



# pathways

SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD. ABORIGINAL REVIEW 2011

## Land of His Ancestors

Wilfred Grandjamb retains a connection to the boreal forest of northeastern Alberta.

PAGE 2

### A River Runs Through Him

The strong bond between the mighty Athabasca and Métis Elder Dicky Dragon.

PAGE 10

### A Charmed Life

Bailey Jr., a superstar bison from Spruce Grove, Alberta.

PAGE 16

### A Dream Comes True

Cora Flett embarks on a new chapter in life.

PAGE 27

# Welcome

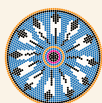
Life offers many different pathways to each of us. One may be guiding young people towards successful careers. Another could be experiencing the natural beauty of the land. It could also be studying for a college diploma or university degree. And sometimes it can be as simple as reading a story to an eager mind.

Through *Pathways*, Syncrude's 2011 Aboriginal Review, we're exploring many inspiring and diverse journeys. Indeed, there is no end to the remarkable stories of success and achievement among Aboriginal people — stories about people making positive contributions in their communities, and stories about groups bringing new perspectives to the table and influencing change in our society.

Join us as we explore these pathways and learn how generations young and old are working to make a difference.

## The stories in *Pathways* reflect the six key commitment areas

that are the focus of Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations program: Corporate Leadership, Employment, Business Development, Education and Training, Community Development and the Environment. As a representation of our ongoing commitment to work with Aboriginal people to create and share opportunity, *Pathways* is one of many initiatives meant to foster dialogue and celebrate shared achievements.



### COMMUNITY

Canada is a country rich in diversity and culture. Syncrude is committed to helping Aboriginal communities celebrate success and continue to build capacity for further progress and achievement.



### LEADERSHIP

Leadership is found among young and old alike. As a member of many regional and national organizations, Syncrude works with business and governments to champion the continued advancement of Aboriginal people across the country.



### EMPLOYMENT

As one of the largest employers of Aboriginal people in Canada, Syncrude creates opportunities that enable Aboriginal people to fully participate in all aspects of our operation.



### ENVIRONMENT

We are committed to working with local Aboriginal advisors on such matters as end-land use and minimizing the long-term impacts of our operations on traditional land uses.



### BUSINESS

Wood Buffalo is home to some of the most successful Aboriginal businesses in Canada. Syncrude works closely with Aboriginal business owners to identify opportunities for supplying goods and services to our operation.



### EDUCATION

Learning unlocks the door to reward and personal growth. Syncrude is committed to working with Aboriginal communities to explore and create diverse educational opportunities.

# pathways

SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD. ABORIGINAL REVIEW 2011



PAGE  
2

## Land of His Ancestors

Wilfred Grandjamb retains a connection to the boreal forest of northeastern Alberta.



PAGE  
10

## A River Runs Through Him

The strong bond between the Athabasca and Métis Elder Dicky Dragon.



PAGE  
16

## A Charmed Life

Bailey Jr., a superstar bison from Spruce Grove, Alberta.



14

## Spiritual Awakenings



18

## Coach for the Community



19

## An Inspiring Heart



22

## Manufacturing Marvels



23

## Artistic Impressions



24

## Exploring Life Under the Sea



25

## A Wise Investment



26

## MOMS Bring Care and Learning



27

## A Dream Comes True



30

## Mother to the Many



31

## The Pursuit of Happiness



32

## Taking Charge

Opportunities Take Shape Page 20 Local Métis Make Their Mark Page 28 Moose Trackers Page 29  
From Potential to Prosperity Page 33 Winter Carnival Turns Up the Heat Page 34 Theatre With a Difference Page 35  
Students Chew on Science Page 35 Environment Updates Page 36 Aboriginal Relations Scorecard Page 40  
Our Aboriginal Relations Program Page 42 A Note from Scott Page 44

Cover photo: Fort McKay Elder Wilfred Grandjamb







# Land of His Ancestors


A

s a brisk fresh gust of wind gently shakes the yellowing leaves of aspen and boughs of spruce, Wilfred Grandjamb stops in mid-stride, with his 1940s-vintage British Army .303 in hand, peering through the forest.

“Tracking an animal is still fun but you must pay attention. You need to watch the tracks and the wind. You cannot go with the breeze; you need to go against it or the animal will catch your scent,” he explains. “You need lots of patience—and a steady hand.”

Wilfred Grandjamb retains a connection to the boreal forest of northeastern Alberta that he passes along to future generations in Fort McKay.





**T**he Fort McKay First Nation Elder eases through the bush with a silent gait that belies his 74 years. When Wilfred brings his rifle to his shoulder, it's a quick, purposeful, well-practiced move of a seasoned sharpshooter who has targeted plenty of game through the metal sights.

His house—a modern two-storey in a crisp new subdivision on the Fort McKay First Nation—is 20 kilometres south from where he stands in the bush. Make no mistake, though, Wilfred feels more at home in the sprawling boreal forest of northeastern Alberta. “I’m an Indian and I’ve done all my best living in the bush,” says Wilfred. “It’s in my blood. I was raised to be a hunter, to provide my own meat. That’s why I do this.”

Born on a trap line about 40 kilometres north of Fort Chipewyan, Wilfred’s connection with the forest started at birth. His parents nurtured that love and the lessons started early. “My father always had things for us to do as kids. One brother would chop wood. Another would split wood. Another would get water,” he says. “Life wasn’t easy but it was a good life.”

After the family moved to Fort McKay when Wilfred was nine, he continued his education through hunting and trapping at Buffalo (Namur) Lake and Moose (Gardiner) Lake.

**“I’m an Indian and I’ve done all my best living in the bush,” says Wilfred. “It’s in my blood. I was raised to be a hunter, to provide my own meat. That’s why I do this.”**

“We trapped foxes, lynx, wolves, martens, beaver, rats, squirrels, minks, all the fur-bearing animals. My dad never made \$1,000 in any year but we survived,” he says. “I started hunting with my dad when I was 10 years old. We would go to Moose Lake. That’s where my education took place. There’s moose all over this country but that was the best place to go. All the Natives up here in McKay used to go there early in the summer. There were lots of ducks, lots of berries, lots of everything.”

After finishing the spring hunt for beaver, they would sell the pelts to buy staples such as flour, sugar, tea and 30-30 shells. “Then we would go hunting at Moose Lake. It would take two to three days to travel there by foot, depending on whether we got a moose along the way,” he says. “We would generally travel with another family. One family would kill the moose. The other one would make the dry meat.”





I love to hunt alone. You can stop and look around whenever you want.  
There's no talking, just the sounds of the forest."





"Smoking the meat preserves it. I love the taste of wild meat. It is what I grew up on. My father says deer, moose and bear contained all the vitamins we need because of the herbs and plants eaten by those animals."





**W**ilfred wants to see that traditional knowledge and love of the forest preserved in future generations in Fort McKay, but understands it will not be easy for trapping and hunting to compete with Xbox, the Disney Channel, YouTube and other forms of mass entertainment.

“Our children have got everything now. My life was poor as far as material things went. We wore moccasins. We never had winter boots,” he says. “I lived on wild meat all my life—moose, deer, bear. Now people go to the store to buy meat. There’s something missing in doing that.”

Wilfred was delighted to see students from the Fort McKay School attend the annual bison harvest, where they watched him skin and butcher an animal from the Beaver Creek Wood Bison Ranch. “I showed them how to skin the bison and they asked lots of questions. They learned about what they could eat from a bison,” Wilfred says. “Hunting is part of our culture. I don’t want them to lose it. My kids know how to use an axe and how to use a gun.”

The wealth brought by the development of the oil sands has provided economic opportunities at a price. “Before the oil companies came up here, there were no gates. Now, when we go 10 to 15 kilometres north, south, east or west, there’s ‘no trespassing’ signs. There’s more trucks that make noise, which makes it tougher





to hunt,” says Wilfred, who worked as a labourer during the construction of the Great Canadian Oil Sands and Syncrude sites. “That’s the cost. But the oil companies bring opportunities. My son Mel still hunts and traps but he has done very well with his company Fort McKay Resources, which supplies technical staff to Syncrude. There’s the trade-off.”

And Wilfred has noted many changes in the region, long before industry arrived. “The caribou used to come right into the village and people would go out the door and shoot one. Then they stopped coming in the 1950s. Nobody knows why they didn’t return,” he says. “It’s one of those things.”

Still, he sees signs of optimism, even in the charred timber seared by the wildfires close to Fort McKay that briefly threatened the community during the spring of 2011. “See all that growth that’s taken place,” he says, pointing to the vibrant green undergrowth and shoots at the foot of the blackened trees. “It’s new life.”

And Wilfred plans to enjoy it for a long time. “A lot of people are in a wheelchair at my age. It’s all in your mind,” he says, patting his trusty rifle. “This gun has brought me a lot of meat. It’s time to go get some more.”





If I cook moose, my family eats moose. If I cook bear, my family eats bear. My sons sometimes ask me "Can we have some fried moose meat?" You don't know how good that makes me feel."





# A River Drums





# Through Him

## The strong bond between the mighty Athabasca and Métis Elder Dicky Dragon

**H**e was born near it and seen death on it. It served as the path to bring him to school and started his working life. For Métis Elder James “Dickie” Dragon, the Athabasca River is a constant thread running through his life.

He shared his memories about the Athabasca while travelling on it by canoe during a July morning when the water was high and the sun was warm.



**1937**

Construction had just been completed on the new St. Gabriel Hospital but Dickie Dragon arrived in the world in a trapper’s tent not far from the Snye by the strong, skilled hands of a midwife. “I was born not far from where we launched the canoe,” Dickie says as he paddles along the eastern edge of the Athabasca River. The tents served as temporary shelters for trappers and their families. “My father had a mink ranch near Plamondon but he also worked on the boats in the summer,” he says. “He used the river to travel up to his traplines up north near Chip. The river was everything that the highway is today.”

Dickie’s family settled in the area shortly after the Riel Rebellion caused them to flee from Saskatchewan. “My grandmother was just a baby at the time. You hear stories from the old-timers from her generation about the bullets flying while they were crossing the North Saskatchewan River near Batoche.”



**1940**

Dickie and his four siblings travelled up north on the snow-covered river in a sled behind his father’s dog team, mushing up to the Holy Angels Residential School after the death of his mother. “Even in the winter, the Athabasca was always the way to travel; everybody had dog teams back then,” says Dickie, who would spend seven years at the residential school.



