

She brings alive Native American folklore for kids

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Native American artist and storyteller Lois Beardslee Monday visited Beechview Elementary School and pupils found there was nothing "savage" about it.

"What is the Indian word for moose?" asked the 43-year-old Beardslee to a group of pupils sitting crosslegged on the carpeted media center floor.

"Kuwanga," responded one of the youngsters.

"Not quite," Beardslee said. "It's a real short word. In fact it sounds a lot like moose."

After a few moments, Beardslee let the answer slip. "It's moose. You guys knew an Indian word all the time."

Beardslee was brought to the Farmington district school to cap a curricular segment on Native Americans. But, since January is Cultural Awareness Month, it didn't hurt to have a Native American come in to show that the bow-and-arrow characterization of Indians is way off target.

"It's part of the curriculum and no one can teach the Native American material better than a Native," said Beardslee, an established author, painter and storyteller, not to mention a Leeannau County cherry farmer. "We're less than one-half of 1 percent of this country's population, so we're not accessible for a lot of these students."

"And there are a lot of myths that need to be dispelled ... Like people killing people, or scalping people. I say to students, 'Look at me, I'm here. Do I look scary? So you bring it all into perspective for them.'"

Beechview first grade teacher Jill Chafetz concurred about the need to break any stereotypes.

"I think it's really important for them (pupils) to see a Native American in modern times and dismiss the stereotypes they might have," Chafetz said. "And to know they were the first Americans here."

Beechview students sampled a variety of Beardslee's talents, such as traditional Native American arts and crafts. Not only did she show how she can turn beans and corn into necklaces

and weave baskets with artistic flair, she also said she is one of only two known Natives who still create traditional Ojibwe birch bark cut-outs of animals such as rabbits, porcupine and deer.

For the students, she demonstrated the process by folding a piece of typing paper and then cutting out the four-way mirror image design.

"This is the Chippewa Indian style of art work," Beardslee said to the students, while cutting the rabbit design. "So it's not going to look like the Easter bunny."

She emphasized to students not to peel thin strips of birch bark and attempt to replicate her craft.

"I do not want you to peel these trees," Beardslee insisted. "There are only three days out of the whole year when you can peel the bark off of the trees without killing them. And I'm not going to tell you when they are because I don't want you to try."

Craft wizardry aside, Beardslee primarily is a storyteller, and that was what had the most impact during Monday's sessions. With pupils listening intently, Beardslee kept their attention with a riveting story about a greedy old woman who baked bread.

Beardslee and the students stood up in unison, with their arms outstretched above their heads, as if they were trees. They repeated the words of "Mama Bozhou," the half-man, half-spirit character in the story.

"Oh, spirits of the world repeat. I want you to help the old woman ... I want you to make a bread twice as large."

Soon, the old woman discovered that the loaf in her oven was much bigger than what she anticipated, given the measly amount of ingredients. But, it wasn't enough. Beardslee said the old woman failed to share her secret, telling Mama Bozhou that the loaf didn't turn out well and that she needed to try again.

"It turned out twice as big as the last one. She tasted it and it



STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Wings of wisdom: Native American storyteller Lois Beardslee, who is part Ojibwa and Lancondon, shows children at Beechview Elementary how to create four-way mirror images through cutouts. Her presentation is designed to partly debunk stereotypes about Native Americans and to revisit a forgotten culture.

was good. Then she got greedy. Four more times the old woman tried to let on that her bread didn't rise sufficiently, even though the loafs kept turning out bigger and bigger — thanks to Mama Bozhou.

Eventually, Mama Bozhou confronted the old woman. "It was me who made it bigger," said Mama Bozhou. "And you have

been greedy. Because you have been greedy, I want you to know what it is like to hunt and peck and scratch for your food."

The old woman's bony thin nose became longer, bonier. She was turned into a red-headed woodpecker and flew away.

According to first grade teacher Maria Golinick, the story was the highlight of the presentation.

"What I got out of it was (the) heritage that she shared with us, the authenticity," Golinick said afterward. "How she told the story in oral form. A lot of children don't really hear oral stories anymore. And the children were able to see symbols of Native American life."

