

Ojibwe Winter Lodge opening ceremony Jan. 14 - The Lakeland Times - Minocqua, Wisc.

The Ojibwe Winter Lodge Project – an intergenerational, traditional arts project – will be celebrated with a public dedication ceremony Wednesday, Jan. 14, noon, at YMCA Camp Nawakwa, on the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation.

This traditional winter lodge style has not been built in Lac du Flambeau for many years. Its ingenious structure features peat-moss insulated walls, a radiant-heat floor made of large river rocks, and an underground air-intake to provide oxygen for a fire made of birchbark rolls.

This design averts several major problems with other traditional wintertime dwellings:

- It minimizes smoke in the living quarters, as only a small fire is necessary to sustain even heating after the underground stones are warmed.
- It does not pull cold air directly into the living quarters to provide oxygen for the fire, instead drawing oxygen directly into the fire pit through an underground duct.
- The heated floor also resolves the problem of discomfort when trying to sleep on cold earth at night.

The Winter Lodge was constructed by master Ojibwe artist Wayne Valliere – an Ojibwe language teacher at the Lac du Flambeau Public School.

Valliere is an accomplished Ojibwe artist, having dedicated his life to the learning and teaching of traditional arts.

A recent winner of the First People's Fund Community Spirit Award, Valliere has placed his artwork in venues such as the Museum of the American Indian and the Evergreen Longhouse. He is also an accomplished birchbark canoe builder and the founder of the annual Ojibwe Winter Games.

He was assisted by his apprentice, Lawrence Mann, and supporting UW personnel,

including Tim Frandy, Thomas DuBois, and Colin Connors .

According to professor Tom DuBois, the project fits well with the ideals of public humanities and engaged research.

“We are helping create and document an artwork that not only celebrates but sustains Ojibwe culture in our state.”

Students in Lac du Flambeau’s ENVISION program also assisted with the lodge’s historic construction.

ENVISION uses Ojibwe methodologies, pedagogies, and teachings to meet the needs of students in a culturally responsive way.

Students learned not only about the lodge’s construction techniques and the lodge’s historical importance, but also about the degree of scientific and technological sophistication that their ancestors possessed.

The students actively assisted UW folklorists in documenting the project, and they will also participate in the curation of the website detailing the lodge’s construction.

Though the construction of the Winter Lodge began only this fall, the harvesting of the natural materials – cedar bark, birchbark, maple lodge poles, and more – began last June, when the bark was ready to be peeled.

During the process of building the lodge, students were actively working in the woods along with their teachers and representatives from UW-Madison, peeling cedar and birchbark, sewing together birch panels, cutting maple saplings for the frame, digging the underground rock chamber, and laying down nearly a ton of rocks into the subfloor.

“Not only are they learning their culture, they are also getting lots of exercise from both gathering the natural materials and building the structure,” Valliere said. “This is putting them on the path to good physical health.”

Valliere sees the Winter Lodge Project as a way to pass on Ojibwe heritage to a new generation of cultural leaders.

His fascination with the art and ingenuity of his ancestors has led to a lifelong passion to preserve and pass on the traditions of his people.

“I’ve made my life about keeping our traditional ways, and bringing back our traditional ways, so that they will be a part of our tribe’s life in coming generations.”

The planned dedication ceremony is free and open to the public.

Members of the public will be able to view and enter the heated winter lodge, meet its makers, and observe and participate in the dedication ceremonies that celebrate its opening.

A traditional feast will be served.

The project has been supported by the Wisconsin Humanities Council, the Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe Language Program, the ENVISION Program, the Lac du Flambeau Public School, Chicago YMCA Camp Nawakwa, UW-Madison’s Collaborative Center for Health Equity (CCHE), the Native American Center for Health Professions, the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies (CLFS), and the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures.

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