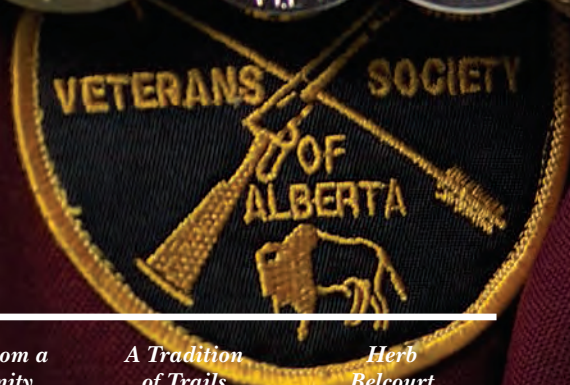


Pathways

ISSUE NO VIII • SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD. ABORIGINAL REVIEW 2017



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Welcome

There are many different pathways to success. It could be sketching a work of art or dog sledding across the Delta. It could be studying for certification, a college diploma or university degree. Or it could be serving your country in times of battle or peace.

There is no end to the remarkable successes and accomplishments among Aboriginal people in the Wood Buffalo region, Alberta and across Canada.

Pathways captures these stories and connects with those making positive contributions, bringing new perspectives to the table and influencing change in our society.

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

THE STORIES in *Pathways* reflect the six key commitment areas of Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations program: Business Development, Community Development, Education and Training, Employment, the Environment, and Corporate Leadership. As a representation of our ongoing work with the local First Nations and Métis communities to create and share opportunity, *Pathways* is one among many initiatives meant to foster dialogue and celebrate shared achievements.

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Francis Pegahmagabow, Ojibwa [Anishnaabe], 1945 Canadian Museum of History, 95253



BUSINESS

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



EMPLOYMENT

As one of the largest employers of Indigenous people in Canada, Syncrude's goal is to create opportunities that enable First Nations, Métis and Inuit people to fully participate in all aspects of our operation.



COMMUNITY

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



ENVIRONMENT

We work with local Aboriginal communities on such matters as end-land use and how we can minimize the long-term impacts of our operations on traditional land uses.



EDUCATION

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



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 Indigenous people across the country.

YOUR THOUGHTS

Through *Pathways*, we hope to bring you inspiring stories that capture the heart, spirit and success of Aboriginal people and communities. We invite you to share your opinion and tell us how we're doing. www.syncrude.ca/pwfeedback

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Honouring the extraordinary contributions of Indigenous veterans.



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SUPER HEROES

For over a century, thousands of Canadian Indigenous men and women have responded to the call of duty. Their stories reveal inspiring portraits of remarkable achievement and extraordinary contributions.



These days, heroes are found flying across movie screens, battling aliens in video games, and punching out villains in the pages of comic books. But in reality, heroes have been defending our freedoms for a very long time.

"Zinging bullets, the crashing sounds of cannon-fire, muddy trenches, miles of barbed wire and bodies strewn across the landscape; war is indeed little more than hell on earth," assures 83-year-old veteran John McDonald. "Over the years I have spoken with and worked with many Indigenous veterans. Those who made it back from the wars were proud of their participation, sorry for the losses of their friends and fellow soldiers, and all with words that praised the comfort of peace and offered prayers that the world would see no more war."

Recipient of the Canadian Forces Decoration with two bars, McDonald served for 31 years as a member of the Royal Canadian Artillery and Royal Canadian Electrical Mechanical Engineers, and another eight as a Reservist. Today, as the president of the Aboriginal Veterans Society of Alberta, he assists those in need in addition to being a recruitment coordinator with the Canadian Forces' Bold Eagle Program (see sidebar).

"Indigenous people who served their country did so for a variety of reasons," explains McDonald. "Some just wanted the opportunity to participate, to work, to leave the reserves they felt trapped on. Others wanted to honour their ancestors and to follow in the footsteps of their uncles, fathers and grandfathers. Indigenous people proved to be natural soldiers – they were skilled shooters, stealthy movers, experts at camouflage and fearless fighters."

Indeed, for more than a century, thousands of Canadian Indigenous soldiers, sailors and air force members have participated in conflicts across the globe, including the Boer War, World War I and II, and the Korean War. They have also been among the most celebrated.

During World War I, Indigenous soldiers earned at least 50 decorations for bravery. Among them was Private George McLean, a member of British Columbia's Head of the Lake Band, who fought at the Battle of Vimy Ridge in the 54th Kootenay Battalion. The book, *Native Soldiers: Foreign Battlefields*, notes: "Single-handed he captured 19 prisoners, and later when attacked by five more (enemy soldiers) who attempted to reach a machine gun, he was able – although

wounded – to dispose of them unaided, thus saving a large number of casualties."

Others include Henry Louis Norwest, an Alberta Métis soldier and one of the most famous snipers of the entire Canadian Corps. He held a divisional record of 115 fatal shots and was awarded the Military Medal and bar for his courage under fire. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa from Ontario, was another top sniper and to this day remains Canada's most decorated Indigenous soldier.

World War II also witnessed extraordinary feats of courage and stealth. A member of the Brokenhead Band in Manitoba and descendant of Saulteaux Chief Peguis, Tommy Prince was recruited into the 1st Special Service Force (1st SSF), a renowned assault team known by the enemy as the "Devil's Brigade." As the Canadian Encyclopedia recounts:

"Prince distinguished himself with the 1st SSF in Italy and France, using the skills he'd learned growing up on the reserve... In February 1944, he volunteered to run a communication line 1,400 metres out to an abandoned farmhouse that sat just 200 metres from a German artillery position. He set up an observation post in the farmhouse and for three days reported on German movements via a communication wire.

When the wire was severed during shelling, he disguised himself as a peasant farmer and pretended to work the land around the farmhouse. He stooped to tie his shoes and fixed the wire while German soldiers watched, oblivious to his true identity. At one point, he shook his fist at the Germans, and then at the Allies, pretending to be disgusted with both. His actions resulted in the destruction of four German tanks that had been firing on Allied troops.