**1952**

Dickie’s formal education with the Athabasca started as a teenager, when he returned to McMurray to work on the yarding boats as his first job.

The boats would take cargo up the river to Lake Athabasca. “Most of it went to Uranium City but some went north to Fort Fitzgerald. They would unload and portage everything to the other side of Fort Smith. They had another set of boats there and they would go right to the Arctic.”

During his time on the boats, he learned to read the river and its ever-changing channels and currents.







"You need to pay attention with the weather, always," he says. "When the wind picks up, it's a good idea to pull to shore until it dies down. You always have to respect the water."

There were many ports along the Athabasca if the boats encountered rough weather.

"On the river map that the boats used, every cabin was marked. You didn't have to say what mile you were at. You would just say you were passing by so-and-so's cabin and everybody knew where you were at," he says.



**1964**

With the start of construction of the Great Canadian Oil Sands project, Dickie returned to the region after working in mines at Uranium City and Bralorn, B.C. "I met my wife Susan in B.C. and we came back here and got married."

The industry has left its imprint on the landscape surrounding the river but Dickie sees some positive signs, too.

"I toured Syncrude about a year ago and was amazed how much had been reclaimed," Dickie says. "To know that the land is going to be put back to close to what it once was is important to me."

Human impacts extend beyond the industry. "Look over there," Dickie says, pointing at black seeping into the water from the bank. "See how much tar sand is here along the banks? The river may cut through the tar sands but you also see garbage, beer cans and bottles all over the shore. That bothers me."



**2008**

Almost 70 years after making his first trip to Fort Chipewyan on the Athabasca on his father's skiff, Dickie decided to do it again, spending four-and-a-half days paddling a canoe alone. "Being by yourself paddling down this river is something else—everybody should do it once."

During his journey, Dickie packed bannock, beans, pancakes and eggs. "I had my fishing rod and gun with me because I was going to live off the land. Memories come back and so do the fishing spots," he says. "Poplar Creek is good for pickerel. Look over there, where the water is going upstream and it swirls around. There's a good spot to fish. You'll catch pickerel and jacks in there."

After 14 hours of paddling, Dickie would find places on the river rather than find shelter on shore. "I stayed right out on the sandbars. Ten feet into the bush and the mosquitoes will kill you."

During his journey down the Athabasca, Dickie shared his old friend with its other companions—from bald eagles soaring above to deer slaking their thirst to beavers constantly working on renovations.

"It's peaceful on the river and once you get further north, it's quiet," he says. "When you stop paddling, you can hear everything."



**2011**

Dickie is making plans to return to Fort Chipewyan. "Travelling on the river, where you are stopping to fish or stopping to camp, it's like a holiday every time you go."



# SPIRITUAL AWAKENINGS

He dreamed and he dabbled, and he did the things  
that many others dared not do.

**T**he passions of Joseph (Joe) Dion have taken him to newsrooms in Canadian cities, boardrooms in China, oil fields in eastern Alberta and even England for a little chat with the Queen.

"When I was 12, I wanted to be Prime Minister, and when I was in university, I wanted to be a doctor, but then I left to become a reporter with the *Edmonton Journal*," says Joe with a laugh. "But I guess I just never felt restricted, and I have always believed that you can be anything you want to be if you have persistence and a vision. So whether I wanted to be a cowboy or a farmer or a doctor, I just went after it."

And while Joe, the great grandson of the revered Cree leader Big Bear, hasn't been elected Prime Minister just yet, he has most certainly accomplished a lot.

Joe was recently named a 2011 National Aboriginal Achievement Award winner. The annual awards are sponsored in part by Syncrude.

While he's now considered a seasoned leader, Joe's character-building leadership journey began early in adulthood. In 1976, he became Chief of Kehewin Cree Nation at age 25, and that took him to England to visit the Queen to discuss Treaty issues.

Shortly after, he was elected Grand Chief of Alberta, and he later became the founding chairman and president of the Indian Resource Council of Canada, which established Indian Oil and Gas Canada.

"I guess I was just never the kind of person to be comfortable with sitting back and watching things happen," says Joe. "When I saw something I thought needed changing, I wanted to help change it."

It was probably that attitude that led to his appointment as constitutional coordinator of what is now the Assembly of First Nations in 1980, and he was with

the Assembly for the entrenchment of treaty rights in the Canadian Constitution.

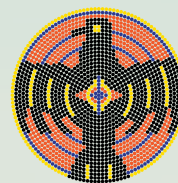
He was a founding member of the Canadian Council of Native Business, which is now the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (see pg. 20), and he is currently president of the Frog Lake Energy Resources Corporation. Frog Lake Energy is the first fully operational, wholly First Nation-owned oil company in Canada, and it produces in excess of 3,000 barrels of oil per day.

Joe has also been promoting Chinese investment in Aboriginal-owned Canadian oil interests, and he believes other First Nations can and should be taking a closer look at oil and gas opportunities in their own backyards.

"We have more influence than people realize," says Joe. "We are too comfortable under the false perception of the protection of government, because the government has had such a big role in our lives for so long. First Nations can make their own decisions and go out into the bigger world and create things like businesses and opportunities for growth. We need people to rise up in our communities to lead the people."

One might not realize that this easygoing man has fought fiercely to help First Nations communities achieve their full potential, and he has tackled issues like unemployment and Treaty Rights head on. In fact, decades ago, Joe was one of the individuals who helped Syncrude work on its ambitious target of hiring a workforce in which one-in-10 employees would be of Aboriginal descent.

"You set goals and you don't stop until you reach them," he says. "Nothing can stop us if we refuse to let it."



## What change would you like to see in the world?

The conditions of First Nations communities in this time when we're in such a great country really, deeply bothers me. The poverty is terrible. I have great hope though that will change as leadership develops in our communities. We have some of the greatest opportunities of all time for First Nations to be part of the economic growth in our country, and we need to seize those opportunities now.

## What was your favorite place to be as a child?

Hunting with my dad and trapping with my grandfather. My grandfather would snare rabbits or trap muskrats, and my dad would hunt rabbits, deer and ducks. There was nothing better than being in nature and being with my family.

## Who has inspired you?

My mother has always been a role model in my life. Her work ethic, her spirituality and prayer, her reliance on God for everything and her respect for her fellow man all inspired me to follow in her footsteps.









## One-on-One with Bailey

Bailey Junior gives us a glimpse into his life as a superstar bison on the family farm near Spruce Grove, Alberta.

My favorite way to spend a Saturday afternoon is cruising around in my convertible with my buds Jim and Charlie, the dog.

The highlight of my career so far has been appearing on a segment on CNN that won an award for the "Most Creative Story on CNN."





# A CHARMED LIFE

How an 1,800 pound furry bovine has become the talk of the town all over the world.

**I**t was 2008 when the elderly Aboriginal woman made her annual pilgrimage from the Indian Village at the Calgary Stampede across the grounds to the livestock area where she hoped to see her friend, Bailey D. Buffalo.

When she arrived, she wept as she learned that Bailey, a bison that had earned international fame for his tame disposition and penchant for hanging around inside the house with owners Jim and Linda Sautner, had died that spring in a farm accident.

Linda held back her own tears once again remembering their family's loss, but she said to the distraught lady, "When God closes one door, He opens another. We have another bison I would like you to meet, and he's only three-and-a-half months old."

The lady struggled to get down to her knees to see Bailey Junior, spoke softly and kissed him on the forehead. Linda helped her back on her feet when the lady announced, "He has Bailey's spirit. He is Bailey." And then she insisted Jim and Linda bring Bailey Junior over to the Indian Village to be blessed in a special ceremony.

There is little doubt that although genetically unrelated, Bailey Junior and Bailey Senior have a lot in common.

Bailey Senior was one of two bottle-fed calves named after circus magnates Barnum & Bailey, and his agreeable personality and fondness for human company was evident almost immediately.

"One day, Jim decided to bring nine-month-old Bailey (Senior) into the house,

which I did not think was a good idea, but I just told Jim he was going to be the one fixing the damage," says Linda with a laugh. "But Bailey just walked in, smelled some of the coats, pulled the cushions off the couch, and laid down in the living room. He was calm as could be."

Bailey's pet-like demeanor put him on the pages of *People* magazine, and he also appeared on CNN and the BBC. Bailey's fame kept building with invitations to appear on *Late Night with Jay Leno*, *The Ellen Degeneres Show* and *Inside Edition*. Unfortunately, the BSE-related border restrictions didn't make international travel possible.

At three years old, Bailey Junior is becoming equally as famous, and has appeared in television specials and parades. He has been an ambassador for his species at all kinds of events in Alberta including Fort McKay Treaty Days.

Bailey Junior is every inch the character his namesake was, and he too loves cruising about town in a convertible.

"If Jim moved that car 10 feet without him, Bailey would likely jump a fence to get in it," says Linda.

Jim would likely jump a few fences for Bailey Junior too.

"I love working with bison, and Bailey Junior is even farther ahead than Bailey Senior was in terms of how easily he trains," says Jim. "I just really enjoy working with these animals, and it has become a big part of our lives."

**The first thing I do when I enter the house** is check out the living room, and see if the television is on.

**My idea of happiness** is the wind blowing through my fur as I cruise around with Jim in my car.

**Sometimes when I stare at someone for a long time**, what I'm really thinking is people sure look funny without any fur.

**My best quality** is how much I love hanging around people—most buffalo don't and they just don't know what they're missing.

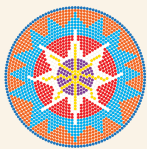
**If I could take a ride in any vehicle other than my own** it would be Jim's sister-in-law's fully-restored, bright pink, antique hot-rod truck. I think it would be fun to hop into that and ride around.

**If I could become a person for just one day**, I would want to be Jim, he's the coolest guy I know.



## Life coach

Steve Jani (right) has coffee with Tim Rinas, director of regional operations at Tech Sonic and president of the Minor Hockey Referee Association.



# Coach for the Community

**S**teve Jani knows a lot about getting a puck in the net, but if you ask anyone who knows him, the thing he's best at is being an all-around terrific guy.

