

# Tribal Plant Gatherers Say Care and Tradition Play Important Role in Making Medicine

By Michael Ayala

Across Michigan and into Wisconsin and Canada, Peggy Hemenway of Little Traverse Bay and Laura Collins of Sault Ste. Marie roam to find the plants and materials for natural healing. Flowers as commonplace as dandelions as well as bee and wasp nests are gathered. The collected medicines are prepared by the two for use in the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Traditional Medicine Program at the new Tribal Health and Social Services Clinic in St. Ignace.

Once gathered and prepared, the plants are used by the healers to treat illnesses, both physical and emotional.

The gathering of natural items for medicine is an important part of the treatment process in tribal medicine. Medicine gathering and preparation is a skill passed only to a select few in the tribe, Mrs. Hemenway said, as a person's character and intentions must be evaluated first to see if they are suitable for the important work. A would-be practitioner's standing in the tribal community is also considered, along with how active he or she is in the tribe's ceremonies.

"It's not just a weekend thing," she said of participating in the ceremonies, "it's every day."

State of mind is an important element when gathering the plants, they said, as negative emotions can seep into the plants. Someone who is grieving, for example, is not allowed to collect plants for an entire year.

If a particular plant is found growing in abundance, Mrs. Hemenway said, it is taken as a



Laura Collins of Sault Ste. Marie (left) and Peggy Hemenway of Little Traverse Bay hold medicines used in the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians traditional medicine program Tuesday, August 24. Collecting plants for use in the program is a careful process, and harvesters take care to ensure negative emotions or pollution don't seep into the healing plants.

sign that the illnesses that plant can treat will occur often.

"Everything works together, sickness and medicine," she said.

Preparing medicines from herbs growing in the area is not a simple process, Mrs. Hemenway

said, and use of them varies, as each patient is different, as is the type and severity of their illness.

For this reason, knowledge of the healing properties of the plants and recipes for making the medicines are closely guarded.

Freely giving away the knowledge could have dangerous consequences, as the medicines could be misused and sicken people, Mrs. Collins said. Those trained in preparing and administering the medicines are also responsible for

carrying on the tribal history and traditions.

Mrs. Hemenway, who assists the tribe's traditional healers along with gathering and preparing the medicine, said she has always been interested in plants. She was trained in the techniques, with information passed on orally.

With five years experience, Mrs. Hemenway said she continues to learn more with each passing day.

"We believe everybody has a purpose and a gift, and I believe [traditional medicine] would be my purpose," she said.

Mrs. Collins has always enjoyed outdoor life, and had worked for a tribe in Minnesota before moving to Sault Ste. Marie. Since she wanted to help her fellow tribal members, Mrs. Collins said, she was selected to learn about the tribe's medical knowledge.

"We wanted to help people," Mrs. Hemenway said. "That was probably the most driving force, helping our people."

For the plant gatherers, harvesting medicinal plants is both a spiritual and technical process. Wild plants are taken based on the seasons. August tends to be the busiest season for them, as many plants are ready for collection, Mrs. Hemenway said.

Just enough plants are taken to treat patients, Mrs. Collins said,

and nothing is wasted. Since some plants only grow at certain times, patients may have to wait before

receiving a traditional medicine treatment.

"Plants don't wait. They only last a certain amount of time," Mrs. Hemenway said.

Some plants are rare and protected. Simple

dandelions or cedar tree foliage, prepared in different ways to treat illnesses, can be taken without issue, but other plants like the lady's slipper are protected and cannot be harvested. In cases like those, Mrs. Hemenway said, rare plants must be purchased for medicinal use.

They must take care when gathering plants in Canada, as dirt and some plants cannot be carried over the border, Mrs. Collins said. Some plants must be dried, prepared, and processed before they can be brought back.

Pollution is also a factor when gathering, Mrs. Hemenway said. Smog from vehicles will damage plants along roadsides, so they walk a distance from roadways to find usable herbs.

Those who have plants they would like to donate may contact the traditional healing program at (906) 632-5200. The program can also be contacted to remove wasp and bee nests that have not been sprayed, which will be used for medicinal purposes.

## Engaged English, Horn

Ken and Cynthia English of Rudyard and Jim and Colleen Horn of St. Ignace announce the engagement of their children, Sara English of Rudyard and Armand Horn III of St. Ignace.

Miss English is a 2007 graduate of Rudyard High School. She is presently attending Davenport University in Grand Rapids, where she is studying accounting.

Mr. Horn is a 1997 graduate of LaSalle High School and a 2008 graduate of Central Michigan University, where he earned a degree in accounting.

Miss English and Mr. Horn are both employed by Shepler's



Sara English  
and Armand Horn III

Mackinac Island Ferry in St. Ignace.

A wedding is planned September 25, 2010, at Rudyard Christian Reformed Church.

## Rudyard Alcoholics Anonymous Meets Mondays, Fridays

Friends of Bill W. Alcoholics Anonymous Group meets Mondays and Fridays, at 7:30 p.m. at St. James Lutheran Church in Rudyard. Mondays are closed meetings, while Fridays are open with a speaker every third Friday.

Al-Anon Meeting are every Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the Consolidated Community School Services (CCSS) building in Kincheloe.

## Great Lakes Boat Building School Hosts Beer-tasting Fundraiser

The Great Lakes Boat Building School in Cedarville is hosting a beer-tasting fundraiser Friday, September 3, as part of the school's increasing emphasis on fundraising. The event, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., will feature four, five-ounce beer tastings, bratwursts with chips, live music by North Country Band, guided tours of the school, and a souvenir glass with the boat school name and logo.

The boat school's fundraising committee would like to have a fundraiser each quarter, with an emphasis on events that can be fun and entertaining. This fundraiser fits that criteria, said committee member Michele Fiering, and also accents another important aspect of the boat school - its support of the state economy - by only selecting Michigan beers.

"We have a culture here that

enjoys beers and microbrews," she said. "We also wanted to support Michigan products, keeping in theme with our own Michigan-based service."

One beer each will be selected from Bell's Brewery in Kalamazoo, Keweenaw Brewing Company in Houghton, Founders Brewery in Grand Rapids, Arcadia Ales in Battle Creek, and the Frankenmuth Brewery in Frankenmuth.

Tickets are \$25 and will be available at the boat school, Cedar Pantry, the Pine Cone gift shop, the Islander bar, Hessel Grocery, Bumpas' Bar, or Cedarville Marine.

They may also be purchased from individual board members or at the door the day of the event.

Tuition only provides one-third of the operational costs, so grants, donations, and fundraising efforts are needed, organizers say. The school has participated in silent auctions at SnowsFest.

The event is already off to a good start, said the fundraising committee, as 250 of 400 tickets have been sold. Enrollment for the boat school is currently at 10 students, with the deadline to sign up for classes being the first day of school, September 20.

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