



Seeley's Bay's 20th Storyfest will explore the nature of reconciliation with local Arctic Explorer

James Raffan.

Author: Emily Wright



James Raffan (left) and Chuck Commanda (right) will be exploring the nature of reconciliation at Seeley's Bay's 20th Storyfest. *Photo via James Raffan.*

Seeley's Bay will be celebrating its 20th Storyfest with a presentation from local resident James Raffan entitled 'The Road to Reconciliation: Small Steps Toward Re-Thinking Canada'.

Raffan, who has lived in Seeley's Bay since 1984, is an Arctic explorer, environmentalist, speaker, and writer who's been presenting at Storyfest since its inception in 2010.

"[Storyfest] was the brainchild of a woman called Liz Huff, who was one of the leaders of the Seeley's Bay and Area Residents Association (SBARA)," said Raffan in an interview with Kingstonist.

"She suggested that I do some of these talks that I do from time to time in other places to raise some money for community projects."

Most of the Storyfests have centred on Raffan engaging in old-fashioned storytelling to share his work and experiences, such as canoeing expeditions and travelling throughout Northern Canada.

"SBARA uses the funds raised from Storyfest in the community, which have helped fund projects like signage, festivals, trails and flowers around the village," wrote SBARA member Jan Holland in an email to Kingstonist.

"I can easily say that over the years Storyfest has brought in thousands of dollars into the community and SBARA is so thankful for all of James' dedication to this project, and we hope Storyfest will continue for many years."

Raffan will be presenting at the 20th Storyfest alongside his friend Chuck Commanda, an Algonquin master canoebuilder, according to a SBARA press release issued on Thursday, Mar. 19, 2026.

"Over the last five years, in response to the great work that Marie Wilson and Murray Sinclair and the other commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have done, I thought I really got to find other ways to have stories from far away told, but to support Indigenous storytellers," Raffan explained.

"I've been working with Indigenous people all over the country on a whole variety of projects, from radio to documentaries to books to movies. And this [Storyfest presentation] is a chance to talk a little bit about some of those projects."

Raffan explained that he and Commanda have worked together in the past, and he's excited to do so again. Commanda is of the Anishinaabe nation and makes birch bark canoes with schools and communities to build understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

"To my mind, reconciliation is as much a journey or a process as it is an outcome or an end," said Raffan.

“So Chuck’s going to be there, and I’m going to have a conversation on stage with him about his work as an agent of reconciliation.”

Commanda will also bring one of his birch bark canoes to display, on loan from the [Thousand Islands Boat Museum](#), the press release noted.

The presentation will include Raffan speaking about his recent projects tied to reconciliation, such as his most recent published book [Echo Maker](#).

Additionally, Raffan will screen a new short documentary, [Signs of Life](#), which he co-produced, that celebrates how the chance discovery of an ancient soapstone lamp on the Arctic coast resulted in an affirmation of music and drumming at the heart of Inuit culture, according to the release.

The Storyfest presentation will be held at [Seeley’s Bay Community Hall](#) at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Apr. 12, 2026, with refreshments included. Tickets are \$20, and attendees under 16 are free.

Visit the [Seeley’s Bay website](#) to purchase tickets.

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