In France in the summer of 1944, Prince endured a gruelling trek across rugged terrain to locate an enemy camp. He travelled without food or water for 72 hours. He returned to the Allied position and led his brigade to the German encampment, resulting in the capture of more than 1,000 German soldiers."

For his selfless acts, Prince was decorated with the Military Medal



Indigenous people proved to be natural soldiers – they were skilled shooters, stealthy movers, experts at camouflage and fearless fighters.”

John McDonald

cont.

one BOLD IDEA

A Canadian Armed Forces initiative is transforming lives and opening the doors to a military career for many young men and women.

Each summer, Indigenous youth from across Western Canada and northwestern Ontario travel to CFB Wainwright to participate in the Bold Eagle summer employment program. Taught by professional soldiers, the program helps to develop physical fitness, self-discipline, self-confidence, teamwork and leadership skills. It includes a four-day cultural camp, administered by First Nations and Métis Elders, followed by a five-week basic military qualification course.

"Many Bold Eagle applicants have never been off the reserve, never been to a major city," says program recruitment coordinator and Indigenous veteran John McDonald. "And then we have applicants from the cities who've also never experienced this type of program or the military-style training it embraces. The cultural camp eases the transition."

There's perhaps nothing a military veteran likes more than seeing the next generation take up the call and explore the possibilities of serving their country. In addition to traditional combat roles, recruits can pursue careers in engineering, telecommunications, health care and advanced equipment technical support.

"When I joined the Aboriginal forces as a civilian, our job was to find ways to help make life a little easier for the serving Aboriginal servicemen," says McDonald. "Fortunately, we had a lot of wisdom because there were a lot of Elders in that group. One of the goals was to find opportunity for Aboriginal youth and to encourage Aboriginal youth to consider military careers. That's how the Bold Eagle program came about."

Since its inception in 1989, the Bold Eagle program has hosted over 1,300 youth.



PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Sgt. Tommy Prince, Archives of Manitoba, Personalities – Prince, Tommy 1, 14 October 1952, N197.

Cpl. Francis Pegahmagabow, Ojibwa [Anishnaabe], 1945 Canadian Museum of History, 95293.

Pvt. George McLean.

personally by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. He enlisted again in the Korean War and, as a member of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, was awarded the United States Presidential Unit Citation for distinguished service. He would also personally receive Korean, Canadian Volunteer Service and United Nations Service medals.

"Indigenous soldiers," observes Métis Elder and 37-year veteran Don Langford, "were elite fighters throughout the various wars and conflicts they've participated in. More important is that they returned home with a great deal of knowledge and leadership abilities."

Some of these include Sam Sinclair who played a major role in developing the Métis Nation of Alberta, Stan Shank who helped create Native Counselling Services and the Canadian Native Friendship Centres, Vic Letendre who developed the Native Youth Justice Society, and Lt. David Greyeyes who returned home to become Chief of his Band, a director with Indian Affairs and a Member of the Order of Canada. As Langford notes, "The list goes on."

Langford, the executive director of Edmonton-based Métis Child and Family Services, himself served in five different Canadian Forces bases as well as in Germany. He was one of about 30 serving members who lobbied for greater Indigenous rights and to create opportunities for young Indigenous Canadians in the military.

"It was about 16 years ago when Canada's Armed Forces recognized the contributions by Aboriginal soldiers, sailors and airmen," says Langford. "They now allow First Nations servicemen to wear their braids and, more recently, the Métis to wear their sashes. Aboriginal veterans are also allowed to wear their Aboriginal War Medal, which was created about a decade ago."

The actual number of Indigenous Canadians who participated in the two World War campaigns is not actually known. Accurate records weren't kept and many Indigenous peoples, including the Métis and the Inuit who were not included in the Indian Act, didn't qualify for the tally sheets that included First Nations soldiers. The number however was high. During the First World War alone, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, one in three Indigenous men who were

of age to serve enlisted to defend their country.

Today, members of Canada's Armed Forces continue to protect the nation's interests, and are involved in everything from territorial surveillance and assisting with natural disasters to serving as peacekeepers and providing humanitarian assistance. Indeed, there is no reason to search for a hero. We simply need to look around us.

“

Indigenous soldiers were elite fighters throughout the various wars and conflicts they've participated in. More important is that they returned home with a great deal of knowledge and leadership abilities.”

Don Langford



be attached to the U.S. Army Air Corps, H.Q. 8 Bomber
Command, T.A.P. w.e.f. 31 Oct 42 for a provisional period
one month. Might they be instructed to report to the
S.O.2 (M.O. & I. Section) at 1400 hrs on Saturday 31 Oct 42
with full Home Service Scale 1 of clothing and equipment.

L.8791	Pte	John D.	1 C.M.G.R.U., S.L.I.
L.27346	L/Cpl	Dreaver P.M.	Regina Rifle Regt.
H.17725	Pte	Stevenson W.	P.P.C.L.I.
L.21038	Pte	Greyeyes W.R.	8 Gen Hosp R.C.A.M.C.
L.64832	Pte	Laplante R.H.	1 C.M.G.R.U. S.L.I.
M.50681	Pte	Tomkins C.M.	9 Non Div Ord W/S R.C.O.C.
L.8142	Pte	McLeod, J.M.	3 Cdn Div Amn Coy, R.C.A.S.C.
L.8163	A/L/Cpl	Favel H.	41 Gen Trans Coy, R.C.A.S.C.
L.9725	Pte	Fiddler A.	1 A.S.C.R.U., R.C.A.S.C.
M.17318	Tpr	Belrose P.J.	2 Armd Regt L.S.H. (R.C.)
M.16097	Tpr	Beaudry R.W.	4 Cdn Recce Bn (4 P.L.D.G.)
L.53297	Tpr	Poitras J.A.	1 C.A.C.R.U.
H.67015	Gnr	Chevillard H.J.	2 C.A.R.U.
L.64512	Tpr	Cappo J.J.	1 C.A.C.R.U.



Some of Canada's most valuable contributions during the Second World War weren't made in a factory or carried over a soldier's back. One, however, was a closely held government secret that until only recently was allowed to be revealed.

