

news



Kirsten Tomlinson, Tara Audibert and Phyllis Grant stand next to a poster advertising their app Nitap: Legends of the First Nations Friday at the Vogue Theatre.

Photo: Justin Samanski-Langille/Miramichi Leader

Art collective launches second edition of Indigenous storytelling app

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Justin Samanski-Langille | Miramichi Leader

A year after launching Nitap: Legends of the First Nations, the Ni'Gweg Art Collective celebrated the launch of the mobile app's second edition Friday night with an evening filled with gifts, cake and animation screenings at the Vogue Theatre.

The team, led by Wolastoqey animator Tara Audibert, Mi'kmaq animator Phyllis Grant and game designer Kirsten Tomlinson, presented four new animated stories which are being added to app's open-world gameplay in a July 1 update.

The four stories are told by Audibert and Grant's relatives in both English and their original languages and then paired with animated visuals matched to the oral story telling.

The app, which launched last year and is available world-wide on both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store, was created by the trio, with the help of plenty of friends and family, as a means of preserving and spreading First Nations stories and legends.

For both Audibert and Grant, using an app to increase access to their history has been an exciting experience unmatched by any other medium.

"It's really cool to be Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey and to be able to share our stories the way we want to tell them," said Grant.

"It's exactly the way we want to do it, there is no one telling us how to do it ... nothing is altered, everything is as it would be if you were sitting with the elders and listening to them. I find it's more genuine because of this."

Following the screening of the newly added stories Friday, the group showed some of the behind-the-scenes work put into composing the app's original music and held a short meet-and-greet with the story tellers themselves.

In the year the app has been live, Audibert said it has seen wide success, with several schools and organizations reaching out to the team to talk about how to use the app in their respective environments.

"People have loved it from what I have heard. There has been a real need for cultural content and I think this is really filling that need," said Audibert.

With dialogues around important First Nations issues such as reconciliation and missing and murdered indigenous women beginning to gain traction, Audibert said the role the app plays is only becoming more important.

"Here we are surrounded by six different reserves and there is a bit of a divide with that. We want to bring them close together and show them that it is not just about residential schools or missing and murdered women, there is also this story telling aspect that we grew up with and love. That's the biggest part of our culture we want to share."

Grant said the act of creating the app and telling the stories of both their own communities and First Nations across the country through a medium which they have total control over contributes to the healing process.

"The expression of art is how we heal, that's how I heal. It's all interconnected," said Grant.

"I am very interested in art as therapy to be able to create and share and have people be excited about it is a great feeling."

While the group celebrated the addition of four more stories Friday, it is far from finished in their eyes.

Four more stories are already in the works for a launch in the next year and work is starting on gathering stories and music from First Nations across the country.

Eventually, the plan is for the app to enable anyone to record and share their own stories and legends and share them with other users as a quasi-social network.

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