

**Good News Release  
August 29th, 2023**

**RCCDSB highlights Indigenous Summer Programs from across the county.**

As Ontario schools approach a new school year, RCCDSB is pleased to highlight the Indigenous Summer Learning program and the 2023 North American Indigenous Games.

The Board's Indigenous Summer Learning program continued this summer, as some Grade 8 Indigenous students have been working hard toward achieving a general learning reach-ahead credit focused on project management this past summer.

In the month of June, students began a journey to rejuvenate and redesign a courtyard space at Bishop Smith Catholic High School. They learned about the steps of project management and underwent important safety training. Throughout the process, students were able to research designs, consult with a biologist, and learn about budgeting, amongst other things.

During the week of July 10-14th, students working towards a credit, and those completing community hours in fulfillment of their graduation requirements came to implement the vision. The Board was fortunate to partner with Skills Ontario, who gifted each student with a tool bag and tools for their use with the project. Skills Ontario also joined in the project for a day giving the students a presentation on the skilled trades and crafted both birdhouses and birdfeeders with the students. Although the project is ongoing and the credit work continues, students were able to gain on-the-job experience and skills related to project management and general landscaping. When done students will have created a shared, sustainable, and culturally relevant space that everyone can enjoy. An opening ceremony is planned for later in the fall.

In addition to the Indigenous Summer learning program, the 2023 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia in July. This event happens every 3-4 years, and the best Indigenous athletes get the opportunity to compete against teams across North America. These games are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for most, and RCCDSB had 5 students participate in the games, Nolan and Lena Costello, Mark and John Bailie, along with one coach, the Board's Indigenous Graduation Coach, Gerry Benoit.

Lena Costello played for U-16 girls' basketball for Team Ontario, making it to the quarterfinals. Her brother, Nolan Costello, played U-19 boys' basketball for Team Ontario, losing in a triple overtime game for the bronze medal against Minnesota.

Mark Bailie came 10th in the 800m race, and 8th in the 1200m race. His brother John Bailie participated in the shot put and javelin and came in 4th place for those events. The brothers, who attend St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Renfrew, ran together in the 4 by 100m, and while they were initially due to come in 3rd, New Mexico was disqualified, awarding the Bailie brothers the silver medal.

Gerry Benoit coached U-14 boys' basketball with Indigenous athletes between 12-14 years old across Canada. This was the first time in several years that these games were able to take place. Gerry recalls the intense moments during the semi-final game against Team BC. As they were down by 14 in the 4th quarter, Team Ontario pushed into 5 minutes of overtime and won the semi-finals with 1 second to spare. An exciting victory for the U-14 team! They ultimately lost in the finals by 7 points, but Gerry speaks on one of the biggest takeaways from the games: "The most important takeaway to me is working with someone you may not know towards a common goal. Some of these athletes only met one another on this trip to Nova Scotia, but everyone came together to display the true definition of teamwork!"

The City of Pembroke has invited all the athletes and Coach Benoit to the Pembroke Council meeting on Tuesday, September 5th at 6 p.m.

Indigenous Summer Learning program- progress at the Bishop Smith Courtyard





North American Indigenous Games

