

# Tensions remain 5 years after Caledonia occupation

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Political activist and rally organizer Gary McHale leads hundreds of angry protestors at a rally in Caledonia.

Photograph by: Simon Hayter for National Post, xx

TORONTO — It's been five years since tensions erupted over a controversial native land claim in Caledonia, Ont., and some residents are still waiting on the government and police to apologize for how the incident was handled.

"This will not be forgotten about," said Gary McHale, one of a number of protesters arrested during the dispute, told a news conference Wednesday. "This will not be overlooked and they must take responsibility for what they did."

McHale, who is also the executive director of the Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality, called on the provincial government, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Six Nations group in the community southwest of Toronto to apologize for the wrongs incurred during the years-long land occupation.

On Feb. 28, 2006, members of the Six Nations reserve occupied 40 hectares of land known as the Douglas Creek Estates on the basis of a claim that it belonged to the group. The land, which was eventually sold to the province, remained occupied for years as clashes began between natives and non-natives in the community. Tensions escalated as the protesters defied court orders to leave and instead wielded baseball bats, hockey sticks and set fires on the land.

Throughout the standoff, the OPP, then led by current Conservative MP Julian Fantino, were instructed to continue a non-enforcement approach in Caledonia. McHale, and other non-native residents, have alleged that this failure to act by both the police and the government was a form of racial-based profiling.

He was arrested for breach of peace in September 2006 at one of the biggest clashes between the two groups during the dispute.

Over the weekend, McHale and other non-natives will hold a rally and erect a temporary monument to mark the upcoming anniversary of the occupation Monday.

Longtime resident Merlyn Kinrade, who was at the news conference, said community relations have yet to move on to the "healing" stage.

"It's still a strained relationship," he said. "I think members of each community tolerate and hopefully encourage one another that we must get along."

Mark Vandermaas, with the Caledonia Victims Project, said it was equally important that the Six Nations group acknowledge how the dispute has left lingering effects on the community of Caledonia.

"If you drive down the street in Caledonia today, you are probably not going to see anything burning, but that doesn't mean there's justice in Caledonia," he said.

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