"He was very devoted to his country, so much so that he kept a wartime secret for more than 45 years," explains 83 year old Canadian Forces veteran James 'Smokey' Tomkins, referring to his older brother Charles 'Checker' Tomkins. Checker was one of a handful of Canadian soldiers who helped develop a secret Cree code for transmitting important logistical messages to and from the aerodromes during the war in Europe.

"I didn't know about the role he played in the war; he was sworn to secrecy and never spoke of it," explains Smokey. Checker remained silent until 1992, shortly after the release of the movie *Windtalkers*, a film that details

the exploits of U.S. Navajo code talkers, was released.

"I didn't believe him," Smokey laughs, "because we were close and he'd never said a word about it before then. He loved the army and was a very loyal soldier."

Checker was one of the estimated over 3,000 Indigenous people who enlisted when Canada declared war on Germany. While no soldier knew what was in store for them on the front lines, the farthest from anyone's mind would have been participating in a top secret mission.

"Checker told me he was having dinner and talking with others in the Cree language when he was approached by an American army officer who wanted to know what language they were speaking," explains Smokey. "My brother told him and away he went. The next thing Checker knew he and other Indigenous soldiers on the base who spoke different languages were asked to meet in a nearby hangar."

About 600 soldiers met that day and were divided into different language groups.

"These groups," notes Smokey, "included Ojibwa, Algonquin, Mohawk, Saulteaux, Cree and even some of the Salish language speakers. They were put in separate rooms, each with a microphone and a sheet of paper with terms and words on them. They were asked to translate the English on the sheets into their native tongues. When it was all over, the Cree language prevailed and the Cree Code Talkers unit was established. They were sent out to the different bases in England and were eventually attached to the American Air Force."

Cree code talkers, along with their Native American counterparts, were credited as playing integral roles in winning the war. When Checker returned home, he re signed with the Canadian Army and served for another 25 years. "I am a Métis, half English and Cree Indian," said Checker

CANADA'S SECRET WEAPON

in a 2003 interview captured on a Smithsonian Institute recording. "I love my country and I've done everything they've asked me to do."

In 2016, the contributions of Checker and his fellow code talkers were honoured in a short documentary film directed and co-produced by Checker's distant cousin Alexandra Lazarowich, along with co-producer Cowboy Smithx. The film, *Cree Code Talker*, debuted at the Edmonton International Film Festival, supported in part by Syncrude.

"We decided to make this film," explains Alexandra, "because we thought it was important to share Charles' and the many other Cree code talkers' story. It was important for the film to also be told from an Indigenous perspective."

She hopes the film will create further awareness of the role Aboriginal veterans played in world history. "We want justice for them. That's what we

want to do with this film," she says. "In my secret heart of hearts I'm hoping to get congressional medals for them."

As an Indigenous filmmaker, Alexandra also feels a responsibility to share these stories. "I want to honour our communities, our people, our land and our history. The film is also a poem to the Grouard, Alberta, area where my family and Charles' family is from."

In addition to Checker and Smokey, the Tomkins family were well respected throughout Alberta and the nation. Their father Peter was one of the founding members of the Métis Nation and their grandfather, Peter Sr., was the deputy district grand master of the Masonic Lodge.



Above: Frank Tomkins (left) and James 'Smokey' Tomkins in the documentary film *Cree Code Talker*. Page opposite: Charles 'Checker' Tomkins.

Checker passed away in 2003. Smokey, who was just seven years old when the war began, joined the army in 1954 and retired in 1975 after 22 years of service. Formerly a resident of Fort McMurray, he currently lives in Westlock, Alberta.

“

**Throughout her
life she fought for
equality and
for the rights of
Indigenous women.**

Gail Gallupe



BATTLE FOR JUSTICE

”



Her dedication as a physical trainer and drill instructor at military bases across the country during the Second World War earned Bertha Clark-Jones the admiration of everyone who knew her. Yet the toughest battles for this esteemed Canadian Air Force sergeant didn't occur on the beaches of Normandy or in the skies over the North Atlantic, but here at home.

With an honourable discharge after the war, the respected veteran returned to the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement where she was raised, lifted by the hopes of starting anew. But, for Bertha, the road ahead didn't prove to be as easy as it was for others.

“As a veteran she was entitled to a section of land but was truly dismayed when she learned that because she was a woman she could not own land on the settlement,” says Gail Gallupe, one of Bertha's three daughters and currently the President of Fort McMurray's Métis Local 1935. “She didn't go overseas to fight in the battles but she did serve her country in meaningful ways and wasn't pleased to learn

that she was being treated as an inferior person. It was then that she decided to take a stance and throughout the rest of her life she fought for equality and for the rights of Indigenous women.”

Bertha successfully lobbied for her rights and was eventually offered land in nearby Hawk Hills. She would soon marry friend and fellow veteran George Clark, and settled down to raise a family. The fifth of 14 children, Bertha was familiar with large families and eventually raised nine of her own.

Moving to Fort McMurray in 1960, Bertha became involved in the local Aboriginal Friendship Centre and over the years worked as a school bus driver, cook, hairdresser and telephone operator. Eight years after she arrived, her legacy started to take shape when she founded the Voice of Alberta Native Women's Society to bring attention to wide-ranging social issues. Then, in 1974, she co-founded and became the first president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, an organization that today continues to support the social, economic, political and cultural well-being of

Indigenous women across the country.

Bertha's contributions were widely acclaimed. She was named an Officer of the Order of Canada, recognized with an Indspire Lifetime Achievement Award and both a Diamond Jubilee and Queen's Golden Jubilee Award, and inducted into the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women's Esquao Circle of Honour.

“My mother was a strong, hardworking Métis woman, an advocate for the underdog, an accomplished speaker who was loyal to her country, dedicated to her family and always willing to share the credit when acclamations were bestowed upon her,” says Gail.

George passed away in 1978 and Bertha later remarried to Allan Jones. In 2014, just shy of her 91st birthday, Bertha too would pass, but not before leaving a lasting impact throughout Canadian society. As she would say in a video produced to recognize her Indspire Lifetime Achievement Award, “If I feel something, I have to act on it... I just have to act on it.”



LEFT TO RIGHT – Bill Loutitt, John Grant

COMMUNITY OF

LEFT TO RIGHT – Harvey Sykes, David Waniandy





He said, ‘You fight for your country.’
And that was it.”

