**Amik Preserving Our Language and Culture**

We keep talking about our dying language and culture as time goes on.

Our spiritual leaders and Elders are becoming fewer and fewer, yet nobody wants to put any effort into pursuing that part of life, which is important to us as Anishinabe people.  It seems everyone cares more about what’s happening every day with contemporary issues and the way of life.  The main concerns are: “Where are you going tonight?” “What are you doing this weekend?” “Who is all going to be there?” “I cant make it to the Big Drum ceremony, I have a pool tournament.” The list goes on.

We in the Mille Lacs area offer a lot in the way of culture and language.  We have all our ceremonies.  We have places you can go to learn some of the language and culture, the schools, the community, the Language and Culture Grounds in Rutledge.  These places all wait for us.  We have to set aside meaningless priorities and get to know about who we are, so we can continue being the proud Anishinabe that we once were.

People ask what we teach at the immersion grounds.  Here’s an example, taken from a three-day event we hosted.

We had some beginning Ojibwe language lessons for people who had never learned Ojibwe before.

We had a gentleman doing some black ash basket weaving.  He showed people how to peel the bark off the tree and make baskets out of it.

At the same time, there were ongoing workshops where one of the instructors did some deer hide tanning the old way – scraping and soaking the hides, scraping the hair off, and using the brains of the deer to tan the hide.  I remember watching my mom tan hides this way.  It smelled bad, oh man, did it stink!

Then we had a lady in another part of the center making traditional pointed-toe moccasins, the original Ojibwe moccasins.  She was doing beadwork and moccasin making, showing people different ways to stitch.

We also had some unfinished rice from the previous fall, so we had a hands-on ricing demonstration.  People actually got in there and parched the rice, jigged it, winnowed it, and boiled it.  That took a couple days.

Some people come to the center for just one day at a time, which is not enough time to teach them a lot.  So these people get a little bit of information on our culture, a little bit of our history, a little bit on the tribal government, then they go down on the center’s grounds to get hands-on experience doing whatever the instructors are doing that day, whether it’s hide tanning, finishing rice, or something else.  Whatever we do, though, the goal is always to help teach and preserve our ways.

So there is a lot of language and culture offered in our areas.  All we have to do is make an effort to learn, learn so we can pass it on to our children, grandchildren and we-ehs.

If you’re not familiar with we-ehs, they are like your godparent or godchild. We-ehs are chosen at the time one receives his or her spiritual name. We-ehs have a real powerful bond with each other, they confide in each other. The older we-eh (often the name giver) mentors the younger one about things in life. The younger we-eh must be able to go to the older we-eh with any concerns he or she may have regarding life problems. Often times people have more than one we-eh.