

Tanning camp keeps Canada's indigenous heritage alive

Smoked caribou and bison skins are strewn over old pine logs among the teepees at a tanning camp in Yellowknife, northern Canada, where indigenous youth are preserving their heritage by learning ancestral skills.

"Basically anywhere where there is an animal, you need to learn how to tan its hide for clothes or shelter, or things like that," says Mandee McDonald, the twenty-something co-founder of the Dene Nahjo community group. "Strong, resilient, indigenous." The three words printed on the front of her black t-shirt represent for the young woman pride in her community and its customs, which are under threat. "Our ancestors—even some of our grandmothers, and great grandmothers—knew this practice very well, but colonialism... really created a barrier to intergenerational knowledge acquisition," she explains.

Popularizing tanning among Dene youth helps to keep those traditions alive. Last summer, the tanning camp with its teepees, picnic tables and log frames to affix animal hides was set up on the shores of Frame Lake, a stone's throw from Yellowknife city hall and the Northwest Territories' legislative assembly. The Dene used to fish in the lake, but it has become contaminated by nearby gold mine tailings.

Pushing back against colonialism

For members of the Dene Nahjo, which was creat-

ed to advance social and environmental justice for northern peoples, foster indigenous leaders and lobby Ottawa on policy matters, the camp represents an act of defiance against colonialism. Several tattooed youths, some with silver face piercings and feather earrings, recall how family members had been forced to attend boarding schools hundreds of kilometers away, and were stripped of their language and customs in an effort to integrate them into society.

Each tanned skin, they say, helps to erase more than a century of abuses at the schools run by

Christian churches on behalf of the federal government. Outside a teepee, elders scrape hairs off a moose hide laid out on a big blue plastic tarp. Every stroke is methodical and timed. The hair will later be used to decorate baskets made of birch bark. In most

Dene Nahjo's aim is to share their cultural knowledge

North American indigenous cultures all parts of a hunted or trapped animal must be used.

For Tania Larsson, another co-founder of the group who has mixed Gwich'in and Swedish ancestry and grew up at the foot of the French Alps, prodding elders for advice can be intimidating. "You can't just walk up and say 'Hey, teach me your culture,'" explains the young artist.

"Tanning animal skins is not just about learning a skill, it's about connecting with your heritage, it's about going into the wilds, collecting wood and moss, everything you need provided by nature," she says.



People stand in a Dene Nahjo camp, open to the public, at Somba K'e Park, near Frame lake and a playground for kids at the urban hide tanning camp.

Working the hides alongside your elders and peers also helps to build relationships with them, she adds.

Share culture and knowledge

The Dene Nahjo's aim is to share their cultural knowledge with as many people as possible, not just aboriginals, but also school groups and jetliners full of Asian tourists who come for the Aurora Borealis. Yellowknife resident Jennifer Skelton is grateful for the instruction as her husband recently came back from a hunting trip with a moose, and she wasn't sure what to do with it. "I think it's great that they set up here and

provide an opportunity for anyone to learn how to work the hides," she said.

The small, tightknit Dene Nahjo group receives support from local aboriginal leaders, but according to Tania's sister Nina Larsson it's the dynamism of its young founders that drives members. "There's no hierarchy, we are all equal," she said. "Making decisions (by consensus) can take a bit longer, but we all grow together and have become closer," she says. — AFP



Tania Larsson, co founding member of Dene Nahjo and moosehide tanning instructor, ties a moose skin to a wooden pole in Yellowknife. — AFP photos



Meagan Wohlberg and Melaw Nakehk'o flesh a moose hide with moose leg bones at the urban hide tanning camp organized by Dene Nahjo.



Visitors and Dene Nahjo members scrap a moose hide at the urban hide tanning camp in Yellowknife.

Plus-size for men: Sites offer trendy looks for bigger guys

Chris Cyr doesn't like much about the big and tall clothes he finds in stores: They're "not very adventurous," he says, and the fit can be too baggy. And then there's the array of odd prints: "A lot of Hawaiian shirts with sailboats and golf balls tend to pop in."

But the startup comic from St. Louis says he is finding more fashionable threads for bigger guys online, as a crop of internet retailers are finally catering to the long-ignored group. The companies are making larger sizes of slim-cut jeans, bomber jackets and other trendy clothes that shoppers say are hard to find elsewhere. Bigger-sized models are used when designing the clothes, which the companies say helps make sure the proportions are right. Rather than just making a pair of jeans larger, for example, they also adjust the back pockets and other details.

