

Bringing Baskets Home: The Overwhelming Success of the Mi'kmaw Basket Auction



Malglit Pelletier (We'koqma'q First Nation) (left) and Della Maguire (Glooscap First Nation) (right) stopped by Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre to present a cheque to Tim Bernard, Executive Director of MDCC, in support of its ongoing work.

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The Mi'kmaw Basket Auction, held online in November of last year and led by Della Maguire (Glooscap First Nation) and Malglit Pelletier (We'koqma'q First Nation), united communities across Mi'kma'kik in a remarkable effort to support Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (MDCC). Featuring a diverse collection of baskets donated by artisans, families, and community members, the auction raised \$30,446.63—far surpassing its \$5,000 goal. This powerful event not only highlighted the artistry and significance of Mi'kmaw basketry but also shared heartfelt stories that connected participants to their culture and history.

From intricately woven quill baskets to pieces with personal histories, each item carried deep cultural significance and connected participants to Mi'kmaw traditions. The event encouraged bidding wars that were as much about honouring the artistry and legacy of the baskets as

they were about supporting MDCC. By the end, the auction not only surpassed its financial goal but also brought to light remarkable stories of connection, generosity, and shared purpose.

An Idea Born from Connection

"It came through a conversation in a traffic jam," says Della Maguire, reflecting on the auction's origin during a trip to Washington, D.C., where she and Malglit Pelletier were working as basketmaking practitioners to help prepare Mi'kmaw belongings at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) for their eventual return home to Mi'kma'kik. "We were talking about Malglit's baskets for Salites, and someone said, 'We could do a Mi'kmaw basket auction,' and that's how it took off."

The inspiration came from their time at NMAI, surrounded by a collection of Mi'kmaw baskets.

"When we visited the NMAI and saw all these beautiful baskets that belong to us, it was overwhelming," Malglit adds. "That's when we started talking about finding a way to bring our baskets

back home."

A Testament to Mi'kmaw Generosity

The auction's success was deeply rooted in the support of the Mi'kmaw community.

"The generosity and spirit of the Mi'kmaw community really shone through," says Della's daughter, Stacey Maguire (Glooscap First Nation). "People were so willing to help, whether it was donating, bidding, or offering support in other ways. It speaks volumes about who we are as people."

Families across Mi'kma'kik opened their doors to Malglit as she collected donations.

"The support was unreal," she says. "People welcomed me with tea, gave baskets without hesitation, and were just so excited to help."

Baskets as a Cultural Touchstone

At its core, the auction was about more than fundraising—it was a celebration of Mi'kmaw culture and values.

"Baskets are a reflection of Mi'kmaw values," says Della. "Every piece has a teaching, a story, and a connection to our culture."

For many, the idea of

bringing these cultural belongings back to Mi'kma'kik struck a deep emotional chord. As Malglit notes, "Baskets hold so much meaning. When we bring these baskets home, people might even recognize ones made by their relatives. That connection to our past is so powerful."

The auction also resonated with people outside of the Mi'kmaw community who appreciate the artistry and cultural significance of these pieces. Margaret Fraser, a family doctor in Sydney, Cape Breton, and Mi'kmaw basket enthusiast, was one of the auction's most active bidders.

"I thought it was a great opportunity to support a good cause and also to buy some beautiful things. The idea of bringing these baskets home is so important—when you look at them, you can see the skill, the history, and the knowledge woven into every piece."

The auction also brought deeply personal stories to light. Jarvis Googoo (We'koqma'q First Nation) shared a moving story, illustrating the personal significance the auction held. He recounted a promise from the late Mi'kmaw Elder Diane

Toney (We'koqma'q First Nation), who had pledged to gift him a quill basket upon his law school graduation. Though she passed away before he completed his studies, Jarvis took the auction as a sign when a Diane Toney quill basket appeared. Paying \$2,000, he won the basket and fulfilled the promise in a deeply emotional moment, saying, "Wela'lin Diane. It's a lovely gift." Community members, like Nik Phillips (Millbrook First Nation) and Michelle Sylliboy (We'koqma'q First Nation), celebrated with him, emphasizing how special and well-deserved the moment was.

One of the baskets featured in the auction was made during a 2014 workshop taught by Malglit and Della. Its presence represented the continuation of cultural practices and the value of shared learning.

A Community Effort

The auction was a labour of love for the Maguire family and their community. Stacey Maguire took on the technical and logistical challenges of organizing the event. "We thought there were going to be maybe 30 items and a goal of \$5,000, but it exploded," she says. "By the first day, we'd already surpassed our goal. It was beyond our wildest

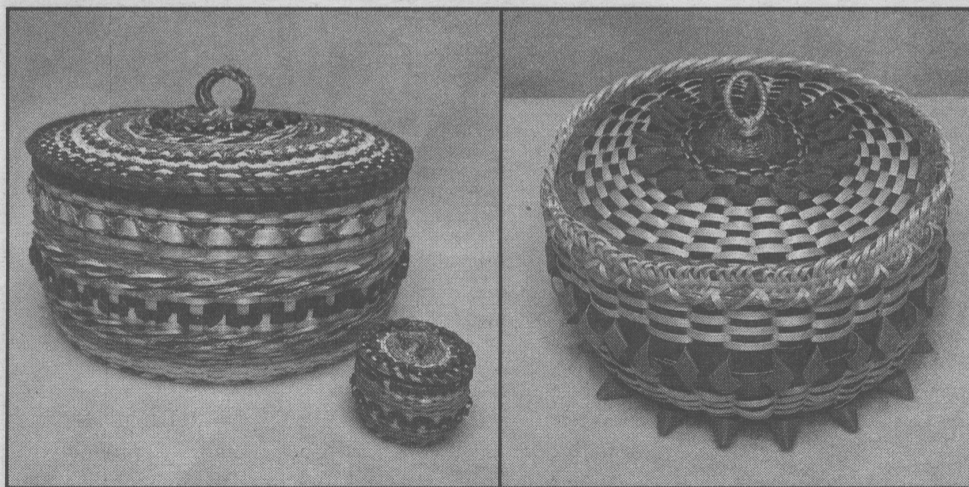
dreams."

Inclusivity was also a priority for the organizers. "We included ticket sales for certain items to ensure everyone, regardless of their budget, could participate and support the auction," says Stacey. "It was important to make the experience inclusive for all."

A Broader Vision: Home to Mi'kma'kik

Tim Bernard, Executive Director of Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre, emphasizes the auction's connection to the broader mission of MDCC and the "Home to Mi'kma'kik" project. "This auction is part of a larger vision to create a space where Mi'kmaw language, stories, and belongings can thrive," he said. "When the centre is built, these cultural belongings will return to Mi'kma'kik, where they belong, to inspire and educate future generations."

The success of the Mi'kmaw Basket Auction is a testament to the power of community, culture, and collective action. Through their efforts, Della, Malglit, Stacey, and Stacey's daughter, Skylar, have not only raised funds but also brought the Mi'kmaw people one step closer to bringing their cultural belongings home. ✨



These stunning Black Ash Fancy Baskets were auction items, each showcasing intricate craftsmanship. One basket, featuring triple weave, braided sweetgrass, jikaji'j, and a signature glass bead, was made and donated by Della Maguire (Glooscap First Nation). Another lidded basket, decorated with braided sweetgrass, jikaji'j, and a laced rim, was made and donated by Malglit Pelletier (We'koqma'q First Nation).