Beardslee also said she hoped that students might come away

from her assemblies with a newfound appreciation of traditional art, such as quilts, necklaces, baskets and mirror-image cutouts. "I'd like them to learn how labor intensive all the old-style art work is and to appreciate it ... We need the general public to learn an appreciation for these things."

Schools can exercise option to stretch learning calendar

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER

The phrase "school's out for summer" may no longer apply to some Walled Lake district students.

Individual schools can begin to study the option of taking a break every 9 weeks, instead of one long summer break under an extended school year plan unanimously approved by the board of education.

The Walled Lake district includes a northwest portion of Farmington Hills. Farmington Public Schools already offers year-round education at Gill Elementary.

If the majority of parents and school officials in a particular building want an extended school year, they can seek board approval. But not until several discussion sessions are conducted to determine parent and staff opinion.

"There must be an intensive campaign in the community and student body," said Steven Gaynor, assistant superintendent.

There is no set percentage of support that must be obtained.

"I think the questions you have are going to have to elicit that information," Gaynor told the board.

The extended plan allows for three-week breaks between each session, which would serve as opportunities for students to be involved in enrichment activities. Intersessions, at a cost of \$45 to \$50 per class or \$100 per week for a full day of classes 5 days a week, would be offered after the first three quarters. The intersessions would be two weeks long at the high school and vary in length at the elementary and middle schools.

3 plans offered

Walled Lake schools have three options when considering an extended school year format including:

■ 181-day school year with intersessions at no cost to parents.

■ 181-day school year with intersessions costing \$45 per class per student or \$50 with transportation. Each class is made up of five half-days.

■ 190-day school year at a district estimated cost of \$37,887 extra per school of 600 students. Intersessions would cost \$45 and \$50 per class.

Intersessions will be taught by staff, substitutes or qualified community members and, at the elementary level, day-long latchkey will be offered at the intersessions.

"Aren't you automatically excluding people of modest circumstance," said Cynthia Campion, board president. "This is expensive."

"It's obvious that some areas of the district will be able to afford this more than others," said Thomas McConnell, board vice president.

Funding sources would be sought for students unable to attend intersessions for financial reasons, Gaynor said.

McConnell was also concerned office staff would be taking on additional tasks without receiving additional compensation.

"They're not working any more days and they're not doing anything different than they do during the traditional school year," Gaynor said after the meeting.

"It just seems like there's going to be more cost involved," McConnell said. "If we can do it for \$37,000, it's a wonderful idea. I hope we can handle that."

"There may be some variance within that cost," however, Gaynor said. "I think this is a fair estimate."

The extended plan allows for 181-days of school or 190-days. Under the 190-day option, a team of substitute teachers would be brought in to work throughout the school year rather than negotiating additional hours for staff instructors.

"These teachers will be very well known to the community," Gaynor said.

Although students would be able to transfer in and out of school that opt for the extended school year, transportation would only be provided within established attendance areas.

Some other aspects of the extended option would need to be bargained with employee's union.

"I really don't think it's a problem for negotiations because what they've really created is a plan that allows a school to make a plan," said Bill Bell, Walled Lake Education Association president. "If teachers don't want to do it, then it won't happen."

Bell said the old school of thought of having all schools operate in the same manner is out of date.

"How we look at schools today is based on the farm day," Bell said, referring to long summer breaks.

But today, Bell said, day care has become more of a concern. Besides, he said, students often forget information during the longer summer break.

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Clarenceville cooks up fund-raiser for band trip

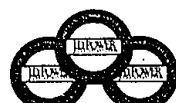
A fund-raiser for the Clarenceville High School band program will be held Monday, Jan. 26, at the McDonald's restaurant at 19311 Farmington Road, just north of Seven Mile in Livonia.

Dubbed "McEducat's Day," the event offers school staff a chance to learn first-hand about employment opportunities for their students at McDonald's while raising money for their school. School staff will wear McDonald's staff uniforms

while working the drive-through window, making french fries and serving customers.

Ten percent of the sales generated during the shift will be donated to the school to go towards band uniforms, the 1999 band trip to Florida and additional instruments for the department.

The Clarenceville district serves students in Livonia, Redford and Farmington Hills.



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