T

he Métis of Fort McMurray have a proud and distinguished history of military service.

Like many others in Fort McMurray’s Métis community, Gordon ‘Gordie’ White felt the duty to serve at a time of war. Unlike his father or older brothers, Gordie’s service took him to the United States Marine Corps and then Vietnam.

Born in 1945, Gordie grew up listening to stories about his father Henry’s service with Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry – Calgary Highlanders. His brothers Lawrence and John enlisted to go to Korea while his brother Russell served in Canada and as a peacekeeper in Cyprus with the Royal Canadian Signal Corps.

The Vietnam War captured Gordie’s attention while he was

warriors,” Linda says. “It’s important for others to know the sacrifices made by these men and the community as a whole.”

Elder Bill Loutitt says the Métis community always answered the call of its nation during times of war.

“It didn’t just happen here. There’s a place called Cumberland House in northeastern Saskatchewan and these guys all had to walk a long way to enlist and the recruiters finally said, ‘We can’t take any more of you.’ They were worried about not having any men in the community,” Bill says. “We’ve always been very patriotic and proud to be Canadian. And part of that is being willing to serve.”

Many of the traditional skills learned from hunting, trapping and living outdoors transferred naturally to the battlefield. “Going into the service was an outlet for my father, my uncle

says Harvey Sykes, whose father, Thomas A. (Tony) Sykes, served in the Calgary Hussars as part of a tank crew in World War II. “He went across and saw action in Holland, Belgium, France and Germany. He told me a couple of stories while we were on our family’s trapline near Cheecham, about 40 miles south of McMurray. But when you hear those experiences, you understand why they don’t like to talk about it.”

Despite making enormous sacrifices for their country, the contributions of Métis and other Indigenous veterans are only now starting to be recognized. “Métis were overrepresented and under-recognized,” says Linda. The Métis Nation of Alberta is currently gathering material to prepare a memorial for veterans. Harvey, who has served as the flagbearer for

WARRIORS

working on construction of the Great Canadian Oil Sands site in the mid-1960s. “He followed the Vietnam War on the radio – we didn’t have television in McMurray back then. He talked about getting involved and I was concerned – I didn’t want him to go. We all tried to talk him out of it,” says his sister Linda Boudreau-Semaganis. “Gordie told me, ‘I could die outside the Oil Can. I want to do something to better the world. If I have to die, I’m dying with honour.’”

After completing boot camp at the famed Marine Corps Base at Camp Pendleton near San Diego, he returned briefly to Fort McMurray. “He was a boy when he left and a man when he came back. I was so proud of him. We all were.”

Gordie soon shipped out for his first tour of Vietnam in September 1968. He was killed in action on March 12th, 1969.

Gordie was the latest in a long line of members of Fort McMurray’s Métis community who served in the military and saw combat. “We are a family of warriors in a community of

Peter and their cousins Andrew and Colin Loutitt from Fort Chipewyan, who all served in the Second World War,” Bill says. “They found something they were good at.”

David Waniandy agrees. His uncles Wally and Jimmy both served in the Korean War. “Wally went because there was nothing of work value around here and he wanted to contribute. He had a lot of energy and wanted to go out and contribute,” he says.

Patriotism was also important for John Grant’s father, Robert, who enlisted in the Edmonton Fusiliers and saw action in the Netherlands.

“He said, ‘You fight for your country.’ And that was it. He didn’t talk much about the bad things. People don’t talk about combat and he lost a lot of friends. He talked about the good things,” John says.

Most veterans didn’t share stories with their wives or children about their wartime experiences, which means some of that history is lost.

“He didn’t like talking about it – they went through hell over there,”

Canada Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies in Fort McMurray, would also like to see the Métis flag – which first flew in 1816 during the Battle of Seven Oaks – included.

“I can still walk so I’ll be happy to be a flag bearer for the Métis flag,” Harvey says.

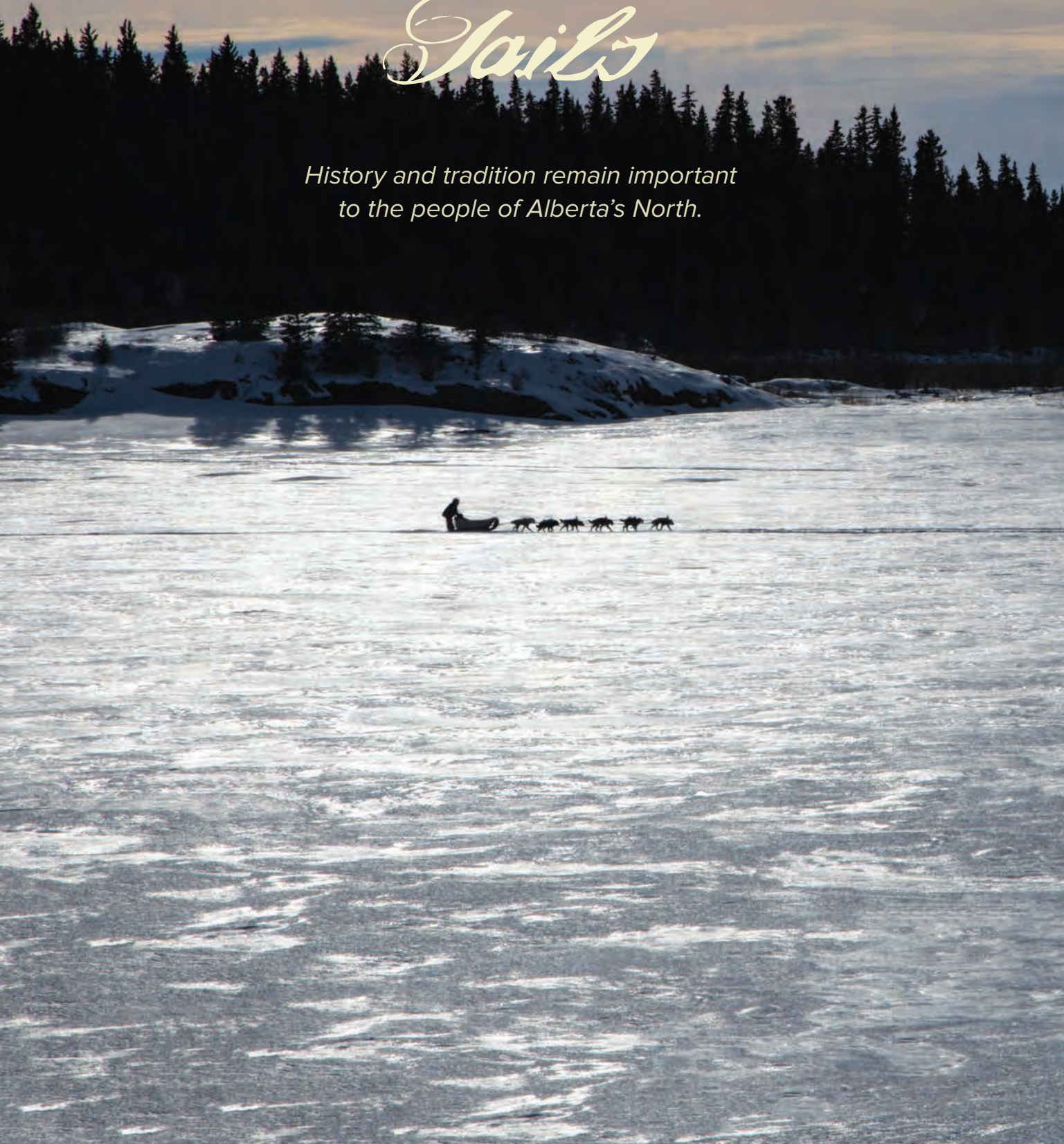
Recognition is important for Bill to help the younger generations who have been largely untouched by war understand the sacrifices made by their forefathers. “Recognizing the Métis contribution in wartime would tell a better story to the younger generation.”

