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# In Honor of Chief Edward Sayers

Karen Johns for SooNews.ca  
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This weekend, members of the Obadjiwan Reserve in Batchawana Bay will be holding four days of traditional Native ceremonies and events.

The event is in honor of memory of Chief Edward `Nebenaigoching' Sayers; a prominent figure in the early struggle for recognition of native rights.

Ojibway elders and healers from Alberta to Manitoba will gather in this historic native village to sing, dance and conduct healing ceremonies over 4 days.

Organizer and descendant of Chief Sayers, JoeTom Sayers told SooNews, that "Chief Edward attended residential school as a young child, and he suffered many of the impacts felt by thousands of other young native children,"said Sayers. " He overcame his suffering to take a leadership role among his people".

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The four day event will focus on healing therapies drawn from an

ancient culture, such as the Sweat Lodge and new alternative methods of healing such as foot massage thereapy.

The event is open to former students of residentil schools and descendants of Chief Sayers.

Saturday evening there will be a Round Dance, one of the more colourful activities: a social event filled with dancing and hand drumming at 8 p.m and it is open to the public.

#### **A Biography and History on Chief Edward Sayers.**

Chief Edward James `Nebenaigoching' Sayers was the son of the late Chief Joe Tom Sayers and Mary Jane (nee Robinson) Sayers of Batchawana Bay, Ontario. He grew up in the house that his father built in Batchawana village and was the second youngest of 8 surviving children.

Ed became interested in native leadership since his father Joe Tom, his grandfather Jim, his great grandfather Joe (Nebenaigoching), and his great great grandfather White Crane (Waubechake) were chiefs and leaders in the Anishenabe community.

Edward carried on the tradition of chieftainship when he took up the fight to protect his people from being evicted in 1974. He further challenged the provincial government by testing the right to fish commercially under the 1850 treaty his great grandfather signed. He and Angus Kakapshe were charged in about 1977 for fishing without a licence and set an example for future generations of native fishermen to follow. As a result, today there are more than 20 independent fishing operations that exercise their treaty rights without government interference or regulation.

Edward also was an early pioneer in off reserve voting rights by challenging Indian Affairs in the late 1970's for off reserve members to vote in Band elections. The off reserve voting rights are now recognized in law due to a Supreme Court ruling in 2000.

He was the last Hereditary Chief, meaning that his title as chief was not passed down to his descendants. The Chief and Band Council is now elected by residents of the Native Reserves. In 1982 Chief Ed Sayers prevented the trespass on to reserve lands by protecting the Obadjiwan Reserve. He actively led protests to open the public road to the reserve which resulted in a successful court challenge. He also occupied the reserve by living in the abandoned Lighthouse, which was turned to Indian Reserve in 1967.

Ed was the first band member to mark out his property on the unsurveyed parcel, and oversaw other land allotments on the 50 acre plot. When the Batchewana First Nation surveyed the property without his input, Ed and the reserve residents banded together to oppose the development.

In 1989, Edward joined a group of family and friends in occupying Whitefish Island in the St. Mary's River. They lived on the island in tents and a teepee all summer and fall. In the winter, Edward was the last resident occupying the island and his nephews Jon and Jim Sayers built a 12X12 shack and installed a small oil stove to keep him warm. Ed lived there all winter and enabled the members of the Batchewana First Nation to finally see the return of the island to reserve status and to share in the 3.5 million settlement.

Ed did not live long enough to enjoy the benefits of his self sacrifice. He received no pay for work and took money from his own pocket to finance his challenges. Edward passed away on September 9, 2001 at the Plummer Memorial Hospital in the palliative care unit. Chief Edward `Nebenaigoching' Sayers leaves behind a legacy of true traditional leadership that has inspired generations of native people to stand up for what is right and just.

Pictured at right:

Ed eyeing a tree to cut on Obadjiwan, (Inset) Placing a sign to warn trespassers as Mark Agawa looks on.

Chief Sayers as a young man

Edward standing with Chief Bear by the Sayers TownPlot in the Sault

Chief Joe Tom Sayers (inset). He built this house and raised his family there.

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