Earlier this year, Steve was honoured for tireless contributions to the business community and developing hockey players in Fort McMurray over the past decade. The Regional Aboriginal Recognition Awards (RARA) committee named Steve as its Male Aboriginal Citizen of the Year for 2010.

"I was surprised to be singled out for this recognition as there are a lot of people who volunteer a lot of time, which is what makes this community a great place to live," says Steve, Syncrude's community business coordinator and Aboriginal business liaison.

Steve serves as a volunteer with the Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association (NAABA). While he sits on the events committee, he sees a natural tie-in with his role at Syncrude, where he works with Aboriginal businesses who are interested in becoming contractors.

"I try to help businesses understand what they need to do in order to work on Syncrude's sites, whether that's safety, business controls or management practices," Steve

says. "If we can develop strong local contractors, it benefits both Syncrude and the wider community."

An avid hockey player, Steve also has coached teams for the past 10 years and recently served as president of the Fort McMurray Native Hockey Association. "Coaching is almost as much fun as playing was for me," says Steve. "I was quite proud to see young children who had trouble standing on their skates develop into smooth-skating players as teenagers."

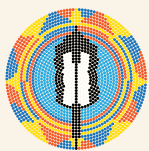
His efforts have made a difference. Just ask Tim Rinas, director of regional operations at Tech Sonic and president of the Minor Hockey Referee Association. "Steve's positive attitude and involvement in youth sports is contagious. He genuinely wants to help Aboriginal youth sports evolve and develop," says Tim. "On the business side, Steve takes the time required to understand the Aboriginal business community and guide them in growing their business."

The Regional Aboriginal Recognition Awards recognize individuals who have made a positive contribution to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. The event is held annually.





Jessica Vandenberghe enjoys a moment reading with her daughter Katharina.



## Q&A

### What brings you joy?

Being able to help people. I love helping my children grow and teaching them to respect people. I also really enjoy mentoring.

### In the next 10 years, what do you want to accomplish?

Career-wise I'd like to be in a leadership position. I found motivation in helping and leading people. On a personal level, I just want to raise my kids and maybe do some world travel. I think next on my list is Peru.

# An Inspiring Heart

She doesn't remember who he was or what he said, but he changed her life.

"I don't even think I had really heard of engineering when we had a speaker come in to my high school to talk about it as a career," says Jessica Vandenberghe, a research engineer at Syncrude's Research Centre in Edmonton. "But the presentation left an impression on me and started me down this path."

Friends and family describe Jessica as outgoing, enthusiastic, creative and responsible, but she humbly laughs and says she has had some really great role models to help her along.

Jessica, who holds two patents in the U.S. and Canada, credits much of her success, her tenacity and her work ethic to the availability of mentors in her life including team leaders at Syncrude as well as others in the community.

"(Senator) Lillian Dyck has been a really important mentor in my life," she says. "She is Aboriginal and Chinese, and since I am adopted and my family is German, I really felt like she could understand my

situation and could help guide me through the process of understanding who I am and how I fit."

Her appreciation of others helping to see her through some tough times, good times and even confusing times motivated her to do the same for others.

Jessica, a wife and mother of two, is also wholeheartedly committed to mentoring others—particularly Aboriginal students and young women. She is an active volunteer for the Alberta Women's Science Network, and Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology (WISEST), as well as the Edmonton Science Outreach Network. She regularly visits city classrooms to share her passion for science and ignite their enthusiasm for learning.

"I just love seeing that spark in kids' eyes when you really grab their attention and I know that just as I was inspired, the moment could change their lives too," she says. "There's nothing more fulfilling than helping others whether it's my own kids, someone else's kids or my team at work. That's what really motivates me."









Clint Davis, chief executive of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, says the relatively recent rise of economic development corporations is helping Aboriginal communities "create opportunity for their young people."

**A**s major Canadian resource projects across the country expand in the wake of rising commodity prices, a less noticed business boom in Canada's Aboriginal communities is also taking shape. Economic development corporations, which can loosely be described as businesses started and backed by regional First Nations, Métis or Inuit groups, are helping to grow Aboriginal incomes in communities throughout Canada.

Their benefit is reflected in a recent report by TD Economics. TD estimated that economic development corporations will help the combined income of Aboriginal households, businesses and governments reach \$24-billion in 2011, and ballooning to \$32-billion in 2016.

"We're seeing more Aboriginal communities looking to business as a shining light to create opportunity for their young people," Clint Davis, chief executive of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, said. "So we've seen some rapid creation of economic development corporations in the last, probably five to 10 years."

Many of these EDCs, as they are referred to, started off as small companies that provided

any of that money and then grown organically," Tammy Charland-McGlaughlin, vice president of operations, said. She adds the lack of settlement money was a benefit in some way, since it has allowed the company to remain as an entity that functions at arm's length from the Cold Lake First Nations council.

ACFN Business Group, the business arm of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nations, is another example of an EDC that has lifted local Aboriginal communities. It started with a handful of employees in 1994 and a pick-up truck, which was used to haul garbage as part of a labour contract with Syncrude Canada Ltd.

ACFN has since grown into a diversified business with a dozen subsidiaries and joint ventures, totalling about 1,400 employees. Like Primco Dene, ACFN has become the main employer for Aboriginals in its region. And it also highlights how EDCs are helping bridge the skills gap that contributes to high unemployment levels in some Aboriginal communities. "Part of our acquisition process was not to just bring in companies that would help our goals, but to also provide labour that was, for instance, administrative, or technical,

# Opportunities Take Shape

services to local resource projects and eventually branched out into more diverse ventures. Mr. Davis said although his organization hasn't conducted concrete research into when EDCs really began to take shape, anecdotally, the first batch appear to have sprouted up in the early 1980s. Many were founded with the influx of capital that followed in the wake of land claim settlements negotiated with the government.

The Primco Dene Group of Companies is one example of an economic development corporation that has changed its community. The business was founded in 1999 as a catering company to create employment for the Cold Lake First Nations, at a time when the community was experiencing devastating unemployment levels of 70% to 80%.

"There was a lot of economic development in the area in the oil and gas sector, and we saw servicing that industry as the best way to get some meaningful employment at the time," James Blackman, Primco Dene's chief executive, said.

The business has since branched out well beyond catering, and includes emergency medical services, commercial real estate and security. And while the Cold Lake First Nations, which owns Primco Dene, received a \$25-million land claim settlement in 2002, Primco Dene has grown without using that money.


"Our community was in a deficit before that settlement, so the business was started without

or professional," Garry Flett, ACFN chief executive, said. "So if band members want to pursue a professional career, we have an engineering group, for instance. We help them, we train them, we expand their skills."

The growth in the number of jobs, as well as the quality of jobs, helps explain why TD economists Sonya Gulati and Derek Burleton cited businesses as the fastest growing contributor to Aboriginal income. As mentioned above, the two predict Aboriginal incomes will grow by 50% to \$32-billion in 2016. But they temper their rosy outlook by pointing out that despite the rapid growth of many Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal incomes are still 30% less than the median incomes of all other Canadians. But EDCs might be helping to change that. Bryn Botham, chief financial officer for the ACFN Business Group, said one of the biggest benefits his company provides its employees is the opportunity for social mobility. If a worker dreams of improving his or her education, or aims for a job position he can't offer, he's happy to get behind them.

"It's not so much getting work for people here, because there's work for people," he said. "If I can provide employment and someone takes a skill set they learned with my company and ends up moving on to a higher paying job, or something even more skilled, then I feel I've succeeded."





Lemax operations manager Will Soucie  
at the company's shop in Fort McMurray.

# Manufacturing Marvels

**T**wo hundred and twenty customers strong, 30 years of service, and one expansion later, Lemax Machine and Welding shows why they are “your first choice for welding and machine shops in the Fort McMurray area.”

“We are open to any client opportunity whether received electronically or through our door—from the small business to any of the oil sand sites,” says Tony Martin, general manager of ACE Industrial Services, which runs the Lemax operation.

The oldest established machine and welding shop in the area, Lemax is a joint venture of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) Business Group and Empire Industries.

“The ACFN Business Group is committed to creating gainful and meaningful employment for members of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation by establishing effective and profitable business,” says Will Soucie, Lemax operations manager. “We’re trying to create a training ground for Aboriginal youth in the community—to give them an opportunity, or a better opportunity.”

Opening its doors in 1981, it didn’t take long for Lemax to prove its reliability.

“Originally our shop was 5,000 square feet, but to meet the needs of our customers, we doubled in size to 10,600 square feet in 1987,” says Will.

“Working with Syncrude as a customer has allowed us to do the expansion,” says Tony. “It drove the expansion of the business to meet the demand.”

Lemax prides itself on its people, services and equipment. “We have the largest boring mill in town,” says Will. “It’s the largest machine of its type in a local shop.”

Sixteen machinists, five welders and three office staff service its customers.

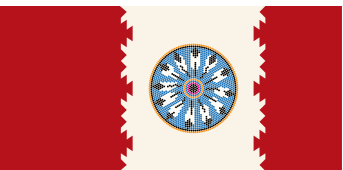
“We’ll hire a candidate as a labourer for six to eight months while they learn about working safely,” says Will. “They have exposure to both trades, so they can choose what they want to do in life. They get to see first-hand what a welder or machinist does day-to-day and test their aptitude, so it’s a really good opportunity.”

The ACFN Business Group is diverse in the services it offers, from construction to fabrication to environmental services. “The goal is to make the Aboriginal business community more involved in the oil sands industry by offering up top quality services,” says Tony.





# Artistic Impressions



Sherri Chisan heard what they were saying, but she just couldn't let it penetrate her heart.

"I have always been inspired by the arts, but I got an early message in school and from society that I wasn't an artist," she says. "But I would regularly feel something inside

wanting expression. I would jot down bits of poetry, prose and doodles and buy art and visit art galleries. I imagined and planned and dreamed about celebrations of indigenous artists."

Now those dreams are her reality.

Sheri is the co-curator of the exhibition *Creator Paints the World... The Colour of Our Voice*, sponsored by Syncrude.

The show is also curated by Lana Whiskeyjack, along with faculty and students of the Indigenous Artists' Program at Blue Quills First Nations College, a locally controlled Indigenous education centre in St. Paul, Alberta.

The show is part of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts' Travelling Exhibition Program (TREX), and it encompasses 22 works of art and two text panels by eight Aboriginal artists.

