

Mackinac Bands Hosts Geography Presentation

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Members of the Mackinac Bands of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians and non-Tribal members gather to discuss the geography of the Straits of Mackinac area with Professor Guntram Herb. Pictured here in the Huron Longhouse Saturday, July 22, are Becky Simmons (from left), Stephanie Krebs, Richard Lewis, Patty Herb, Henrik Herb, Guntram Herb, Lisa Powers, Richard Steck, and John Bourisseau. KAITLYN WALES / THE ST. IGNACE NEWS

Members of the Mackinac Bands of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians and non-members gathered around a warming fire in the Huron Longhouse on the grounds of the Museum of Ojibwa Culture to discuss the geography of the Straits of Mackinac Area Saturday, July 22. Geography Professor Guntram Herb of Middlebury College in Vermont, who regularly works with the tribe, presented information about the area.

Chairwoman Lisa Powers of the Mackinac Bands of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians began the presentation by telling the group that everyone should have the opportunity to learn about their Native culture, and shared some interesting statistics about the younger generations.

“Studies and research tell us that more than 50% of children in elementary to junior high school have no education of the Mackinac Native culture,” she said, “and 70% of seventh through 12th grade students have some knowledge but have nowhere to go to learn more. Teaching and exposure to the heritage and communicating with elders are the keys to making the numbers and percentages decline.”

Ms. Powers also stated it is a goal of the Mackinac Bands to have a gathering place of their own.

“It’s our land, our people, and our water,” she said. “And that is key to keeping our Native culture alive and thriving.”

She introduced the presenters, Richard Lewis, tribal elder chairman of the Mackinac Bands, and Mr. Herb.

Mr. Lewis told the group he is thankful to Shirley Sorrels, retiring director of the Museum of Ojibwa Culture, and the staff at the museum for providing a place to meet.

“To me, this is the original meeting place. It’s not ‘this is the way we were’ this is the way it still is,” Mr. Lewis said. “We’re here. We’re still meeting like this, that hasn’t changed.”