And Linda sees wisdom in sharing the story of the sacrifices of her brother and other veterans with young people in her community.

“We have a lot to confront as a community with so many pointless deaths,” she says. “Gordie didn’t die a meaningless death. He sacrificed his life in service of others. As a young woman, I didn’t understand what I do today as an Elder. And I share his story with young people because I think it’s a message they can use today.”

Of Trails and Sails

*History and tradition remain important
to the people of Alberta's North.*



ROBERT GRANDJAMBE WOULD PROBABLY BE JUST AS HAPPY LIVING IN 1817 AS HE IS IN 2017. THAT'S BECAUSE ROBERT AND HIS WIFE, BARBARA, LIVE COMFORTABLY OFF THE LAND AND WATER IN ALBERTA'S OLDEST COMMUNITY, FORT CHIPEWYAN.

“I fish to feed my family and sled dogs, I hunt and trap for food to eat and pelts to sell, and I offer sled dog tours the traditional way... one line of dogs, not two,” says Robert. “In this area, sleds were pulled by dogs in a single line because it’s easier to maneuver through the trees and bush.”

Robert and Barbara’s company, Atim Ostogwan (Doghead), also offers summer boat tours throughout the

Delta and Lake Athabasca. Here, visitors experience a landscape of vast beauty steeped in Canadian history.

The area became key during the early fur trade when, in 1778, a trapper named Peter Pond entered the Athabasca district and established Pond’s Fur Trading Post. A decade later, Roderick Mackenzie relocated Pond’s house to the south shore of Lake Athabasca and — *cont.*



Thank you to the Fort Chipewyan Historical Society for their assistance with this story.

renamed it Fort Chipewyan. In 1798, it was moved to its present-day location on the north shore. Fort Chipewyan was essential to the North West Fur Trading Company and the launching point of Alexander Mackenzie's voyage of discovery to the Arctic Ocean. From here, he attempted to find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean because it was believed the ocean was only 150 miles west based on Pond's map of the area.

In the 1790s, Fort Chipewyan boasted a general store, fur store and a library, built by Roderick Mackenzie, that grew to hold more than 2,000 books. The hamlet's population today hovers around 1,000 with all the amenities of a modern-day town including internet, cable television, airport, skating rink and indoor swimming pool.

Robert and Barbara delight in sharing this rich history with guests who come to their home, a small bungalow simply decorated with family pictures adorning the walls. The coffee pot is always on and the aroma of fresh baked buns emanates from the kitchen where the couple love to sit and reminisce.

They raised three children and now have two grandchildren to whom they pass down stories and traditions. "As a parent, you try to give your children the best you can, give them the tools to take care of themselves. It's irresponsible to not give your kids the best education possible and a historical perspective of where they came from."



Barbara and Robert Grandjambe outside their home in Fort Chipewyan.





PHOTO LEFT: Traditionally patterned, hand embroidered clothing and dog harnesses are still used on the Grandjambé sled.



PHOTOS LEFT: Robert and the newest addition to the team. A colourful blur in the winter landscape, the team heads out.



It's a surprisingly smooth and quiet ride standing on the back of the sled as a team of powerful dogs pulls you through the boreal forest of northern Alberta or across the frozen rivers and lakes. The silence is deafening as crisp snow crunches mere centimetres below your feet.

Shout "Eu!" and the lead dog veers to the left. Yell "Cha!" and the dog turns to the right. "Your lead dog has to be smart and obey your commands," says Robert who prefers to use the Cree language when mushing. "I don't care if it doesn't pull much, that's the job of the other dogs hooked to the sled. But your lead dog has to know where you want to go. The other dogs will follow."

As hard as it must be to pull a sled that weighs several hundred kilograms, you can tell the dogs love it. It's as though they are laughing like school children playing tag during recess.

Robert has come a long way from his more rebellious youth. "I lived with my grandparents about 50 miles out on the trapline. I'm proud of my time with them. They taught me to be calm, and about respect, caring, and sharing with others."

— cont.

When he was five, he moved into Fort Chipewyan and went to residential school. "I liked it. But I must have been hard to handle because I was kicked out when I was 12," he laughs.

However, it wasn't a laughing matter when he was told to leave. "I asked them, 'Where am I supposed to live?', and was told 'I don't know, but not here.' I ended up working odd jobs and living with different relatives."