"We need art to be able to tell our own story—to tell the stories of our ancestors, to tell the story of our knowledge, of our languages, of the way we see the world as it has come to our lands," says Sheri. "We have heard the stories others tell themselves about us, and now we have to tell our own stories about us to ourselves and to others."

She explains in addition to being a venue for artistic and cultural expression, the exhibition is really becoming a bridge between cultures.



**Main photo:** The TREX exhibit makes a stop at the Anzac schools.

**Inset photo:** (from left to right) TREX artist Ivan Whiskeyjack and curators Lana Whiskeyjack and Sherri Chisan.

"It expresses who we are," she says. "It is a conversation with our ancestors. It is a conversation with the spirit world. It is a message for the generations who will walk this trail after us. It is a transfer of knowledge and of life. Visitors will get a glimpse into our world, to reach across that chasm that too often defines the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples in this land."

The *Creator Paints the World* exhibit visited the Anzac schools in September before continuing on to the Calgary, Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat regions.

"It's a great opportunity to have the kids see the work of these Alberta artists," says Claudia Covelli, vice principal at Anzac Community and Bill Woodward schools. "It's important for them to see the culture represented in this art displayed in the schools."

As somebody who enjoys sketching, student Hunter Pratt appreciated the vibrancy of colour used by the artists. "I like the detail and the colours," she said when viewing the exhibit. "The artists seem to really like nature and use it in their paintings. I'm glad this is at my school."

A new Syncrude-sponsored exhibition, *Our Wilderness is Wisdom*, begins travelling in January 2012.



# Exploring Life Under the Sea



When kids at Fort McKay School first laid eyes on a sea urchin, the most common question was “Where is its face?”

The urchin, along with other ocean mates such as sea cucumbers, starfish and crabs, are part of Vancouver Aquarium’s travelling road show known as the Aquavan. This past September, a group of educators toured landlocked northern Alberta, including stops in Fort McMurray, Fort McKay, Anzac and Conklin, introducing communities and school children to the wonders of the sea.

“We’re hundreds of kilometres from the nearest coastline so the kids just love the opportunity to see these creatures up close and personal to learn about them and their environment,” says Ruth Ryan, principal of Fort McKay School.

This is the second consecutive year Syncrude has supported the Aquavan tour in local communities.

*Learn more at [www.vanaqua.org](http://www.vanaqua.org).*



Students were able to touch live starfish during the recent Aquavan tour to outlying communities.





Syncrude president and CEO Scott Sullivan talks with students about their marble maze at a DiscoverE camp.



# A Wise Investment

A gift from Syncrude will help expand University of Alberta community outreach programs that encourage young people to explore engineering, science and technology.

The \$500,000 donation, to be shared by the Faculty of Engineering's DiscoverE engineering science and technology program and Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology (WISEST), was announced in July by Syncrude President and CEO Scott Sullivan.

"We're very proud to support the University of Alberta in the work they do to provide high-quality educational opportunities for youth," said Scott. "Participating in these hands-on learning programs helps students grow and succeed in the careers of their choice. We're committed to life-long education and by investing in these student programs, we support their journeys of discovery and learning."

"DiscoverE provides thousands of young people with great experiences and opportunities to learn about engineering and technology in a way that is fun and educational," said David Lynch, dean of the faculty. "This generous and increased support that Syncrude is providing will have an impact on current and future generations of young students that is both enabling and enlightening. With this gift we will be able to provide expanded programs to excite the imaginations of many more students."

Chair of the WISEST program, Denise Hemming, a researcher in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, says the gift from Syncrude will support three additional student summer research placements and fund a new initiative aimed at cultivating an interest in science, engineering and technology among Aboriginal youth in northern Alberta.

"We couldn't be doing this without Syncrude's help," said Denise. "We'll be able to take WISEST programs out to these communities, encouraging young students in Grades 6 and 7 to stay in school by showing them that there are really cool jobs in engineering, science and technology that they can do even in their own communities."

The announcement included poster presentations by WISEST summer research students, science demonstrations and a tour of a DiscoverE camp where youngsters were busy building a marble maze.

Camp participants Addison Gugenheimer, 12, and Kieran Nelson, 10, demonstrated their marble maze for Scott, who said he was impressed with the job. For their part, Gugenheimer and Nelson said the DiscoverE camps provide them with a fun learning environment.

"What I like about it is that they give you a project but you have the freedom to do it any way you want," said Nelson. "At other camps I've been to they say 'Do this.' But here, there is no one certain way to do something. They let you decide."

*Story courtesy of the University of Alberta. To learn more, visit [www.discovere.ualberta.ca](http://www.discovere.ualberta.ca).*





# MOMS Bring Care and Learning

Emma Lee (foreground) and Josie enjoy the playground swings with MOMS Tina (left) and Virginia.



The first time Janet McDonald walked into a preschool with her three young children, she thought it would be chaos.

When it wasn't, she was amazed.

"There were water tables, sand tables, paint, play dough, snacks and more," recalls Janet. "I had never seen early childhood programs before so I thought it was amazing. I stuck around basically to watch things blow up, but they never did."

Within months, Janet was working at the preschool as an assistant. Since then, the community came together to establish the Mothers of McKay (M.O.M.S.) Association, in 1996. More than 16 years later, Janet is still with them as administrator.

"Our mandate is to return children to their rightful place in the community—at the centre," says Janet. "We have accomplished a great deal towards that goal."

Offering four distinct programs, M.O.M.S. provides daycare and the Aboriginal Head Start Program for local kids. And although they serve children up to six years old, their reach touches just about every member of the community including creating 12 full-time staff positions. "It is a true community organization. We provide 17 Elders daily meals with

our Elder Meals on Wheels Program, and a Young Moms Program that provides social support and skill building."

Janet truly enjoys seeing children advance through the programs. "Early childhood education and learning through play works," she says. "It's great for the kids and when it's time for them to go to kindergarten, there are no more tears because they are prepared."

A community organization also takes a community effort. "We can't run programs without paying people or buying food and supplies. We are so grateful for the support from the community, industry and government."

One of those funding groups includes the Fort McKay Community Enhancement Society. It provides financial support to organizations for programs and activities that enhance the quality of life for Fort McKay residents. "They see the value in what we are trying to achieve here," says Janet. Syncrude has been on the committee and donated more than \$250,000 since 2005.

The community also sees value. "The response from the community has been very positive," says Janet. "I'm not saying we're perfect or that we know everything, but we try our best for the children."

## All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

*an excerpt from a poem by Robert Fulghum*

Share everything

Play fair

Don't hit people

Put things back where you found them

Clean up your own mess

Don't take things that aren't yours

Say you're sorry when you hurt  
somebody

Wash your hands before you eat

Flush

Warm cookies and cold milk  
are good for you

Live a balanced life - learn some and  
think some and draw and paint and  
sing and dance and play and work  
every day some

Take a nap every afternoon

When you go out into the world,  
watch out for traffic, hold hands,  
and stick together.



# A Dream Comes True



With the long nights of studying behind her, Corie Flett embarked on an exciting new chapter in her life when she was called to the Bar this past July.

Her hard work and dedication had paid off. Her legal career had begun.

"It's the biggest milestone in my life so far," says Corie. "I don't know if there is anything to compare it to...it's life-changing, the start of my career and something I'll always look back upon fondly. It's everything I've been working on for the past eight years—seven at the University of Alberta and one year articling as a law student at Campbell and Cooper in Fort McMurray."

The 25-year-old was surrounded by family and friends for the swearing-in ceremony. "I'm very lucky to share this moment with my family and friends, my band ACFN, my scholarship providers like Sincru. They all provided immense support and are a big reason I am where I am today."

One person Corie wished she could share it with was her paternal grandmother Elizabeth Bourke, who recently passed away. "She was my inspiration," says Corie. "She raised 13 children, 100 grandchildren, great grandchildren. It's her strength and inspiration that flows through our veins and always pushed us to strive for the best. I know she's with me today and I dedicated this day to her."

Corie's future plans are to practice law in her home town with a focus on family law. "I just bought a house in Fort McMurray. I intend to give back to the community through Campbell and Cooper. We've just started an initiative where I will travel to remote communities like Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Anzac, Conklin and Janvier to provide free legal services and counsel for those who don't have easy access to town or a lot of money for a lawyer."

Corie, the daughter of Sincru heavy equipment fleet manager Dwight Flett, qualified and received funding through the company's scholarship programs. "The financial support I received from Sincru, all seven years, helped me focus on my studies."

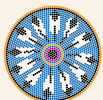
Sincru scholarship recipient Corie Flett received the call to the Bar by Justice Germain on July 15th in Fort McMurray.







Quentin Lizotte serves up a helping of fried bannock to Andy Flett at a Métis Local 1935 Elders' Tea.



## Local Métis Making Their Mark

A historical preservation project is one of the significant pieces woven into an agreement between Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935 and Syncrude.

"If our history is not recorded, it will be gone," says James Richard Dragon, president of Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935.

The For the Sign of the Spirit Relationship ceremony held in December 2010 celebrated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding.

"For us, it means there is a mutual understanding and openness, there's a commitment, there's respect for each other, trust and cooperation," says May-Britt Jensen, general manager with Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935. "Syncrude is one of our neighbours. We wanted to learn more about their projects, and how we can work together to identify commitments we are both going to support."

As part of the partnership, Métis Local 1935 has launched a Mark of the Métis project, a traditional land use and occupancy study of how Elders lived off the land. "We've talked with over 100 Elders,

who've shared their stories," explains May-Britt. "It's a big part of our cultural retention and education."

Having shared his story, James sees the project as providing a glimpse into history: "It's for the younger generations. They will learn about their culture and background."

"We're publishing an atlas of the places people used to harvest, berry pick and hunt. We're learning where people lived and trapped years ago," says May-Britt.

A planned cultural centre will be home for the stories of the past. "The cultural centre will be important because we can show who the Métis people are," adds May-Britt. "It will be a gathering place for our activities. The Mark of the Métis project will be a huge part of our cultural centre."

The agreement opens up lines of communication. "Our members have a better understanding. It helps Syncrude understand us better as well," says May-Britt.

The MOU is just the beginning. "It's going to be a lasting agreement," says James.

*(Read about James' life along the Athabasca River on page 10.)*



# Moose Trackers

## Moose study investigates industry impacts on local wildlife

Cameras located throughout the oil sands regions, and equipped with motion sensors, captured numerous photographs of moose with calves.



