



Aboriginals look to move forward
National Aboriginal Day celebrations focus on forgiveness

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Forgiveness and co-operation were the focus at the National Aboriginal Day celebration Saturday following the federal government's recent official apology for residential schools.

Aboriginal and non-aboriginal families, elders, veterans and dignitaries alike gathered under the hot sun Saturday at Friendship Park to enjoy a day filled with prayer, music and dancing -- along with freshly made traditional bannock -- at a national event set aside to recognize Metis, First Nations and Inuit cultures.

Chief Lawrence Joseph of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) urged those in attendance to make an extra effort to work with one another, regardless of culture or background, in the wake of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's June 11 official apology for those who suffered in Canada's residential schools.



CREDIT: SP Photo by Greg Pender
Metis fiddler Dallas Boyer plays during National Aboriginal Day celebrations Saturday in Saskatoon in Friendship Park

Joseph thanked the federal government for allowing many survivors the chance to move forward.

"(It was a) very historic and long-awaited apology to those of us who are survivors of the residential schools of Canada," he said to the crowd of several hundred people gathered at the park. "I've always said, where denial ends, healing begins."

Blackstrap MP Lynn Yelich spoke about enhancing co-operation between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in the province and throughout Canada, something that will be easier following the official apology.

She also presented the Canada Day Youth award to Kayla Tanton for making an exceptional contribution to her community.

Despite the difficult subject of residential schools, most of the day was spent celebrating aboriginal culture and having fun.

Those in attendance were able to hear Metis and First Nations music and watch jigging, dancing and fiddling. There was also a free lunch of soup, cake and bannock made fresh that morning by elders.

Event organizer May Henderson said that's what National Aboriginal Day is all about.

"It's a good way to combat stereotypes about aboriginal people, that we don't contribute to our community, and to show our culture and be proud of our heritage," she said.

The event, hosted by the Saskatoon National Aboriginal Day Committee and the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre, takes about eight months to plan, said Henderson.

Many brought their families to ensure their aboriginal culture carries on into the next generation.

"We're Metis, and this is good way to spend some family time," said Jennifer Hingley, with daughter Jillian and son Jayden.

From the aboriginal elders' tent, Rose Atimoyoo said she just wanted to "enjoy the beautiful day that everyone has been given."

National Aboriginal Day has been celebrated across Canada since 1996.

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