

Native collection unveiled at museum

BY VANCE GUTZMAN

Artifacts collected from a river of time are now on display at the Schoolhouse Museum for all to see.

A special ceremony was held at the museum last week to unveil a collection of native artifacts, gathered over the past 40 years by two local families, which tell stories stretching back thousands of years.

Guy Lemire and Allan Bancroft, along with their respective families, started collecting the artifacts back in the 1960s, as they wandered the beaches along the Ottawa River with their respective families.

"When the kids were young we canoed the river and explored the beaches," said Bancroft.

"The kids loved it."

As the kids grew older, so did Lemire and Bancroft, and then one day the two men learned of each other's collection.

"Then we started worrying about cleaning out the basements, so to speak," said Bancroft.

"And we said, hey, these are a

valuable part of history, they should be put in a safe place. We wanted them to be in a safe place, and also in a place where people can be exposed to them."

And they also wanted to do it right, so they contacted Jean-Luc Pilon, curator of Ontario archeology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

TELL A STORY

Pilon was intrigued by the collection, and guided Lemire and Bancroft in their choice of artifacts, as well as the layout and text for the display, along with the accompanying maps and photographs.

"Without him, it would be a collection of artifacts, but it wouldn't tell a story," said Bancroft.

The display tells quite a story, indeed.

"This tells a story of contacts," Pilon said at the unveiling ceremony.

For thousands of years, he explained, the Ottawa River was

used as a highway by native people, and not just the locals either.

One particular piece that's part of the display contains rock elements that are only found in one place in the entire world - the northern tip of Labrador.

"The journey it took to get here must have been incredible," Pilon enthused.

"The artifacts in this display tell you that, whatever you thought about traditional life here, put that aside... let them all just speak to you."

"This is the story of this land, and it's a tribute to Al and Guy for having the initiative to understand that this is something that needs to be shared."

ALGONQUIN CENTRE

Lemire and Bancroft, it should be noted, aren't just sharing their collection with visitors to the Schoolhouse Museum.

They're also donating a large part of it to the Algonquin Way Cultural

Centre in Golden Lake.

"It's pretty fantastic," said Michelle Gervais, curator of that particular facility, who was also on hand for last week's ceremony.

"They've been working on this for a long time."

Ellen McQuestion, one of the people heading up the Schoolhouse Museum, is also impressed by the new display.

"I think it's pretty wonderful," she said. "These guys have done an amazing job."

And now those guys have passed the torch.

"From now on, Ellen, it's up to you to bring lots of people in to look at them," said Bancroft.

"That's exactly what we want," Lemire added. "Now they're for everybody to see."

People wanting to see the unique historical display can do so by visiting the Schoolhouse Museum, just west of Deep River at Meilleur's Bay, from Friday to Tuesday, between 11 am and 5 pm, throughout the summer months.