A recent study on wildlife habitat in the oil sands region has uncovered some intriguing findings regarding the health of local moose populations.

Last year, 50 moose were tagged with GPS and radio collars in order to track their movement in and near major river valleys located around oil sands mining operations. Initial findings show a high number of

healthy moose in the area with cows that are very productive. In fact, five sets of twins were identified.

Moose were captured via net gunning from helicopter. In addition to collaring each animal, scientists recorded their chest girth, fat deposit, number of ticks and tooth status. Blood and hair samples were also taken. Cameras were also set up, resulting in frequent sightings of other species such as bears, deer and wolves.

## Last year, 50 moose were tagged with GPS and radio collars in order to track their movement in and near major river valleys located around oil sands mining operations.

"On the surface, the moose population appears to be doing quite well," says Corey De La Mare, lead researcher and a Master of Science candidate at the University of Alberta. "The females are productive and having lots of babies which in turn are doing well into the winter. The question is if and how their traditional movements and habitat use are impacted by mining operations."

For Corey, his observations have been nothing short of astonishing. A helicopter survey just before Christmas was especially revealing. "We only saw about two-thirds of our tagged animals. From the collar signals, we knew the animals were there, but we just couldn't see them for the trees. In all, we saw 80 animals over a period of 10 hours and we knew we were barely scratching the surface. I've never seen that many animals in such a small geographic area and over that short of time. I was absolutely floored."

Corey believes this high number suggests a likely higher margin of error in traditional moose survey observations, which are used for establishing population densities and harvest limits.

Administered through the University of Alberta, the Wildlife Habitat Effectiveness and Connectivity Research Program is supported by Syncrude and other oil sands operators. It will assist in determining how major river valleys function as habitat and travel routes for animals in the region. As well, it will help assemble long-term demographic information on adult female moose survival, productivity and recruitment (the number of calves surviving to reproductive age).



# Mother to the Many

Some stride into her office ambitious and self-assured and others shuffle in uncertain and suspicious. But after speaking with Lilly Upton, they all feel like there is at least one person who is truly behind them.

Their success is her success.

Lilly's official title is Aboriginal Apprenticeship Consultant, but her role is so much more than that.

"I keep in touch with pretty well everyone who comes through my office," says Lilly. "When they're in training, I'm in touch with them pretty much all the time. But even when they're not, we keep in touch. When they're having problems, I'm here for them, and when they're not having problems, I'm still here for them—even if they just want to pop in and say hi. I'm kind of like the apprenticeship mother."

She says this without a trace of pride, however, because her humility is only matched by her kindness.

Lilly knows what it means to overcome. For most of her life her single mom struggled to raise nine children while members of the family battled alcoholism and other obstacles.

After graduating, Lilly became an employment counsellor and eventually she moved from Inuvik, where she was raised, to Fort McMurray.

"I just so enjoy helping people and getting them started on their career," she says. "I just like seeing people succeed."

Lilly helps people understand their talents and abilities and makes sure they are equipped to complete their apprenticeship through the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative.

"Lilly has a great personality and positive attitude towards work," says her friend and colleague Belinda Gauvreau, a senior recruitment representative with Syncrude. "Her respect and willingness to help others are some of her great qualities and this makes her an incredible person to work with."

Upton says while she has seen her share of people struggling, she has also been privileged to witness some great triumphs.

"I have had people come in fighting addictions and all kinds of personal issues, and with determination and support, I have seen them rebuild their lives and find great careers. That's what really makes my job wonderful."

Learn more about the apprenticeship program at [www.tradesecrets.gov.ab.ca](http://www.tradesecrets.gov.ab.ca).

## Q&A



**Who has inspired you?** My mother. We lost our dad when I was 11, and it was a struggle just to survive. There were nine kids in the family, and it was expensive to live up north (in Inuvik). My mother was always pushing us to work hard, be on time and do our best.

**What really bothers you?** I get really upset when I see apprentices lose everything over drugs and alcohol. I try to talk to them about it, because when they overcome, there's so much joy.

**What was your favourite place as a child?** Well, we never travelled because we didn't have any money, so I would say being out on the land having picnics and just enjoying nature.



# The Pursuit of Happiness



Whether she was walking a trapline with her dad as a carefree young girl, manipulating a 300-ton piece of heavy equipment on the job site or tackling a leadership role in her First Nation, Cecilia (Cece) Fitzpatrick has always been in pursuit of her purpose.

"When I was young, I always thought I would run away to a major city and become a broadcaster or something like that," says Cecilia with a laugh. "I didn't really know what my calling was. I just knew I had a calling."

Cecilia, who was a councillor with Fort McKay for many years and who recently ran for Chief, saw leadership up close during her younger years. Her father was a hereditary chief for 27 years, and her sister, Dorothy MacDonald, was one of the first elected female chiefs in Canada.

"I saw what leadership, the right leadership, could accomplish," she says.

Cecilia is passionate about developing leadership and she was one of six women selected to be a mentor for the Coady International Institute's Indigenous Women in Community Leadership (IWCL) program at St. Francis Xavier University.

"Cecilia did an excellent job as a mentor and when we did her bio on our website to match her with a student, there was interest right away," says Sheila Isaac, IWCL program manager.

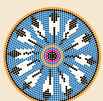
Cecilia's diverse background makes her not only inspiring, but accessible as well. She has taken on many different roles in her life and was even a heavy equipment operator for Syncrude for seven years before her brother told her she needed to "go back and work for her people."

Cecilia thought that was very good advice, and so she returned to Fort McKay work as an environmental coordinator in 2002. "After that, everything just fell into place for me and as the years progressed, I decided to run for councillor, and then I knew this was what I needed to be doing," she says.

Encouraged by her sister's legacy, Cecilia decided to run for Chief in the spring of 2011. Although she was defeated by a narrow margin, she says her dreams for the future of her community remain vivid.

"I can just really see a future where there is enough for everyone and where our people become educated and come back to work for their community," says Cecilia. "We can't lose any more of our young people. We can't stand for it anymore."

## Q&A



**Who has inspired you?** Without a doubt my sister Dorothy MacDonald. She inspired me to get involved in and advocate for my community.

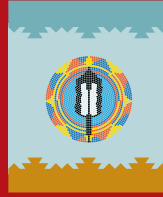
**What is the greatest challenge you have overcome in your life?** Discrimination. I always tried to hide and stay in the background because I was scared to be in the forefront and be criticised. I overcame it, though.

**What was your favourite place to be as a child?** Moose Lake with my family.

**What book has impacted you?** I don't really read a lot lately, but *Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh was given to me by a friend and I love it. It talks about how your life came to be and I find it to be really motivational.



# Taking Charge



"I wanted to better my life."

Words spoken by Jeffery Cree, heavy equipment technician apprentice with Syncrude, describe how he felt when signing up for the Syncrude Aboriginal Trades Preparation Program (SATP) through Keyano College. "When the

opportunity arose with the SATP program, I wanted to jump on it as quick as I could."

The 29-week program culminates in a month-long work placement with Syncrude and is designed to give local Aboriginal students the necessary skills and competencies to proceed on an apprenticeship path or into further formal education.

"I wanted to change my life. I had contracting jobs, but they wouldn't last long," says Jeffery, a member of the Fort McMurray #468 First Nation. "My mind was always occupied outside of school with doing math, writing, reading, keeping up with politics and keeping up with science."

The program gives students the opportunity to upgrade their education, explore trades occupations, improve their employability and work readiness skills, learn more about the safety culture and gain work experience.

Jeffery did his job placement with Syncrude, and became a full-time apprentice in the light duty shop, in a position that he enjoys. "I love it. If you pick a trade that you enjoy, you're going to enjoy your life," says Jeffery. "It has benefited and changed my life."

Supervisor James Maynard says that Jeffery works hard and shows interest in the career. "He fits in really well with the group and is eager to learn. He really wants to know what we're doing and why we're doing it."

Jeffery knows of others that see his success as a motivator to take part in the program: "They see this as an opportunity to do well for themselves and live in Fort McMurray. You get your on-the-job training experience with a journeyperson, so you have a feel for what you are doing, and then you go to school to learn even more."

Keyano College has seen applicants apply because of Jeffery's promotion of SATP.

"Most of the Gregoire Lake applicants that I interviewed for entrance into the second cohort said they were applying because they had heard such good things about the program and employment with Syncrude from Jeff," says Janet Lowndes, chair, Aboriginal Education at Keyano College. "He not only promoted application to the program, he maintained contact with second year students throughout their training. He participated in a student-mentor program as a motivational speaker in the classroom and maintained communication with the students throughout their work placements."

"It's up to you," says Jeffery. "If you want to pursue it—if you want to achieve something in your life, you're going to do it and you're going to complete it—that's how I thought of it. I am set now for the rest of my life. It is awesome."

For more information on the SATP program, visit [www.keyano.ca](http://www.keyano.ca).



# From Potential to Prosperity

First Nations want to be fully engaged in employment and economic development opportunities related to resource development in ways that ensure environmental protection and sustainability.

That was a central theme at the International Indigenous Summit on Energy and Mining hosted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) at Niagara Falls, Ontario, earlier this year.

"There will be hundreds of billions of dollars in resource activity in Canada in the coming years and this activity is going to take place in the lands and traditional territories of First Nations," says AFN National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo. "Our people and our governments are and will be central to this work."

He says the summit was about bringing together all the key players to continue to work on developing a national strategy on energy and mining development, promote partnerships and really examine the issues and opportunities facing Indigenous peoples, industry and governments in Canada and around the world.

There were more than 800 delegates from around the world in attendance at the summit, sponsored in part by Syncrude, including Xu Bu, charges d'affaires for the Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China; His Excellency Dr. Georg

Witschel, ambassador for the Federal Republic of Germany; Anthony Hodge, president of the International Council on Mining and Metals; and Glenn Nolan, first vice president of the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada.

The AFN released a discussion paper during the summit entitled *Powering Prosperity—Working to Build on the Potential of Energy Projects and Partnerships*.

"We are starting a dialogue about the future of our peoples, our lands, territories and resources, our governments and our economies," says Chief Atleo. "During the summit, we shared successes and best practices and charted new paths for Indigenous economic development. We also worked to build bridges and partnerships between Indigenous peoples and the industries and governments who need our resources and our co-operation. We want to be partners in prosperity and ensure any development is respectful of our people, our lands and our future generations."

