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ARTS & LEISURE

It's common sense

Film explores our relationship with the earth

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With mining and oil and gas development speeding up, Danny Beaton's work couldn't be timelier.

Beaton's goal is to get the traditional wisdom of the elders out to as many people as possible.

With a simple, spare approach, Beaton filmed four Iroquois elders speaking. They were gathered at the Six Nations Reservation in Ontario. Born and raised in Ottawa, Beaton has also worked with Cree, Innu, Apache, Seminole and Ojibwe peoples to help preserve their cultures and home lands.

"I became a native activist about 14 years ago and at about the same time I thought

the best way to reach people would be to film the elders, getting it onto television," says the Mohawk filmmaker.

"I wanted to reach a lot of people and share the concern of our spiritual leaders."

The motivation for all four of his films — The Iroquois Speak Out For Mother Earth is the latest — is to educate society about the sacredness of Mother Earth and the need for people to return to spiritual values.

The most eloquent speaker, John Mohawk, is a professor at the University of Buffalo in New York. He maintains that Western culture has imposed its will on nature, beginning with the discovery of fossil fuels in the earth.

He says it's ridiculous that we take what belongs in the

earth and burn it into the air.

"It's common knowledge. If you poison the air, you have to breathe it. If you pollute the water, you have to drink that water. It's all simple," says Beaton.

In the film, Mohawk suggests that Western cultures must look to other culture for clues about how to change our approach in dealing with this planet.

"Natives have a good way of articulating their relationship to the earth and have good ways of articulating how to behave on Mother Earth. Native culture is a culture that recognizes that everything on Mother Earth has a spirit and we're connected to everything," says Beaton.

Referring to the North, Beaton notes the development

taking place.

"People think that they need highways. People think that they need mines. In actuality, people in the North have a natural supermarket. They have a natural food supply. They have a natural water supply, fresh air."

Beaton says Northerners have been "brainwashed and fooled."

"Why do people need so many diamonds," he asks.

"The elders don't want to see everything developed. They don't want to see everything destroyed. Why do we have to destroy everything for things we already have enough of?"

The hour-long film premieres on Vision TV Saturday, March 30 at 9 p.m. eastern standard time.



photo courtesy of Danny Beaton

Mohawk filmmaker Danny Beaton (right), whose documentary The Iroquois Speak out For Mother Earth will premiere on Vision TV in March, stands with Mohawk spiritual leader Tom Porter (left).