In the 1980s, he started making a modest living by giving dog sled tours and hasn't stopped. For more than 35 years, Robert and Barbara have welcomed people from all over the world into their home and they take the opportunity to pass on a historical perspective of life in the North. This even includes teaching various arts and crafts.

Their guest list reads like a world map and includes people from as close as Fort McMurray and as far away as Europe. "We hosted the Prince of Norway here a few years ago," says Barbara.

Their guest book is full of comments like: 'Had a great weekend getting a glimpse of northern life.'; 'Gracious and generous hosts.'; 'You're a great inspiration.'; 'You are a wealth of information on the history and area.'

Last fall, Robert underwent triple bypass heart surgery which may have slowed him down a little, but hasn't stopped him. "I still need to make money to live. But I have to take it easy, so now instead of me taking guests out on the dog sled, I teach them how to and I follow behind on the snowmobile."

That's not to say he doesn't run the dogs for himself anymore. In fact, Robert has challenged his son and namesake to a trapping competition. "I'll use my dogs and sled and he can use a modern day snowmobile to check his trap lines for muskrat and other small fur bearing animals. And, at the end of the season, we'll see who makes a bigger profit once all the expenses are added up. A snowmobile may be faster, but it's also noisier. Dogs are quieter so you don't scare away the animals you're trying to trap."

No matter who wins, the challenge offers Robert a lifestyle not too unlike that enjoyed by the area's earliest inhabitants and fur traders centuries ago.





PHOTO ABOVE: In Cree, Robert yells "Cha!" which instructs the lead dog to turn right.



PHOTO LEFT: Frozen wetlands around Fort Chipewyan. RIGHT: The catch of the day, Northern Pike.





ENDURANCE, LOYALTY & INTELLIGENCE

A Brief History of Dog Sledding in The North



Dogs are commonly referred to as man's best friends, although this relationship has not always been based purely on companionship. For many years, the relationship between humans and dogs was about survival.

In Canada, Indigenous people were the first to domesticate dogs. They served many purposes for families and communities including hunting and protection, but mainly as transportation by way of sled. Many researchers suggest that without dog sledding, survival may not have always been possible in some northern Canadian communities because of harsh winter climates.

"Dog sledding was a common means of transportation in the region since the 1870s and was an important part of development and growth," says Susan Walker of the Fort McMurray Heritage Society. "It was the best way to travel on frozen rivers and through dense woods. Clergy, fur trappers, fur traders and RCMP also used dog sledding as transportation during the winter months and, until 1930, it was how mail was delivered in the region."

Nowadays, with snowmobiles and other forms of winter transportation readily available, the need for dog sledding has decreased. Dog sledding, or mushing, now thrives as a popular winter sport and hobby.

The Yukon Quest 1,000 Mile International Sled Dog Race, which gets its name from "the highway of the north", is one of the world's most popular dog sled races. The first race took place in 1984, with 26 teams leaving from Fairbanks, Alaska. Twenty teams made it to the Whitehorse finish line over the following 16 days, while the other teams dropped out along the way. The race has since continued each year, testing mushers and their dogs to the ultimate limit in the coldest and most unpredictable weather and along dangerous terrain.



2

1 Man helping his Husky dog team jump across an open channel of water on ice at Taloyoak, Nunavut. (Richard Harrington, Library and Archives Canada, PA-129590).

2 From the McKenzie River - (Trapper, Dogteam, and sled). (Library and Archives Canada, PA-011706).

3 Log cabin and dog team, Fort McMurray. (Archie McMullen, Provincial Archives of Alberta, A11991).



4

4 Dog Corrals, RCMP detachment, Ft. Chipewyan. (Harold Routledge, Provincial Archives of Alberta, A17137).

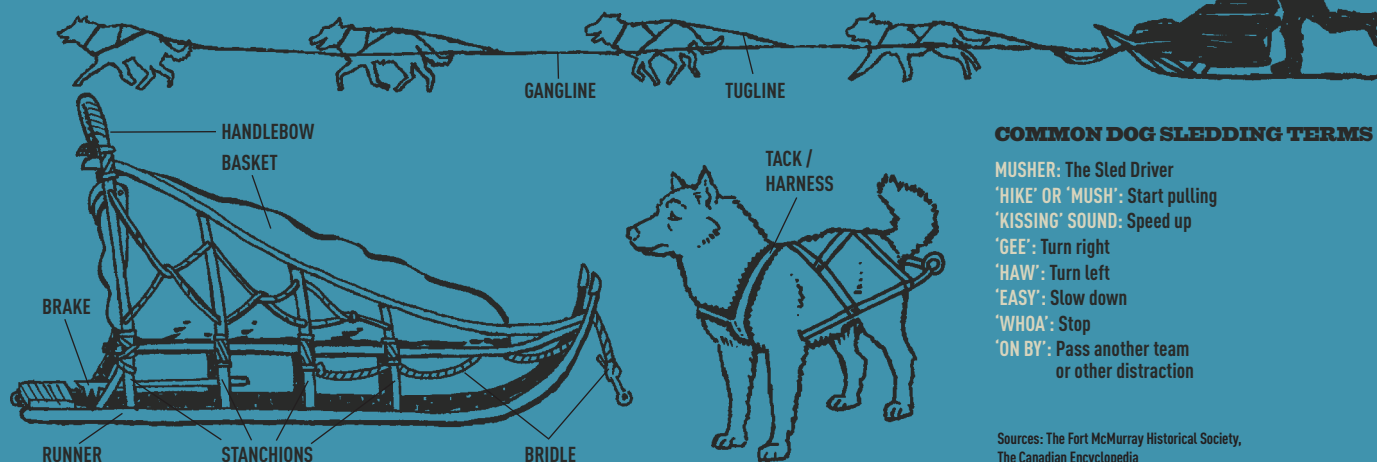
LEAD DOG Typically noted for a high level of intelligence and commonly female. Applies the musher's commands and ensures correct direction.

POINT DOG Often leaders in training other dogs. They ensure the team follows turns initiated by the lead dog.

SWING DOG Pulls the sled and helps to maintain speed.