More than \$300 billion in resource development activity is anticipated to occur in First Nations territories, and there are over 150 First Nations communities in Canada that have agreements or Memoranda of Understanding with mining companies, according to information from AFN.

## Quick Facts

Canada's mining sector is the largest industrial employer of Aboriginal people in Canada; almost 5% of the minerals and metals industry workforce is Aboriginal.

About 1,200 Aboriginal communities are located within 200 km of a producing mine or exploration property.

Syncrude has contracts with over 30 Aboriginal-owned businesses and nearly 500 employees have self-identified as Aboriginal.

Source: AFN, NRCAN, Syncrude

National Chief Shawn Atleo (right) speaks with Chinese minister counsellor Xu Bu, deputy ambassador and the charge d'affaires for the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.







# Winter Carnival Turns Up the Heat

**Mushers in the Three Forts Sled Dog Race endured a 176-mile journey, following an old mail delivery route from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan.**



The climate, culture and characters of Wood Buffalo inspired a festival that attracted thousands to events across northeastern Alberta last winter.

Called WinterPlay, the festival occurred over 10 days in late February and early March. “Overall it was a great success,” says Misty Oakes, communications and development director with Events Wood Buffalo. “Frigid weather could not keep our community indoors and we absolutely celebrated the season that defines us.”

Syncrude has supported WinterPlay since its inception in 2008, but stepped up with a three-year, \$100,000 contribution that helped the festival grow with programming in every community—from Fort Chipewyan to Fort McKay to Janvier and Conklin—throughout the region.

There was indeed an endless array of activities, from slow pitch tournaments in the snow to outdoor hockey on the Snye River; from a fireworks display to an international display of ice sculptures; from an indoor midway to a traditional French Canadian maple sugar

party. In addition, the King and Queen of the North competition brought together participants from all over the region to compete for the crowns through traditional activities like snowshoeing, fire making and sawing logs.

But perhaps the main highlight was the Three Forts Sled Dog Race. This 176-mile, four-day sled dog race followed an old mail delivery route from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan with overnight stays in Fort McKay and two other locations. With a \$30,000 purse and an \$8,000 first place prize, the race was unlike any sled dog race seen in the region for over 30 years.

“The Three Forts Sled Dog race witnessed two champions battle it out in a world-class field until Blayne Streeper was eventually crowned the winner at the finish line in Fort Chipewyan,” says Misty.

Claude Giroux, who was executive director of Events Wood Buffalo and oversaw the festival, appreciated the tremendous local support. “Events Wood Buffalo is very thankful for all the sponsors, as well as volunteers, and everyone else who helped make the carnival such a tremendous success. It has been an inspiring event for all of us.”



# Theatre With a Difference



Evergreen Theatre group entertained local school children with their interactive performance about environmental responsibility.



Earlier this year, local youth-turned-sleuths helped solve the mystery of the missing species through a musical performance by Evergreen Theatre.

Called *Lost*, the performance helped students learn about the importance of habitat protection and minimizing environmental impacts via a rapping polar bear and informative frog. At the end, students guessed answers to the mystery, engaging with the concepts in the show as active participants.

“Students walk away from watching a performance of *Lost* understanding the connection between human wants and needs, consumption and the impact on the environment,” explains Evergreen Theatre’s Sean Fraser. “Students learn how specific actions like turning down the heat or turning off the lights can benefit endangered species like the Polar Bear and Whooping Crane.”

Syncrude donated the funds to support performances at schools in Anzac, Conklin and Fort McKay, as well as eight schools in Fort McMurray, including Greely Road School, Dr. K.A. Clark School, Father Turcotte School, Good Shepherd Community School, Beacon Hill School, St. Martha School, St. Gabriel School and Westview School.

---

For more information, visit [www.evergreentheatre.com](http://www.evergreentheatre.com).

## Students Chew on Science



It’s the one time of the year students get to chew gum in school. Fort McKay School held its annual spring Science Fair in April to showcase projects from students in kindergarten to Grade 8.

“Normally they are not allowed gum at school, but one of the Science Fair activities is mixing your own ingredients to make gum,” says Ruth Ryan, principal at Fort McKay. “The Fair is something the kids really look forward to. It’s a really exciting day for them.”

Aboriginal people once used tree sap to make chewing gum. Children created their own at the event, choosing between orange, watermelon and mint flavors.

The Fort McKay Wellness Centre provided a lunch of chili and sandwiches for the students and industry members. “It’s a great event for the whole community, anyone is open to come and see what the kids have created,” says Ruth.

Expressions of surprise, fascination and intrigue were par for the day at the science fair.





# ENVIRONMENT

## New Salvaging Technique Aids Reclamation Efforts

Syncrude scientists have developed a new mulching technique that is dramatically improving reclamation growth and productivity.

Until a few years ago, when land was being prepared for mining activities, the merchantable timber was collected, but the tops and stumps of the trees—coarse woody debris—was then burned and the cover soil salvaged for reclamation projects.

This soil had little to no woody debris, so environmental scientists began to research rough mulching as an alternative.

"Rough mulching allows us to break down the unmerchantable sticks and tree tops into pieces of three-to-six foot sections," says Sylvia Skinner, Syncrude environmental scientist and forester. "This coarse woody debris provides habitat for small animals, provides areas for water to collect, and mitigates erosion effects on new landscapes. We've seen very promising growth of natural vegetation as a result.

"Syncrude was one of the first to take the initiative to do mulching, and now only burns when absolutely necessary. Saving this material is just another way we are helping to speed up the reclamation process and recreate the natural environment as closely as possible," says Sylvia.

**Rough mulching provides habitat for small animals, helps improve water retention and minimizes erosion.**



## Restoring Wetlands

Construction continued in 2011 on the development of a fen wetland in the northwest corner of Syncrude's original east mine.

The 50-hectare Sandhill Fen Watershed project was also seen up close by local Elders as part of Syncrude's annual reclamation tour in September.

Recreating a fen of this size and magnitude has never been attempted before in the world. A team of over 15 researchers and scientists came together to brainstorm the conceptual design.

"Our goal is to construct the initial conditions necessary to develop a self-sustaining fen wetland and its watershed," says Carla Wytrykush, a Syncrude environmental scientist and wetland ecologist. "We also want to better understand how to propagate and plant a variety of shrub species, including blueberry, bearberry and cranberry in the uplands."

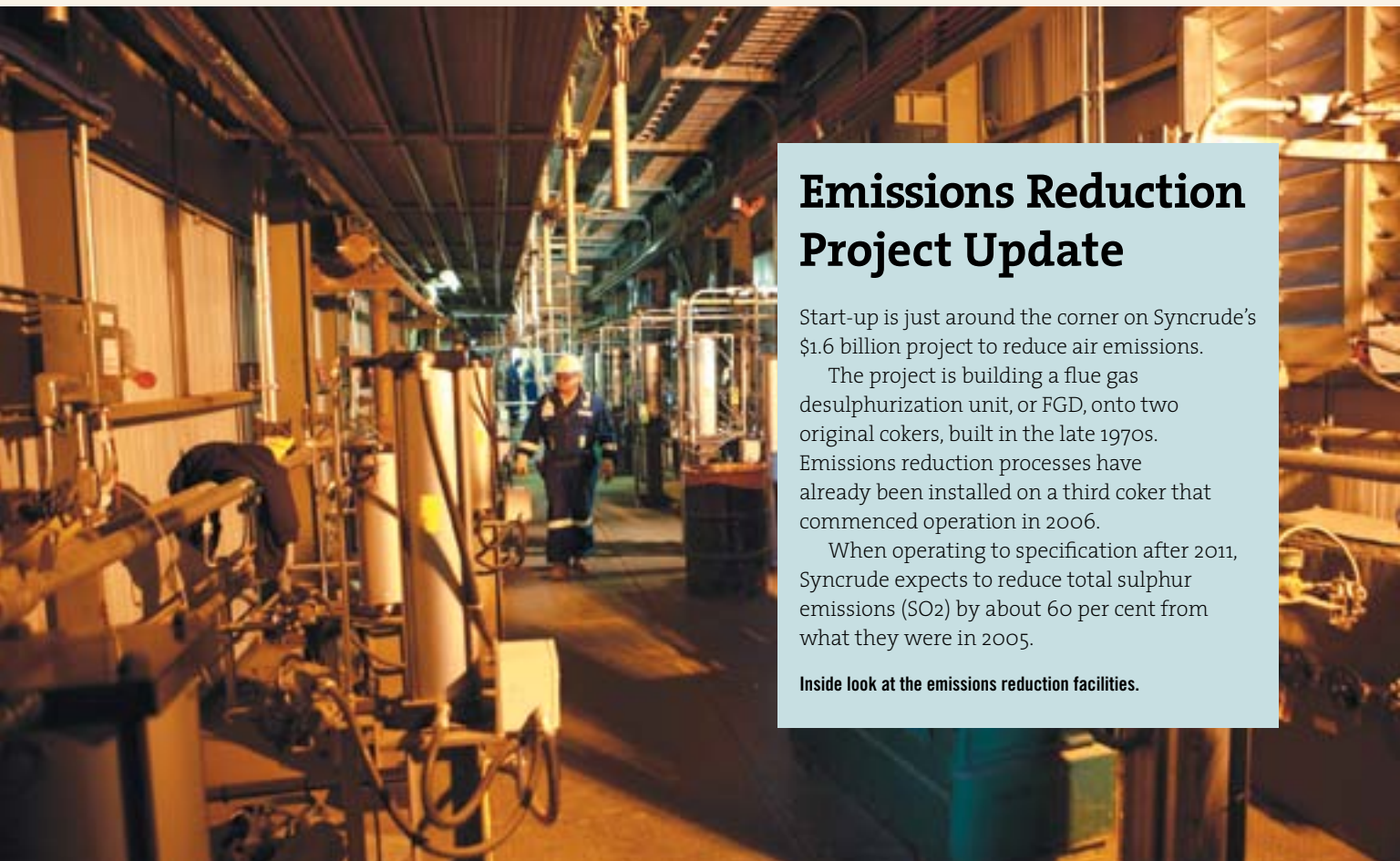
According to Ducks Unlimited, fens are often referred to as "muskeg" and are the most extensive wetlands in the western boreal forest.



