

# Lessons from Standing Rock

Local residents talk about their actions, efforts to protest of DAPL construction

**By Kim Dedam,**  
THE SUN Community News & Printing

April 6, 2017



*Dan Plumley, a founding member of Adirondack Wild, traveled to Standing Rock in December and was there when the Army Corps of Engineers first denied easement to build the Dakota Access Pipeline. In this photo, he is standing at Flag Row near some of the 170-plus First Nations flags. Photo provided by Dan Plumley*

KEENE - A Vietnam War veteran, a local herbalist and business owner, and a longtime Adirondack environmentalist all returned recently from wintry, wind-blown plains at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota.

Each had a unique experience in protesting against construction of Dakota Access Pipeline. And each said they learned something sacrosanct about the way people connect to each other and the natural world.



*A large crowd gathered to hear Lessons from Standing Rock at Keene Valley Congregational Church last week and learn what several local residents experienced and brought home from the protest. Photo by Kim Dedam*

The narrative in Lessons from Standing Rock drew over 60 people to the Keene Valley Congregational Church, and was welcomed by the church's Pastor John Sampson last Thursday.

We are going to talk about a sacred response to power and greed with nonviolence and resistance, he said of the peaceful discussion that lasted over two hours.

The pastor's invitation was accepted with a prayer of thanks from Haudenosaunee elder Alan Brant (Anataras) of the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory near the Bay of Quinte in Ontario.

Brant spoke in the ancient language of his people about the cycle of life, how all life fits together, in parts, as one and for all living things.

Native people see an untenable risk for oil spill as out-of-balance with any economic gain. The Missouri River at Standing Rock is a source of drinking water for the Indian reservation there and millions more downriver.

Keene resident Dan Plumley, (one of the founders of Adirondack Wild), was at Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires) Camp in December when Army Corps of Engineers denied an easement to run the pipe across contested treaty land and under the Missouri River.

The Corps in December found engineers had not completed proper environmental review.

That decision has since been overruled by an order from the new U.S. president. And federal and local law enforcement officials forced the frozen camp to close and move at the end of February.

"Even though the site is cleared now of hundreds lodges, tipis, tents and Flag Row with colors flying from over 150 indigenous nations, the Oceti Sakowin fire was lit," Plumley said.

"The stand Mni Wiconi, which means water is life, in Lakota sparked global awareness of threats oil extraction and transport make to communities, natural water systems, aquifers, farm fields and drinking water," he said.

"This is a long fight, it's been going on for 500 years," Plumley said, scrolling through dozens of photographs he took at Standing Rock.

Pausing at an image of water cannons blasting peaceful protesters one very cold winter day, Plumley stopped talking.

"It was a painful memory," he said, once his voice cleared, "of violence brought against a peaceful nation and thousands of people who stood to support them."

Plumley explained how he trained as a volunteer water protector, learning to remain calm and resist the armed threats of oncoming sheriff deputies, oil company guards and regional police.

"We learned the world view of the Lakota, how to remain prayerful and peaceful."

"Along Lake Champlain," he said, "we have a pipeline on wheels which is every bit as dangerous (as DAPL)."

With the pipeline approved, protest refocused on efforts to defund pipeline infrastructure.



*Nicky Frechette*

International and national divestment has since removed billions of dollars from banks that fund DAPL, explained Nicky Frechette, who protested locally.

A founding member of Mothers Out Front, Frechette was arrested last November for sitting inside a TD Bank in Plattsburgh. The bank is connected to TD Securities which holds loans on the Dakota pipeline.

"We've been lied to and the truth is starting to come out in this world," she said of corporate industry and investors that she says threaten environmental conditions with their loan policy.

"Arrest and quiet protest raise awareness," she said of her actions, warning that continued exploitation of natural resources for profit is seen as "normal."

"I think we need to change that normal."

Katie Wilson, an herbalist and Keene shop owner, was arrested with Frechette in Plattsburgh.



*Photo by Dan Plumley*

And a month later traveled to Standing Rock with blankets, teas, herbal medical supplies and other remedies collected by donation.

Wilson also fought tears in describing the sense of sacred she brought back from Oceti Sakowin.

She described a conversation at an early sunrise fire that reviewed how important diversity is to life.

“We’re all indigenous to this Earth,” Wilson said.

Her lesson from Standing Rock is about unity.

What comes next, Wilson said, is divestment. Millions of personal accounts have been moved from banks that support DAPL totaling to date \$77 million.

Municipal, national and international divestment has moved billions more away from pipeline investors. Seattle, Washington’s voted to take \$3 billion out of Wells Fargo.

And last week, the Dutch bank ING sold its \$2.5 billion loan to DAPL.

In a statement announcing their decision, ING said, "Being a lender to the project, we first tried to engage and use any influence we may have to encourage a satisfactory outcome for all parties involved."

"However, there was even less room for lenders to positively influence the project after construction had been resumed by the client once the permits had been granted."

On a much smaller scale, Wilson said moving personal funds is a way to utilize lessons from Standing Rock.

"And yeah, it's a huge pain in the butt to do that, but it works," she said.



*Tom Smith*

A U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War, Tom Smith, also from Keene, joined the Veterans' Stand for Standing Rock in December. He said it was organized to provide a human shield for water keepers.

Smith described how more than a thousand veterans from every war dating back to World War II shared common concern for the protest and the protesters.

"I was getting this feeling we could turn this thing around," he said of the camaraderie and focus of former military personnel that brought a warrior's sense of mission to the camp.

But, Smith warned, any outward military reaction could also have sparked conflict with various law enforcement officers surrounding the camp, who he found poorly trained and detached.

"They just don't have the experience or enough control their emotions or their weapons," Smith said of what he saw in patrols guarding the oil company's claim.

"What is really important now is the million people marches. Stand up as one and say 'stop it'," Smith advised.

Wilson said she also learned how her choices and actions do matter.

"Certain truths are self-evident and they are the unifying principles."

Many at the discussion in Keene plan to attend protests in the Science March on Earth Day, April 22, and at the Climate March in Washington, D.C. on April 29.

Local events are planned on both days.