WHEEL DOG Typically the strongest and heaviest dog who plays the crucial role of pulling and steering the sled.

BASKET SLED Light and maneuverable, carrying gear raised off the ground.



COMMON DOG SLEDDING TERMS

MUSHER: The Sled Driver
'HIKE' OR 'MUSH': Start pulling
'KISSING' SOUND: Speed up
'GEE': Turn right
'HAW': Turn left
'EASY': Slow down
'WHOA': Stop
'ON BY': Pass another team or other distraction

Sources: The Fort McMurray Historical Society,
 The Canadian Encyclopedia



Herb Belcourt remembered as an entrepreneur and philanthropist who inspired a generation.

DREAM WEAVER

Humble beginnings can oftentimes be the engine that drives the very greatest of achievements. And perhaps no better example can be found than in Métis Elder Herb Belcourt. His desire to help others when he was young would lead him through a lifetime of service to the community and recognition across the country.



Lesley and Herb Belcourt

My greatest achievement, I think, was being involved in the creation of the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards program. It has made a tremendous and positive impact on our people.

Herb passed away at his Sherwood Park home this past July, just one day shy of his 86th birthday. A couple weeks later, a capacity crowd would gather at Festival Place to participate in a celebration of his life. Those attending had been asked to avoid wearing black and instead encouraged to wear their favourite clothes and colours.

"It was an upbeat celebration and one that Herb would have approved of and been proud of," says his widow Lesley Belcourt, who notes they celebrated their 44th wedding anniversary just a few days before his passing. "In December, the doctors told Herb that he had about a month to live but with determination and tenacity he added six months more to that number and we were both very grateful for the extra time together. Herb would have wanted

to be remembered for his accomplished life and his love of family, not for the disease that took him from us."

Herb's success story began in 1958 when, dissatisfied with the plastic coverings on his chrome kitchen chairs, decided he'd re-upholster them himself. He was happy with the result and decided to canvas the neighbourhood to see if anyone else needed furniture covered. They did, so Herb put an ad in the paper and in a few days had more business than he could handle. It wasn't long before his growing staff was doing work for trailer companies, stores and individuals.

Over the years, Herb established numerous businesses, including Belcourt Construction, a company that grew to be the third biggest power-line construction company in Alberta. In 1971, together with his

cousin and partner Orval Belcourt and friend and partner Georges Brosseau, Herb launched Canative Housing Corporation, a non-profit organization that provided affordable housing to Indigenous people. It became the model for similar organizations across Canada.

"Herb just had the strength to be able to move forward," said Herb's cousin Tony Belcourt in a recent CBC interview. "Herb could charm a lot of people because he had natural charm... There was nothing phony about him and I think that's one of his best assets."

In 2001, the three business partners gathered at the Edmonton Community Foundation offices and, with a \$13 million donation, established the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards (BBMAs). To date, this initiative, supported in part by Syncrude, has provided over 1,500 awards to 1,100 Métis students in

more than 200 different post-secondary programs throughout Alberta. In all, more than six million dollars in awards have been given and more than 96 per cent of recipients have gone on to finish their education. Graduates include doctors, nurses, lawyers, dentists, electricians, hoteliers, business managers and pipe fitters.

Interviewed this past spring, Herb expressed his immense pride in the program. "I've been very fortunate in my business life," he said. "I've had great partners, outstanding support and a loving family who has always been there for me. My greatest achievement, I think, was being involved in the creation of the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards program. It has made a tremendous and positive impact on our people. The ability for our young students to remain in school to achieve their educational goals means a great deal to

me. I am so proud as I watch our youth not only reach this goal, but go on to lead productive and meaningful lives in careers they once didn't believe possible."

According to many, Herb's achievements will have far-reaching impacts for years to come. "Herb was an inspiration not only to the Métis community but our country as a whole," says Martin Garber-Conrad, chief executive officer of the Edmonton Community Foundation. "His passing is truly a loss, but because of his vision the BBMA's will continue to provide opportunity to Métis students across the province as they realize self-sufficiency through post-secondary education and skills development."

Though Herb never sought the limelight, his ongoing entrepreneurship and his low-key approach to everyday problems

brought him a great deal of success, and as a result he was recognized for his accomplishments as both a businessman and as a philanthropist. He received an honorary Doctorate of Laws Degree from the University of Alberta in 2001 and was a recipient of an Indspire Award in 2005. He is also among a select group of people recognized with the Order of Canada, which he received in 2010.

Until 2013, Herb was also an Aboriginal Advisor to the Commanding Officer at "K" Division for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). "In addition to being a role model to all Canadians, Dr. Belcourt's contribution to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in this province exemplifies the highest level of leadership and commitment to public service," says former RCMP Deputy Commissioner Marianne Ryan who presented Herb with a

commendation for his 35 years of service earlier this year.

Recognition continued in 2017 when he was inducted into the Alberta Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame and became the first Métis person to receive the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award. In May, the County of Strathcona and the hamlet of Sherwood Park named a park in his honour, and in June he was inducted into the City of Edmonton Community Service Hall of Fame.

Success also followed Herb into the world of literature when, in 2006, he published *Walking in the Woods: A Métis Journey*. It quickly became a best seller and the book has been reprinted several times.

Herb's widow Lesley says a new preface in the most recent edition released

this year includes words about his final wishes and long-standing vision. "Herb wanted to see the creation of a unique, holistic healing centre for women; a facility complete with all the professionals needed in recovery programs. He called the vision 'Healing Waters' because he wanted to see the facility built at Métis Crossing, close to the river and near the old church."

Herb's legacy lives on and his contributions won't soon be forgotten. In a letter to Herb earlier this year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shared his gratitude on behalf of the country: "The honours you've earned over the years are too numerous to name (but) in their totality they reflect a remarkable lifetime of servitude both to the Métis community and to the Province of Alberta."



Because of his vision the BBMA's will continue to provide opportunity to Métis students across the province as they realize self-sufficiency through post-secondary education and skills development.

Martin Garber-Conrad,
Chief Executive Officer of the
Edmonton Community Foundation



Herb Belcourt is inducted into the Order of Canada by Governor General David Johnston.