Aerial view of fen restoration, July 2011.



# UPDATES



## Emissions Reduction Project Update

Start-up is just around the corner on Syncrude's \$1.6 billion project to reduce air emissions.

The project is building a flue gas desulphurization unit, or FGD, onto two original cokers, built in the late 1970s. Emissions reduction processes have already been installed on a third coker that commenced operation in 2006.

When operating to specification after 2011, Syncrude expects to reduce total sulphur emissions (SO<sub>2</sub>) by about 60 per cent from what they were in 2005.

Inside look at the emissions reduction facilities.



Syncrude wetland ecologist Carla Wytrykush explains to local Elders the efforts underway to reclaim the industry's first fen wetland.



# ENVIRONMENT

## Oil Sands By-Product Tested as Water Filter

"They're as happy as clams in high tide." This is how Syncrude research associate Warren Zubot describes the fish living in tailings pond water that has been filtered through petroleum coke.

any organic material dissolved in the tailings water, making the water colourless and practically particle free," explains Gail.

Last year, Warren and Gail demonstrated how this cleaned process water could support aquatic life. An 80-gallon fish tank was installed at Syncrude's Research facility in Edmonton, and filled with filtered process water. Two Koi fish and two goldfish were then introduced. A year later, the fish have grown from the size of a thumb to the size of a hand. The tank meanwhile provides a healthy environment where the

---

**"Not only does the coke remove naphthenic acids, but virtually any organic material dissolved in the tailings water, making the water colourless and practically particle free."**

---

For the past four years, Warren and engineering associate Gail Buchanan have been researching the use of coke to filter naphthenic acids from process water. "The technology is similar to that of a water filter you'd have at your home," says Warren. "The coke acts as a filter—it cleans the water."

With 30-plus years of experience in water treatment, Warren and Gail have combined their expertise to develop this environmental technology.

"During my work with the Syncrude tailings group, I noticed the tailings water—after it was mixed with coke and pipelined as a slurry to the Mildred Lake Settling Basin—was clear and colourless," says Warren.

What followed was an intense study into understanding what exactly was happening. And the results were intriguing.

"Not only does the coke remove naphthenic acids, but virtually

fish graze on algae growing on rocks and plants in between meals of pellets and flakes. Each week, 15 to 20 percent of the water in the tank is replaced with the filtered tailings water.

The next steps will be to test the water treatment process on a larger scale.

"We will be doing a field pilot program by building a containment area surrounded by dykes and filling with a mixture of coke and tailings water. The water will then flow through the bed of coke towards drains installed at the base so the water will come out the bottom," says Warren, who has received a U.S. patent for this technology. "A major purpose of this pilot program is to understand the field conditions necessary to ensure the water treatment process is operated in the most efficient manner possible."

A demonstration project has shown the viability of treated tailings water to support aquatic life.





# UPDATES

## A New Direction for Tailings Research

Seven heads are better than one. That's the thinking behind a new collaboration amongst Syncrude and other oil sands companies which will foster innovation in tailings research and development.

"We've heard from stakeholders that they would like to see us reclaim tailings faster and we are responding to that," says Syncrude vice-president of Technical Brian Schleckser. "The process is comparable to putting together an Olympic hockey team. We're taking the best from all the clubs and focusing our efforts."

As part of the agreement, each company has pledged to share its existing tailings research and technology and to remove barriers to collaborating on future tailings R&D. Bringing all of the companies' scientific expertise together creates a strong foundation of resources that will lead to improvements in tailings management. This milestone is supported by the Canada Mining Innovation Council, an organization focused on the promotion and implementation of mining-related research to meet the needs of Canada's mining and minerals industries.

The companies have agreed to the following core principles to guide the actions of the research collaboration:

- make tailings technical information more broadly available to the industry members, academia, regulators and others interested in collaborating on tailings solutions;

- collaborate on tailings-related research, development and technology among companies and with research agencies;
- eliminate monetary and intellectual property barriers to the use of knowledge and methods related to tailings technology and research and development; and
- work to develop an appropriate framework so that tailings information is organized, verified through peer review and kept current.

"This is a tremendously positive step for research into improved technology for managing tailings," says Dr. David Lynch, dean of the faculty of engineering at the University of Alberta. "These companies are to be congratulated for their foresight and willingness to work together in this way."

Named the Oil Sands Tailings Consortium (OSTC), the group is led by retired Syncrude research manager Alan Fair. Throughout his career, Alan was involved in many aspects of reclamation, including the development of new tailings technologies.

"Overseeing the direction of the OSTC is an honour," says Alan. "It has been a long held personal desire of mine to see industry come together on tailings research in a truly collaborative way towards improved solutions. Our goal is to develop and deploy tailings solutions faster."

Other companies involved in the OSTC include Canadian Natural Resources, Imperial Oil, Shell Canada, Suncor Energy, Teck Resources and Total E&P Canada.


### OUR COMMITMENT

Syncrude is implementing a multi-pronged approach to manage tailings and comply with the Energy Resources and Conservation Board (ERCB) Directive 074. After 2015, Syncrude's plan will exceed the requirements of the directive.

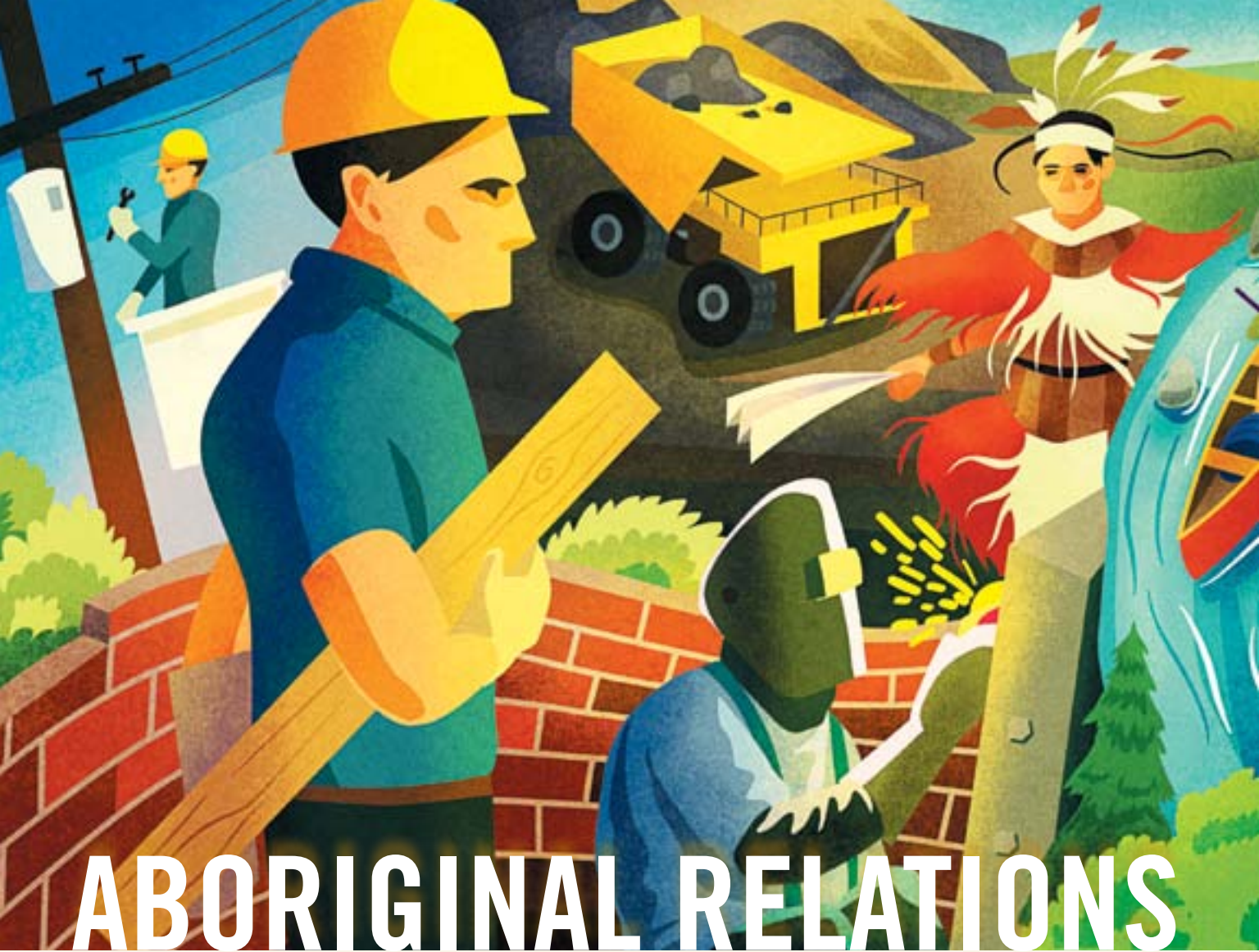
Syncrude's approach involves:

- water capping of fine tails;
- composite tails, which combines fine tails with gypsum and sand (underway in former east mine area); and
- centrifuge, which literally spins the water out of tailings to produce a soft, clay-rich soil material that can be used directly in reclamation.

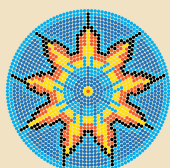
Research continues on additional methods, like thin lift drying and accelerated dewatering.



By putting tailings into a centrifuge, we are able to spin out the water. This results in a clay-rich soil that can be used in reclamation landforms.



# ABORIGINAL RELATIONS



## Employment

	Workforce	Representation in:				Recruitment and Retention		
		Total number	% of total			% of all hires	% rate	Number of years
	Syncrude Direct Aboriginal Workforce	Total Workforce	Administration, Professional and Technical	Trades and Operators	Leadership and Management	Aboriginal New Hires	Aboriginal Attrition Rate	Aboriginal Employee Service
2010	484	8.4	5.4	10.5	5.8	10.4	10.2	9.8
2009	479	8.4	5.9	11.3	5.9	10.8	9.8	9.9
2008	435	8.1	5.5	10.2	5.6	6.7	11.9	10.4
2007	413	8.6	5.3	11.4	6.0	4.6	9.8	10.9
2006	420	9.1	5.2	12.2	6.0	7.3	9.8	10.6

Syncrude hired 59 Aboriginal people in 2010. This represents 10.4% of our overall hiring. Of our total workforce, approximately 8.4% are of self-declared First Nations, Métis or Inuit descent.





