A journey ends, and begins

Lenape Rising Nation River Journey contingent arrives by canoe and kayak this weekend in Cape May, wet but jubilant

By LAUREN BEAL
Cape May Star and Wave

It should have been one of the easiest parts of the trip — one last mile from Highbee Beach to Sunset Beach.

After all, the Rising Nation River Journey travelers had already kayaked and canoed nearly 330 miles down the Delaware River from Hancock, N.Y.

Yet for the crowd who turned out on Sunday afternoon to welcome the Lenape American Indian tribe members and supporters to Cape May, the mood was both excited and anxious.

As the wind whipped umbrellas in the air and the rain poured down, poncho-clad spectators huddled under cover and looked doubtfully at the choppy water.

"This place gets more of the wind," said Clara Hanlan, talking about the open water.

Clara and her husband John drove from Seaville to see the Native Americans land, waiting in the rain for nearly two hours.

The weather was forgotten, though, at the first sight of a canoe in the distance.

Nearly 100 people were on the beach to greet Chiefs Mark Gould and Bart Cartwright, as they paddled their canoe onto shore.

Nine other canoes and kayaks soon followed, each one received with whoops and cheers of celebration as they landed Delaware River Greenway Partnership president Richard McNier, head of the environmental organization that partnered with the Lenape, paddled in the final canoe.

Cape May residents Janet Fox and her mother, Thelma MacNier, were some of the first to shake the travelers' hands.

"We were already wet!" Fox said. "I told (MacNier), I'm going. We decided to come down to welcome our native people."

MacNier smiled as she pointed out the chiefs she had met.

"I got a big hug and kiss!"

The arrival at Sunset Beach marked the end of the Rising Nation River Journey, a 330-mile trip that started Aug. 4 in Hancock, N.Y. Lenape tribe members and their supporters stopped in Philadelphia to sign a renewed treaty of brotherhood between the Lenape and local public and private organizations.

This treaty — as well as completion of the river trip — was recognized Sunday in a congressional commendation from Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew, read aloud at Sunset Beach.

Though the weather prevented the travelers from celebrating with the planned tribal ceremony, they were still able to spread information about their culture — one of the main goals of the river trip.

As well-wishers hugged Little Bear — a shaman — and shook his hand, he answered their questions about his ceremonial dress and his experiences on the river.

"It wasn't just a water trip, it was a trip through time ... a trip through a spiritual growth," he said.

Little Bear remarked on the quality of the river water —

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Left, Bart Cartwright, a Lenape Native American and direct descendent of Chief Tamamend who signed the original treaty on behalf of the Lenape people with William Penn, accepts an NJ Assembly citation from Dr. Richard Fellowes of Lower Township, on behalf of Assemblyman Jeff Van Drew. The citation was given to the Lenape people Sunday along with one to the Delaware Greenway, to commemorate the end in Cape May of a 330-mile journey by canoe and kayak down the Delaware River by members of the Lenape Nation and their supporters.
Journey

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bigger than it was remembered it from previous trips.

"The river was beautiful, it was simply
all the way down," he said.

Another goal of the river trip
was to highlight the need to pre-
servate the Delaware River.

The Lenape also wanted to
make awareness of their tribe.

The Lenape are the original
 inhabitants of Delaware, New Jer-
sy, eastern Pennsylvania and

In Cape May, it was evident
awareness was being raised —
from the crowd of well-wishers
on Beach, to the generous
support of local residents and
businesses.

The travelers actually landed
in Cape May on Saturday night,
hours earlier than planned. They
and many supporters spent the
night on the beach of Leonard
and Nena Sucho. Cape May residents who volunteered to host the travelers when they first
arrived from their river trip.

On the last day of their
trip, the travelers gathered
at Leonard's beach and were

Local Native American also
showed up to greet the travelers
and gave them food. They could
up a local resident who is
Cape May's business coordinator
with the Lenape Nation.

The fishing trip came to a
successful end.

After hearing the weather
and completing the final leg of their
journey, the Lenape tribe mem-
bers and supporters returned to
their homes, some for warm
soup and others for celebration.

The long journey is finished,
these hundreds said it was a
long and fulfilling experience for
its participants.

For pictures and more
information about the Rising
Nation River Journey, go online at
www.lenapeculture.org.

Shown here, clockwise from upper left: Rising River Nation Journey campers arrive onto Sunset Beach in the Cape May area Sunday after their six-day trip down the Delaware River. From left: Mike O'Connor, Leonard Sucho, Nena Sucho, paintings, and Brian Czerniak. Cape May reporters. For information on the event, contact Gregg Wilcoxen of the Cape May County Tourism Development Commission at (609) 398-8787. Photos courtesy of Leonard Sucho.