

New Collaboration Brings Gathering of Indigenous Arts, Culture and Tradition to FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre

4 April 2017 | St. Catharines - The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, working closely with Kakekalanicks Indigenous Arts & Consultancy and Indigenous community leaders from the Niagara region announce the first **Celebration of Nations / Célébration des nations (CN)** in downtown St. Catharines from 8–10 September 2017.

“We’re thrilled to partner with the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre,” said **Kakekalanicks president and CN Artistic Director Michele-Elise Burnett (Métis)**. “The great Métis leader Louis Riel once said, ‘My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.’ Through the **Celebrations of Nations** programming delivered at this new state-of-the-art venue, we’re doing our best to make that vision come true.”

This three-day Indigenous arts extravaganza will aim to provide a far-reaching platform for the community to embrace and honour the unique heritage, diverse cultures, and outstanding achievements of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples within Canada.

“We are very proud to host the Celebration of Nations in St. Catharines at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre. The Niagara region has a deep shared history with our First Nations and this year is an important opportunity to learn, share, and reflect, as we forge our shared future together,” **St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik**.

[Celebration of Nations](#) will showcase a wide variety of Indigenous arts and artists, ranging from traditional and contemporary music, dance and visual arts to film screenings, creative workshops, a distinguished speaker series, and hands-on activities for both children and adults. Headlining a series of performances will be the legendary **Buffy Sainte-Marie**, recipient of numerous accolades, honours, and awards including the recent Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2017 JUNOs.

This and more than 20+ other compelling events will be curated and juried by Artistic Director Michele-Elise Burnett and **Artistic Producer Tim Johnson (Mohawk)**, with support of the **Celebration of Nations** Advisory Council and Performing Arts Centre programming staff.

“Canada’s sesquicentenary and the findings and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission serve as context for our programming,” said Tim Johnson (former Associate Director at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian). “We endeavor to pull back the curtain, in some cases quite literally, to reveal and commemorate Indigenous contributions to Canada’s defense and formation as well as to display the continuity and scope of Indigenous influence upon Canadian society today.”

The PAC is proud to announce \$187,000 funding support from the Government of Canada's 150 Heritage Fund.

“The Government of Canada’s 150 Heritage Fund provides opportunities for communities to bring people together and inspire them. Celebration of Nations is a perfect example of that,” said **St. Catharines’ MP Chris Bittle**. “For many, information and knowledge are the first steps towards reconciliation and I want to thank the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre and everyone that will participate in the three-day festival for sharing their gifts with the community. I look forward to a wonderful Celebration of Nations in September.”

The PAC is also thrilled to confirm \$70,000 from the Province of Ontario.

“Events such as this play an important role in fostering understanding of the diverse cultures that exist within our country and it is wonderful that the Performing Arts Centre in downtown St. Catharines is able to host this Celebration of Nations.”- **Jim Bradley, MPP for St. Catharines**.

Celebration of Nations emerges as an opportunity for Niagara residents and visitors to actively participate in an inclusive and engaging community gathering that will foster a greater sense of belonging, support of meaningful reconciliation, and leave a lasting legacy of goodwill for future generations.

Programming and schedule will be released by the FirstOntario Performing Arts on June 2017.

[Please follow us on facebook for updates.](#) And visit us online here:

<https://firstontariopac.ca/Online/article/CelebrationOfNations>



Photo - BACK Left to right: Walter Sendzik (Mayor of St. Catharines), Jennifer Dockstader (Executive Director, Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre), James Bradley (MPP, St. Catharines), Carlos Garcia (St. Catharines City Council), Michele-Elise Burnett (Artistic Director, Celebration of Nations), Tim Johnson (Artistic Producer, Celebration of Nations), Brian Kon (Chair of the Niagara Regional Metis Council), Chris Bittle (MP, St. Catharines), Steve Solski (Executive Director, FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre), **FRONT left to right:** Annie Wilson (Programming Supervisor, PAC), Sara Palmieri (Programming and Marketing Manager, PAC), Jessica Carmichael (Artistic Director, Carousel Players). Photo by Lauren Garbutt.

Kakekalanicks' mission is to promote Indigenous art and artists to broad-based audiences and acts to educate the public about the deep-rooted beauty and uniqueness of each Nation's culture, heritage, and traditions through the medium of the Arts.

The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre aims to provide meaningful opportunities to bring our community together in a place of mutual understanding, empathy, and respect through the arts.

-30-

About the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre

The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre is a 95,000 square foot cultural complex comprised of four state-of-the-art performance venues that host a signature presentation of international and local performing artists. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects, the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre plays a vital role in the renaissance of downtown St. Catharines, serving as the catalyst in modernizing the area and reinforcing the brilliance of Niagara Region's diverse cultural cluster.

For additional information, please contact: CelebrationofNations@FirstOntarioPAC.ca or AWilson@stcatharines.ca



Canada

ONTARIO
150



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



St. Catharines



FirstOntario
PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE