

# Order of Manitoba to former Pine Creek and Ebb and Flow residents

By M. A. Nyquist  
Herald Staff

Barbara and Clarence Nepinak are two of 12 Manitobans, who will soon receive the province's highest honour, the Order of Manitoba.

While the couple lives in Winnipeg, Barbara is originally from Ebb and Flow and Clarence is originally from Pine Creek.

The Nepinaks are the first ever couple to be each honoured with the Order of Manitoba.

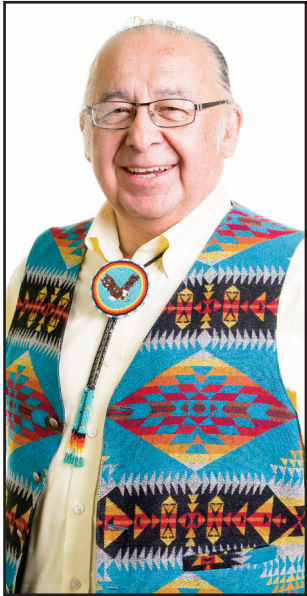
"Last year we were nominated, but we were nominated as a couple, so they notified us we couldn't be considered," Barbara explained.

"But then I guess our nominator went ahead and submitted individual ones this time. So this is the first time actually, that a couple has been nominated on two submissions."

The Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba's office describes Barbara as a prominent cultural awareness co-ordinator and a member of the Standing Indigenous Advisory Committee of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Fluent in her ancestral languages, she contributes to the process of language reclamation and retention through her work with the Manitoba Association of Native Languages. Barbara is a past member of the Special Advisory Council to the Winnipeg Police Chief.

Clarence is described as dedicated to promoting cultural awareness across Canada. He received the Knowledge Keepers Award for his work in preserving



Clarence and Barbara Nepinak

and advancing Indigenous culture.

Clarence has served on many boards and councils including the Vancouver-based Healthy Aboriginal Network, the Elders Advisory Council at the University of Winnipeg, the Indigenous Peoples' Education Circle at Brandon University and the Indigenous Advisory Council for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

The Nepinaks have made the preservation and promotion of their culture, their lives work.

"But I think it goes back to the way we were raised. Even though Clarence went to residential school, he still had a good foundation. And for me, I didn't go to residential school, so a lot of the way we live now reflects back to our teachings that we received in our homes as children," Barbara said.

"We started off with our family. I mean, as we parent our children, we're also role modelling and also doing



the teaching that was passed on to us by our families."

The couple began their journey in 1968, Clarence said, before they married in 1970.

"Doing community activities, having Christmas parties for those less fortunate. It's been a work of love for our community and our families. Families that we knew about that we did these things for," he said.

Barbara noted she and Clarence acted as middlemen, sharing what they had, making contacts for people, helping them find where they needed to go and translating for others.

"To help them try and get ahead and to be more independent," she added.

Clarence credited family

for teaching them by example.

The couple met in Winnipeg, while they were both going to college. Clarence went on to university later as an adult and Barbara entered college again.

"Because I realized at the age of 40 our children were getting independent and they didn't need us so much. So then I thought, well I've got to do more in my life, so I went to night school and on weekends I used to go to school. But you know that turned another page in my life of what was to come to be," she said.

Clarence spent 11 years in residential school, but feels he had an advantage, because he did not get there, until he was nine years old.

"The other thing that I had was that I spoke my language and I was being taught, because I was living at home with my parents and was very close to both sets of grandparents," he said.

"I had a very good strong beginning and so when I got to residential school, classmates of mine were really having a hard time, because they didn't have that, because they were taken from home when they were five or six years old."

As they were raising their four daughters, Barbara and Clarence used that model to teach the girls and ensure they had a strong

understanding of their traditions and protocols.

The Nepinaks are firmly rooted to The Forks in Winnipeg and have been sharing their culture through the bannock on a stick program for about 20 years.

"People don't realize that when we started that program, that bannock on a stick, it was to promote the indigenous community in Winnipeg," Barbara explained.

Clarence laughs as he recalls when he first heard his wife suggesting the program in 1999.

"And I said what?! And we've been doing that for 20 years now. It's been really good. We've had visitors from all over the world basically," he said.

"But I think the rewarding part is when we see children that are all grown up now, they're all adults now and they have their own children. So they're bringing their kids," Barbara added, joking the couple should have negotiated a pension plan two decades ago.

Clarence also does an oral history walking tour at The Forks, sharing the migration story and about Indigenous people at the Forks.

It is significant to have an Indigenous presence at the Forks, Barbara said.

"After all, we are the first citizens and also we need to be able to share those teach-

ings," she said.

With discussions of reconciliation, the Nepinaks are often called on, as elders, to advise on the proper protocols and to do prayers.

Clarence admitted he and Barbara refused to be called elders, until the Aboriginal Circle of Educators bestowed the honour on them.

"And we're so proud that we were able to accept that honour of being called elders. But you know the name elder doesn't come from our people, it's from the settlers that use that word. But we don't have a word that would replace that. There's other phrases that we use for the role that has been bestowed on us by our community, like wisdom keepers, or traditional knowledge people," he added.

The couple has taught their language to children in care, are working on a diabetes program, a climate change project and mentoring young people.

"We are just a little part of that, I always say, because when they need us to come and do something or whether it is to deal with a situation, we're there for them, because it's not just for us, it's for the benefit of our future of our young people," Barbara said.

The investiture ceremony will be held at 4 p.m., July 18 in Room 200 in the Manitoba Legislative Building.

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Thank you to the volunteers that have helped make the event possible on the day of the run including the color throwers, patrol guards, announcer, and those that helped set up the course.

And thank you to the organizers of this year's event including Danielle Ledoux and Janie Inkster, with the help of the Skate Dauphin board - Becky Smith and Danielle Schwitzer.

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