



Tribes walk around Lake Michigan in effort to save lakes

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Press Photo | Mark Copier One step at a time: From left, Lorraine "Punkin" Shananaquet, Linda Cypret-Kilbourne, Josh Metansinine and Carly Shananaquet walk north of Holland. They carry a copper water vessel and an eagle staff on their walk around Lake Michigan to raise awareness of water pollution.

HOLLAND TOWNSHIP -- A curious woman stopped to inspect what had just happened to her tree near the corner of Rose Park and Butternut drives.

"We tobaccoed it," said Lorraine "Punkin" Shananaquet, a Gun Lake Tribe member and Hopkins resident.

Shananaquet, her daughter Carly and son Paul were among about 15 people Tuesday taking part in the Mother Earth Water Walk.

The contingent went from Grand Haven to Holland for an overnight stop, and were headed south today as part of a 17-day, nearly 600-mile trek around most of Lake Michigan.

The walk, which started Saturday in Manistee, goes through Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin en route to Hannahville near Escanaba in the Upper Peninsula. The sixth-annual effort seeks to raise awareness about protecting water.

The walkers are allied with the Anishinabe, the traditional alliance of the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibwe Indian nations. The Gun Lake Tribe's formal name is the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians of Michigan.

Josephine Mandamin, an Ojibwe, is the walk's chief grandmother and leader, although she says she's just "a part of it."

"The theme of this walk is that water is not for sale," said the 66-year-old from Thunder Bay, Ontario. Selling off water "is like prostituting our mother, the earth."

Mandamin was among a group of six grandmothers starting the hikes five years ago. The first walk was around Lake Superior, and the second around Lake Michigan. Lake Huron was 2005's site, Lake Ontario in 2006 and Lake Erie last year.

The walks, which include volunteers in support vehicles, are led by women. According to American Indian tradition, water represents women while fire represents men.

"But males can join, too," Shananaquet said.

Josh Metansinine, a 17-year-old from Thunder Bay, took a turn carrying an eagle staff Tuesday afternoon for "guidance and protection on the walk," he said.

The most sacred item ported for the walk is a water-filled copper vessel, which Shananaquet says represents female teachings.

As the walkers encounter lakes or streams along the way, they pray to the waters, bless them and offer tobacco.

The tobacco also is used, as the unsuspecting Holland Township woman was politely told, to mark the group's stopping and starting points.

"We weren't upset or anything," the woman said. "We were just curious."

That's what the walkers are hoping for.