**Jim Clark Getting Familiar with Each Other**

Aaniin (Hello). My name is Jim Clark. I am an Elder of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. I want to welcome you to the first "Moccasin Telegraph" column, a new feature in the *Mille Lacs Messenger*. Approximately every three weeks, a member of the Mille Lacs Band will share a little bit about our people, our culture, our history, and our traditions.

What is a moccasin telegraph? Here’s my understanding of it:  years ago, there were no telephones and no mail service, so people had to find other ways to communicate with each other. The Anishinaabe (the Indian people) lived in family groups spread out over this area. Each one of these groups had a patriarch of the clan, like my grandfather. The patriarch would designate someone in his group, maybe a young fellow or a young girl, to carry news. These people were runners. The patriarch would say, “Something is happening, and we want to pass the news along,” and the runner would take the news to the other family groups. Indian people wore moccasins at that time, so the runners would run in their moccasins.

That’s how things worked a long time ago – the Anishinaabe had a moccasin telegraph that brought the news to the people. Today, a phone can be the moccasin telegraph. And, Anishinaabe still say they’ve heard things “through the moccasin telegraph.”

We want to use this "Moccasin Telegraph" in the *Mille Lacs Messenger* to tell you about the Mille Lacs Band. Anishinaabe have lived in this area for a long time, but some people don’t really know much about us. And I think when people know each other better, when they familiarize themselves with each other, they are more relaxed with each other.

It’s like when you wake up in the morning and it’s snowed outside. Everything looks different, but we’ve seen snow all our lives so we don’t worry about the difference because it’s familiar.

It’s like that with people, too. I remember I went to a boarding school in Hayward, Wisconsin, that was run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I went there for four years. On Saturdays, we’d walk into town – the boarding school was about a mile away – and we’d go to a show Saturday afternoon, maybe buy some popcorn. And some kids used to tease us, and some kids would try to fight.

And then the last year that we were there, we had to go to the public school because they didn’t have any teachers at the Indian school. And there we got along with the kids. They found out that we were just like anybody else, and we got along with them really well because we were more familiar with each other.

So, that is why I think people should learn more about each other. I’ve been to schools and talked to kids and adults to tell them about Anishinaabe people. When I talk to people, they seem more friendly and relaxed even after talking to them for just a half hour or 45 minutes about what Anishinaabe people are like.

We look forward to using the "Moccasin Telegraph" to tell you more about the Mille Lacs Anishinaabe in the future, so that you can be more familiar with our people. Mii gwetch (Thank you).