Asos, the hip online clothing seller, launched a line for plus-sized men late last year. MVP Collections, founded a year ago, sells velour hoodies in sizes up to 6XL and motorcycle jeans that go up to a size 54. And The Winston Box, which calls itself a clothing subscription service "for guys with some junk in the trunk," sends up to four items a month to members. "There's a lot more options," says Cyr. He pays \$75 a month for The Winston Box, and says the 3XL shirts he receives fit better than what he finds elsewhere. He also recently bought a blazer from Asos that he wears to his startup shows.

Trendy clothes

Men have long had big-and-tall shops to turn to, but young shoppers say they don't find the trendy clothes they crave there. Kyle Gammon, a college fashion student who lives near Savannah, Georgia, says Asos has become his go-to after he discovered its plus-size line earlier this year. While fit can sometimes be a question for anyone buying online, Gammon has bought a couple of print shirts from the site. He likes the way they fit, giving him just enough room around his midsection without a lot of extra fabric in the arms. He's also a fan of the colors and styles the site offers.

"They have a really good variety," says Gammon, "which

I'm not used to getting." Former baseball player Mo Vaughn, who co-founded MVP Collections, says he could find T-shirts and suits in his size in stores, but nothing in between. Now his company sells items such as gray sport jackets and deconstructed jeans made with a bit of spandex for stretch. "Why can't we be fly like everybody else?" Vaughn says.

Daniel Franzese, an actor who starred in "Mean Girls," joined The Winston Box as creative director earlier this year after seeing an ad for the company on Facebook. He says stylists often had trouble finding clothes for him to wear for TV roles or for red carpet events. "Fashion forgets about the bigger male," Franzese says.

That's still generally true, even with the new options. Several market research firms said they didn't track or have estimates of the value of the men's big-and-tall clothing market. And startups say that to promote their brands, they go to conventions and events around the country aimed at curvy or plus-size women - because there aren't any for big men.



Comedian Chris Cyr stands in a green room as he waits to go on stage at Helium comedy club in Richmond Heights.



The Winston Box is a monthly subscription box that designs and makes its own clothes for big guys.

Rush for tickets as Springsteen hits Broadway

Eager to see her musical hero Bruce Springsteen in the intimate confines of a Broadway theater, Laura Effinger quickly registered online as a verified fan who would supposedly have dibs on seats. When tickets went on sale, the website told her she was on standby and to watch her phone for a code. And so she waited. The notification never came—but tickets were already being advertised on resale sites for thousands of dollars.

"This is such a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience that it's a very valuable ticket right now. I think it's unfortunate that people are taking advantage of that," said Effinger, who owns a photo studio in South Carolina. Effinger, who has seen "The Boss" three times before, said she would still fly to New York "in a heartbeat" with her mother if she were able to snag tickets.

Springsteen—one of rock's most legendary performers who for decades has packed arenas with marathon, fatigue-defying concerts—on Tuesday starts four months of shows at Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre which has just 960 seats. Tickets instantly became some of the most coveted in the United States. Hours before Tuesday's opening, seats on leading resale site StubHub were going for as high as \$6,000. Springsteen had been selling the tickets between \$75 and \$800. Ticket buyers have come from nearly every US state and 30 different countries, according to StubHub.

Trying to verify fans

Hoping to curb exorbitant resale prices, Springsteen joined leading seller Ticketmaster for its new "verified fan" program—which uses algorithms to determine if a person will likely go, and then sends a one-time code when tickets go on sale. Ticketmaster, part of concert giant Live Nation, said it had been successful and that fewer than three percent of Verified Fan tickets wound up on the secondary market.

But that doesn't mean there were enough for everyone who wanted to go. Springsteen needs to play more than 20 Broadway shows to reach the same number of fans he does in a night 15 blocks away at Madison Square Garden. And no one can stop fans, no matter how devoted to The Boss, from deciding they would rather earn thousands of dollars by selling their tickets.

Effinger, the photographer from South Carolina, said she was not angry with Springsteen—in contrast to some livid com-

ments seen in online Springsteen fan forums. "He is trying so desperately to get tickets into the hands of people who want to see him, like myself. Unfortunately, it's failing," she said. Springsteen already extended his Broadway run once and, reaching out to disappointed fans, started a last-minute lottery for \$75 tickets.



Bruce Springsteen performs during the closing ceremonies of the Invictus Games in Toronto. — AP

The 68-year-old "Born in the U.S.A." singer, whose songs speak of the struggles of working-class Americans, said he decided to go to Broadway after performing in January at the White House—a solemn concert that then president Barack Obama arranged as a gift to departing staff. Springsteen told The New York Times last week that he liked the greater intimacy. Unlike his high-octane shows with his E Street Band, Springsteen will perform alone with a piano and guitars. — AFP