations people both in the past and as we move towards the future.

Many positive changes are appearing in Aboriginal communities as the people reclaim their pathways to health. Aboriginal health is seen as a combination of spiritual, emotional and physical well-being which is different from western models. First Nation Healthy Authority was established and is poised to reflect the collective knowledge of First Nation people by embracing the traditional practices of the past and the medical technology of today.

Many Aboriginal and Metis communities are also stepping forward to help make their communities healthier. Communities are returning to past practices like hunting and fishing camps and teaching the next generation to gather and prepare traditional foods and medicines. Though that may sound like day to day activity, it also brings communities and generations together to practice healthy living.

Walking and hiking in the mountains and fields; whether to hunt, fish or gather food, teaches many valuable skills. Hunting and fishing camps give their first kills to the community and help feed their elders with meat and fish from the camps. They also teach us to feed our people by gathering food and preparing it later for storage. These activities also provide physical exercise for all ages and being out in nature helps improve mental and emotional wellbeing. Most importantly, these practices help teach the next generation to respect the land and its abundance and to regain some of the traditional practices that have kept Aboriginal people alive and healthy. You do not get that pushing a grocery cart in the supermarket!

Aboriginal communities are successfully melding the past and the future in order to become healthy strong people and communities. So, when you join the Aboriginal Day festivities on June 21<sup>st</sup> and admire the drumming, dancing and bead work as well as the occasional treat of fried bread, remember there is so much more to celebrate.

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