# SCORECARD

## Business

### Contracts with Aboriginal Companies

#### Cumulative \$ millions

Direct procurement since 1992



Total Aboriginal business spending for 2010 was \$148 million, the seventh straight year that Syncrude's Aboriginal business volumes have exceeded \$100 million. The cumulative total for Syncrude business with First Nations- and Métis-owned companies since 1992 is now over \$1.5 billion.

#### Our Aboriginal Business Commitment

Syncrude is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to provide products or services to our operations. In evaluating proposals, preference is given first to local Aboriginal businesses if all other factors in a contract are equal. We also encourage other contractors to employ Aboriginal people and sub-contract work to Aboriginal businesses.

## Community

### Investing in Aboriginal Communities

#### \$ millions

Cumulative since 2001



Syncrude invested over \$1 million in Aboriginal initiatives and projects during 2010.

## Environment

### Permanent Land Reclamation

#### Cumulative Hectares



Syncrude has permanently reclaimed over 3,500 hectares to date, with another 1,000 hectares ready for revegetation, and planted over 5.8 million tree and shrub seedlings. Syncrude is responsible for around 75 percent of the reclaimed land in the oil sands mining industry.

## Education

### Interested in a Syncrude Scholarship?

Since starting operations in 1978, Syncrude has provided ongoing financial support towards the educational endeavors of students throughout



the province. Our goal is to continue building on this success and ensure even greater accessibility to financial resources in the future.

Through major endowments at several Alberta education institutions, students are able to access scholarships focused on a variety of fields, including engineering, nursing, education and environmental sciences. For a complete list of available scholarships, please visit [syncrude.ca](http://syncrude.ca) and click on Community-Syncrude Awards and Scholarships. Many of the awards available are prioritized for Aboriginal and northern Alberta recipients.

# Our Aboriginal Relations Program

**Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations program is focused on six key commitment areas: Corporate Leadership, Employment, Business Development, Education and Training, Community Development, and Environment.**

Progress is stewarded by Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations Steering Committee, whose mandate is to ensure that Syncrude delivers on its six key commitment areas. The Committee includes senior managers and advisors from throughout Syncrude who meet monthly to guide and champion strategies to ensure positive outcomes for Aboriginal stakeholders. Our Aboriginal Relations team supports the Committee. They manage the day-to-day interactions and relationships with local stakeholders.

The Aboriginal Relations  
Steering Committee:  
(back row, left to right)  
Kara Flynn  
Donelda Patterson  
Bryan Cheater  
Linda Bucke  
Teena McDonald (secretary)  
(front row, left to right)  
Peter Read  
Steve Jani  
Brian Fairley  
Fred Payne  
Dr. Tom Lawley  
Missing:  
Steve Gaudet  
Robert Hargreaves  
Nonnie Roth



## The Aboriginal Relations Steering Committee

### Bryan Cheater

Manager, Procurement

### Brian Fairley

Vice President, Production

### Kara Flynn

Manager, Public Affairs

### Steve Gaudet

Manager, Environmental Affairs

### Robert Hargreaves

Manager, Facilities

### Dr. Tom Lawley

Chief Medical Officer

### Donelda Patterson

Manager, HR Services

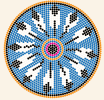
### Fred Payne

Team Leader, Regulatory Affairs

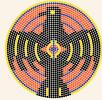
### Peter Read

Manager, Mildred Lake Mining





COMMUNITY



LEADERSHIP



EMPLOYMENT



ENVIRONMENT



BUSINESS



EDUCATION



## Our Aboriginal Relations Team

### **Belinda Gauvreau**

Senior Recruitment  
Representative  
gauvreau.belinda@syncrude.com  
780.790.6123

### **Maggie Grant**

Community Investment  
Specialist  
grant.maggie@syncrude.com  
780.790.6356

### **Steve Jani**

Aboriginal Business Liaison  
jani.steve@syncrude.com  
780.790.6357

### **Nonnie Roth**

Stakeholder Relations Advisor  
roth.nonnie@syncrude.com  
780.790.6408



## A Note from Scott

Thank you for reading *Pathways*. This publication celebrates the significant accomplishments by Aboriginal people in our region, throughout our province and across the country.

I hope *Pathways* also provides insight into Syncrude's relationships with local communities, our commitment to responsible development and—of particular interest to many—our progress in land reclamation.

Oil sands mining operations create a large footprint. This is why reclamation is so important. How we handle our ongoing commitments to reclaim land and manage tailings is the best way to highlight responsible development.

Reclamation activities begin long before a shovel ever hits the ground. Closure plans—developed in consultation with our neighbours—lay out a vision for how we will return the land back to nature. In fact, innovative reclamation techniques are being developed by our teams of engineers, biologists, foresters and researchers in collaboration with scientists from around the world. You can read about some of their advances in this book.

Syncrude has always been an industry leader in land reclamation. We've permanently reclaimed over 3,500 hectares of our lease—with another 1,000 ready for revegetation—and planted more than 5.8 million tree and bush seedlings. It's a good start.

But we cannot rest on our accomplishments. We must continue to treat responsible oil sands development, including reclamation, as an essential part of our business.

Syncrude has been part of the local community for over 30 years, and we'll continue to work hard to live up to your expectations.

Scott Sullivan  
President and CEO

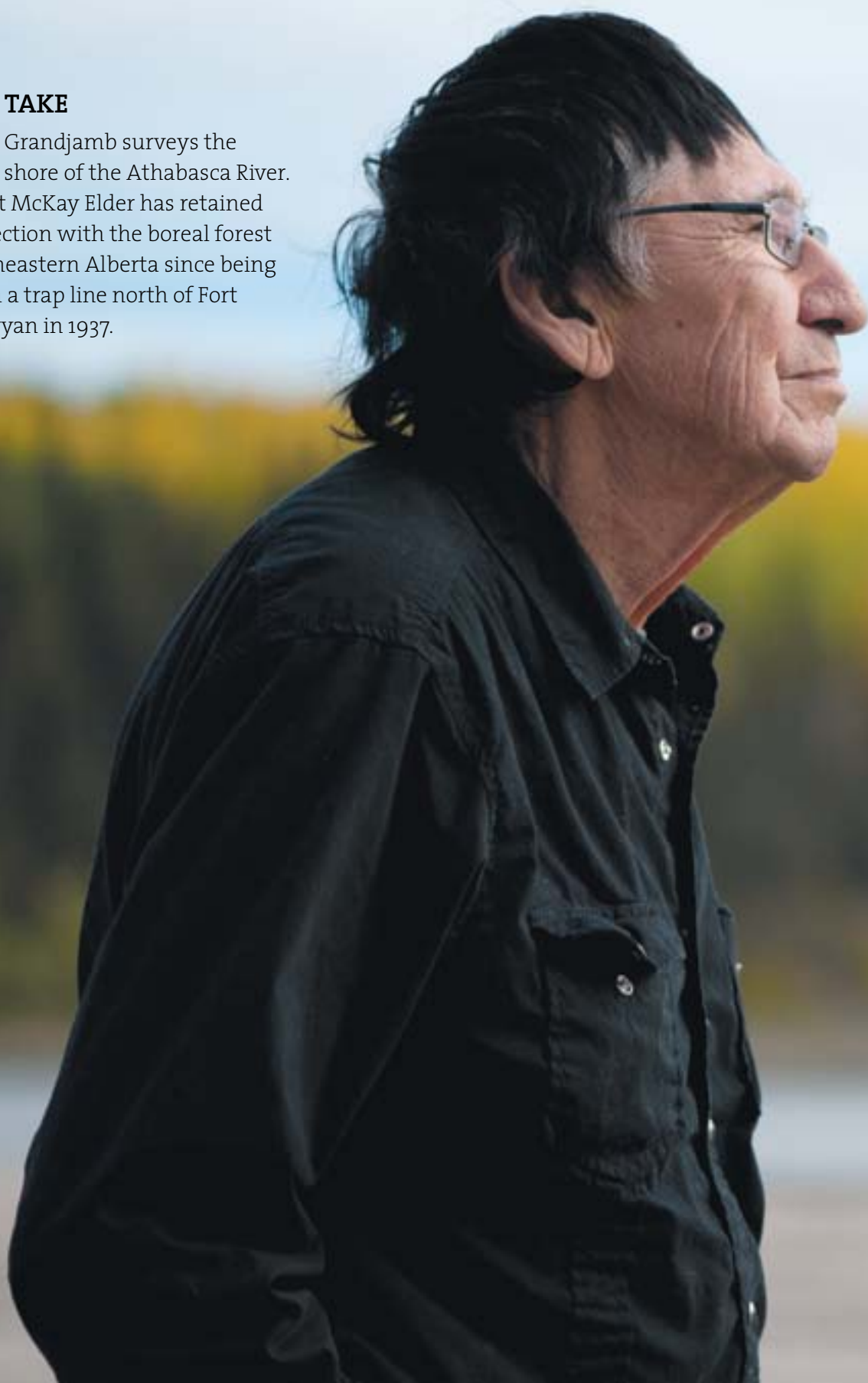


These organizations and initiatives recognize Syncrude for its expressed commitment and comprehensive programs to support Aboriginal people.



## **FINAL TAKE**

Wilfred Grandjamb surveys the eastern shore of the Athabasca River. The Fort McKay Elder has retained a connection with the boreal forest of northeastern Alberta since being born on a trap line north of Fort Chipewyan in 1937.





[www.syncrude.ca](http://www.syncrude.ca)

By choosing 10% Post Consumer Recycled fiber for the Cover and 10% Post Consumer fiber for the Text pages instead of virgin paper for this printed material, the following savings to our natural resources were realized:

Trees Saved: 5      Landfill Reduced: 127 Lbs.  
Water Reduced: 2,091 Gals.      Energy Reduced (000): 1,000 Btu



The Syncrude Project is a joint venture undertaking among Canadian Oil Sands Partnership #1, Imperial Oil Resources, Mocal Energy Limited, Murphy Oil Company Ltd., Nexen Oil Sands Partnership, Sinopec Oil Sands Partnership, and Suncor Energy Oil and Gas Partnership.