Groups pledge faith to Lenape

Brotherhood Treaty is signed to promote natives' culture.

By Christine Schiavo
Of The Morning Call

In good faith and good feelings, amid beating drums and burning sage, Lenape Indians and Delaware River stewards renewed a 300-year-old commitment to friendship Saturday on the historic spot where William Penn and Chief Tamemond made the original promise.

About two dozen people signed a Treaty of Renewed Brotherhood under an elm tree at Pennsbury Manor, Penn's Bucks County estate in Falls Township, promoting to maintain and promote the Lenape culture.

"We're in a new life with the Lenape people," said Richard McNutt, president of the Delaware River Greenway Partnership, an umbrella organization of more than 100 environmental groups. "We're going to go long and we're going to go far. Wanashi (thank you). Wanashi to everyone here."

The signing occurred three weeks after a group of river stewards started a monthlong canoe journey down the Delaware in Rancocas, N.J., that will end next Sunday in Cape May, N.J. Their history tied to the river, the Lenape (also known as the Delaware Indians) have teamed with environmental groups, churches, historical societies and others.

John Cilmi of Unity Church of Susses County, N.J., signs the Treaty of Renewed Brotherhood with the Lenape Nation Saturday.

In taking up the pen, Poste said, "Today, with a little skepticism, I hope that this treaty never gets broken."

The Lenape have a right to be cautious. Many would say they were robbed in the so-called Walking Purchase of 1737, where the tribe lost nearly 1,500 square miles through the scheming of Penn's son, Thomas. The loss occurred when the Lenape reluctantly agreed to abide by the terms of a suspiciously written treaty that had Penn acquiring all the land that could be covered in a day and a half's walk.

Penn hired runners to cover the territory, surprising the Indians, who had expected them to walk and stop for meals. The runners snatched much of Pike, Carbon, Montour, Northampton and Bucks counties for Penn.

The event strained relations between whites and Indians and splintered the Lenape tribe.

Putting the past behind them, those who renewed the Brotherhood Treaty spoke of new era of good feelings between Lenape and non-Lenape. McNutt vowed, "I'll honor this treaty until I must stop beating."