

Vision for future at Chaudière Falls

The Ottawa Citizen

Sunday, August 26, 2007

Re: Chaudière Falls: Mist clears, Aug. 17.

I am not of native descent but believe that many native people -- especially elders -- have a lot to teach us if we will listen. In particular, when it comes to Chaudière Falls, Chaudière Island and Victoria Island, we should listen to the greatly respected Algonquin elder William Commanda. He has detailed a fabulous vision to make the heart of Ottawa and Gatineau a shining example of co-operation, hope and healing.

In the editorial about Chaudière Falls and the surrounding area, the Citizen said, "The mixture of water, natural beauty, rock and history are too important to be left to development chance," and you encourage the NCC to "secure the Domtar lands." Certainly this special area is core to the Ottawa-Gatineau region, and was the main focus for thousands of years until recently.

These lands and waters must be reopened to the public, and elder Commanda is asking us to implement "a vision for supporting indigenous heritage, environmental stewardship and peace-building."

I think Canadians could appreciate this site as sacred in the literal sense of the Sistine Chapel of Rome or the Sacred Mosque of Mecca. But this sacred site of the First Nations has been privatized, polluted and sealed off from the public behind barbed wire. It is an example of how beliefs of native peoples have often been misunderstood and disregarded. But it is not too late to restore those sacred falls and islands for the benefit of everyone. We should do it soon.

Since Samuel de Champlain came up the river almost 400 years ago, that area has gone through a number of industrial phases. Each removed it further from the splendid natural wonder it once was. As the Domtar and E.B. Eddy era ends, it is time to return the area to greenspace, and to public space that will first entail cleaning up the current contaminated brownfields.

Decision-makers should get together soon and implement Mr. Commanda's vision. At 93 years of age, he still works tirelessly for this cause and for all people. Working for many years with others such as Museum of Civilization architect Douglas Cardinal, he has marvellous and detailed plans waiting to be implemented, if we will only listen. For more information, readers can go to asinabka.com/geninfo.htm.

Phil Weir, Ottawa

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