

## Aboriginal filmmaker offers environmental awareness

By Andrea Raymond

**D**anny Beaton is a Six Nations Mohawk Indian from the Turtle Clan who has been raising the awareness about indigenous people and Mother Earth, both through his photography and films that document the thoughts and traditions of Native Elders. He started traveling with the elders about 14 years ago, producing important documentary films.

"I have learned a lot from the Elders, and I know that people today, in this city and in cities in general, are very lost. I want to bring them the truth, wisdom and beauty of the elders. If society wants to solve its problems, it should look to the Native culture. It's a healthy culture of purifying and strengthening yourself by taking care of and protecting Mother Earth," says Beaton.

I recently viewed two of Beaton's films, *Mohawk Wisdom Keepers* and *The Iroquois Speak Out for Mother Earth*. They document the beliefs and spiritual traditions



(From left) J. Clause, Danny Beaton, Robertjohn Knapp, brothers Carm & Paul Bordonaro, owners of Bloor Cinema, at screening of Beaton's film. Photos: Shirley Gibson

of several Elders, as well as the need to respect the earth. In *The Iroquois Speak Out for Mother Earth*, four native Elders share their concerns for the environment. The effect is simple and powerful. Shot in colour, each Elder, seated alone with a backdrop of lush greenery, talks about the devastation that has occurred in the natural world since the imposition of Western culture on native lands. The Elders raise concerns about industry, values, and the lack of brave and intelligent leadership in the face of an environmental crisis.

"The earth is in a crisis. The Elders have been speaking out about the beauty of Mother Earth for a long time – everything we need to survive is right here. We have to understand that the earth takes care of us, and we need to take care of it," says Beaton.

Through his films, Beaton wants to share the teachings of the Elders, in hopes of protecting and respecting Mother Earth. We are living in a society where the pollution of air and water is an everyday occurrence, where smog alerts happen more days of the summer than not. Beaton believes that if people become connected with the earth, they will realize how important the earth is – that all living creatures are sacred. "I'm trying to honour the earth by doing this. I'm trying to show the earth that I care and I'm trying to show Native peoples that they have a



On location at Lehman Gibson's organic farm, Six Nations.

beautiful way of life – that we need to keep it alive".

"I am trying to educate people, to show them that the earth is sacred," says Beaton.

Beaton is working on his fifth film, *Second Thanksgiving* and will be traveling to Montana this summer to take part in traditional ceremonies, all the while getting the message out.

An activist, Beaton is doing all that he can to protect the earth, to raise awareness and to share the teachings of his Elders. He hopes to reach as many people as possible through his films, photos and writing. He feels that we can all have an impact, by speaking out and writing our Member of Parliament.

Beaton's films are available at Toronto Public Libraries or by calling (416) 921-0014.

## Flowing water



*H2onour Earth* is an environmental arts organization, comprised of leaders in arts, education and Native communities who are giving young people the opportunity to express themselves as creative caretakers of their planet. On June 3, *H2onour Earth* and 200 children came together to create the first *Flowing Waters Ceremony* (above) and open the Peel Children's Water Festival at Heart Lake Conservation Area in Brampton. Throughout the week, more than 5,000 Peel children brought water to add to the crystal vessel and create artwork for the project's *Arc of Dreams*.

Photo courtesy H2onour Earth.



Maggie Bassett Award winner  
Jeff Burke.

## Theatre award recipient inspires community

**E**ach year Theatre Ontario celebrates the achievements of Ontario-based theatre artists who have made a sustained and significant contribution to the development of

theatre in the Province of Ontario.

The recipient of this year's Maggie Bassett Award, Jeff Burke of Toronto is one of those artists. Jeff is the kind of person who is not just committed to involvement in community theatre for his own personal satisfaction, but who is dedicated to fostering excellence, nurturing the talent and self-expression of others, particularly young actors and those new to the stage and the maintenance of supportive links among the members of the community theatre world. He is a member of Theatre Aurora and Amicus Productions and was a member of Theatre Next Door for a number of years.

Jeff Burke has been the heart and soul of the Board of Directors of the Association of Community Theatres - Central Ontario for fourteen years. He has served as Festival Chair, Gala Chair, Vice-President (twice), Theatre Ontario representative, President (twice) and Past President (twice). No other board member in ACTCO's history has served as long or in such a breadth of functions. Jeff is dedicated to the maintenance of ACT-

CO as a key organization in support of and service to the forty or more member companies from across the central region of the province.

In addition, Jeff has continued to act, produce, stage manage and direct many of Theatre Aurora's finest productions over the past fifteen years as well as working with other groups. For eleven years, Jeff has been the driving force behind Theatre Aurora's Young Company. In this capacity, he has not merely been a director of shows but an educator, a friend and an inspiration to literally hundreds of young people. He leads this young company through exercises, games, explorations and rehearsals that have built self-confidence, discipline and motivation. For many of these children, Jeff has had an impact on their success in school, their chosen careers and their futures. He has promoted diversity in casting as he based decisions on talent and potential rather than preconceptions. All of this work with young people is done on a strictly volunteer basis for which he does not receive remuneration. Jeff has also volunteered his services as an adjudicator a number of times to other companies seeking guidance and feedback and has been particularly commended for his insight, support and tact.

The award entitled "Courage" was presented by Jane Gardner, Executive Director of Theatre Ontario

along with a generous donation of a gift certificate in the amount of \$100.00 from TheatreBOOKS. Both presentations were made at the ACTCO Annual General Meeting on June 10th, 2002.

The Maggie Bassett Award is presented in honour of the late Maggie Bassett who, as Theatre Ontario's first employee, pioneered dynamic programs that continue to benefit the entire province. Past recipients of this prestigious award include: Patricia Beharriell, Sandy Black, Jack Blacklock, Wayne Fairhead, Richard Howard, Jack Medhurst, Heather McCallum, Kay McKie, Beth McMaster, Dusty Miller, Wilf Pegg, Virginia Reh, Jean Roberts, Lib Spry, Dennis Sweeting, Elsie Thomson, Sandra Tulloch, Herman Voaden, Ken Watts, and Herbert Whittaker.

For more information about Theatre Ontario call 416-408-4556 or visit their website at [www.theatreontario.org](http://www.theatreontario.org)