

NIAGARA

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Earth in crisis, native activist says

People have lost sight of fact that we are part of the Earth and must honour it

BY DOUG DRAPER
THIS WEEK

"It is no mystery that the Earth is in crisis," a Native activist and environmentalists told an audience of aboriginal and earth sciences students during a guest appearance at Brock University earlier this month.

Danny Beaton, a representative of the Mohawk Nation and a producer of a number of nationally televised films on the environment, told students the Earth's air, water and other life-giving resources are facing destruction today because people have lost sight of something he was taught by his Native elders — that "we are part of the Earth (and) have a responsibility to honour its life-giving forces."

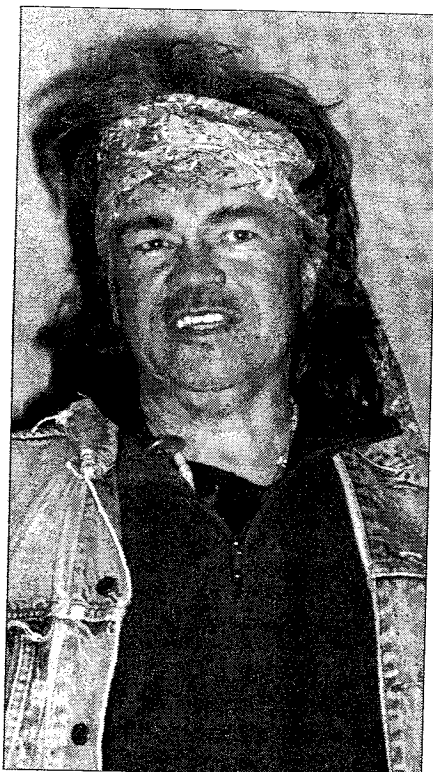
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Beaton is based in Toronto and last year joined the Niagara-based citizens group, Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, in pleading to Niagara's regional government to preserve what is left of a forested area on land slated for residential development in Niagara Falls. His message to Niagara Regional council then was similar to the one he gave to students this month at Brock University.

"How can we not be hurt when our



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Native activist Danny Beaton spoke to students at Brock University recently.

air is being destroyed, when our water is being destroyed, when our fish are being destroyed and when our animals are being destroyed, because these are our protectors," he said. "We belong to the Earth. We are not separate from the Earth. The Earth is our mother."

Beaton's theme was echoed in a film, *The Iroquois Speak Out for Mother Earth*, which he produced and played for the students. In the film, four Native elders from the Western New York area stress that future generations of people are in peril if more isn't done now to protect resources for them.

"Water is life, and if we do not take care and clean up the water, there can be no life on this earth," said one Native elder woman named Audrey Shenandoah. Another elder, Oren Lyons, added that "it is four our grandchildren that we are protecting the Earth, so that they can have a good life.... If we want to survive, it is pretty well up to us. We need to restore balance.... We need leaders of vision who are selfless."

Still another Native elder, John Mohawk, noted that our modern western culture gives a false impression that technology can solve all problems. If we poison this planet, there is this notion that we can simply move on to another planet and start over.

"But we are not going to get two billion people on the Starship Enterprise," he said, adding that for real solutions to our environmental problems, we have "to look to cultures that adapt to nature rather than ones that force their will on nature...."

"Nature represents an awesome power (and) there is nothing we can do in the face of it," Mohawk said. "We are its subjects."