From Believer to Achiever



f Michaela Loutitt has her way, she will be practicing medicine and helping people become the best they can be.

The student from Fort McMurray received the Belcourt Brosseau Métis Award in 2016 and is currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Science program at the University of Alberta majoring in Biology. Thanks to the award, her academic dreams are closer than ever.

The Belcourt Brosseau Métis Awards help students realize their potential through post-secondary education and skills development. More than \$6.7 million has been awarded to 1,500 Métis youth across the province since the awards were established in 2001. Scholarships are supported by endowments provided by Syncrude and other organizations for the foundation established by the late Herb Belcourt, his cousin Orval Belcourt and Georges Brosseau.

"This is the first award I have ever received. I'm truly honoured," says Michaela. "It's a big help when you are going to school."

That's especially true when there are seven years of university in her future as she pursues

studies in medicine. Inspired by her mother, a pharmacist, and an older sister who is a doctor, Michaela has her sights set on physiotherapy.

"Ever since I was young I've wanted to be in the health care field," says Michaela. "When I looked into the future I saw myself helping people."

Helping comes naturally to the second year university student, who volunteers with Métis Local 1935 and the Indigenous students club at school. She also has a large circle of friends she enjoys

supporting and encouraging. "I'm always there to help them out," says Michaela. "I try to be someone they can look up to by being the best I can and showing them they can do it too."

The youngest of three girls, Michaela received a lot of support from her family to pursue post-secondary education and was influenced by the strong women in her life. While she also has an interest in Native Studies and is considering a minor in the subject,

she currently remains focused on physiotherapy and perhaps a medical degree.

Whichever path she chooses, Michaela's smarts and enthusiasm will undoubtedly lead her from believer to achiever.

"This is the first award I have ever received. I'm truly honoured. It's a big help when you are going to school."

A Caring Heart

Sara Voyageur admits her academic journey has rarely been easy. But for her, the victories along the way have made it all worthwhile.

As a young girl growing up in Fort Chipewyan, Sara felt a strong responsibility to her family and heritage. Living in the remote, small hamlet, she jumped at the opportunities to learn about Indigenous culture and the world around her from her parents and three grandmas. Now as a second year nursing student, she feels the support of the entire community.


"Every time I go home, people ask 'when is this little nurse Sara going to be finished with school? Is she going to come back and take care of me?'. I feel because of their support I have a big role to fill," says Sara.

But it wasn't until late high school when Sara decided to pursue nursing.

"The first interaction I had with the profession was during annual immunizations at the nursing station in Chip," she says. "There was a nurse named Claudette and I was inspired by the way she interacted with me. She had a caring attitude and helped me get through my fear of needles. You could tell she was passionate about her career."

Sara completed high school with average marks, but still needed to enroll in academic upgrading courses to enter nursing. She knew the program would not be without its challenges but, with the support of family and friends, she finished as the student with the highest grades since 1980.

Next, Sara entered the pre-nursing program at Keyano College while finishing up a critical math course. Although she initially hoped to enter university directly, she quickly completed the program and started first year nursing the following year. However, things didn't go as planned.



"I've had challenges and still do, but these challenges help me grow."

"After my first year in the nursing program, I ended up failing," says Sara. "I was ashamed and I felt like a failure. I had come so far and worked so hard to get here but was questioning if I could do it. I wouldn't have reapplied if it wasn't for my parents talking me through it."

Sara's parents encouraged her not to give up. "They said, 'failing is not the end. It's the beginning. For some people it's an easy straight career path, but for others it's a struggle' and that's what happened with me."

Sara hopes her story encourages Aboriginal youth to pursue their dreams no matter what they might face.

"Look at me, I'm not perfect. I've had challenges and still do, but these challenges help me grow," she says. "Getting what you want out of life is hard work but it starts with getting your high school diploma, and then anything is possible."

In 2016, Sara received Syncrude's Rod Hyde Aboriginal Education Award for her academic achievements. The award honours Rod Hyde, a former Fort McKay School principal.

EDUCATION

The Way of the Drum

Local program teaches the values of cooperation and responsibility

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he 2016-17 school year marked the 10th anniversary of the Dr. Clark Drumming and Leadership Group, but it almost didn't happen.

The wildfire that forced the evacuation of Fort McMurray on May 3rd, 2016, enveloped the city in a thick layer of smoke for several days. It damaged beyond repair the more than 30 drums and regalia the students used.

"We had to dispose of it all and I had no idea where or when we would be able to replace it," says group founder and Dr. Karl A. Clark school teacher/counselor Eileen Lucas. "But just as they did when we started this group, Syncrude stepped up and donated the funds to buy all new drums, drumsticks, rattles and costumes required. I am so thankful for Syncrude's community spirit and generosity."

Over the years, Eileen has seen more than 100 students from Grades 3-6 partake in her unique program that teaches them cultural songs. They practice once a week during their lunch hour and then perform at school functions and other celebrations.

But learning to drum and sing traditional songs are not all they learn. "I teach them how to use the drum, what it represents and all responsibilities associated with it. Once you learn how to play, you're expected to teach others how to play the drum," says Eileen. "I also teach them many attributes they can take away, like leadership, cooperation and volunteerism because we play events in the community."

This year, five students from Beacon Hill School joined her group. "Because of wildfire damage to their school, they share our facilities and some students wanted to join," says Eileen. "My dream is to see all children in all schools playing the drum because it's so relaxing and it's considered a healing object."



Eileen Lucas and the 2016-17 Dr. Clark Drumming and Leadership Group.

EDUCATION

A LEADER

Sherisse Salopree grew up in a family that understood the importance of education and the foundational role it plays towards a rewarding and fulfilling life. “When I was younger I wanted to get a Commerce degree even before I understood what it meant. It sounded so important,” says Sherisse.

While her career journey is just beginning, it didn’t start with a clear path. Sherisse, a member of the Dene Tha’ First Nation with ties to the Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation, tried studies at the University of Alberta and Concordia University before taking a break to truly find her passion. Putting her education on hold was a difficult decision, but she felt she couldn’t continue her studies until finding something meaningful to work towards.

For Sherisse, inspiration was close to home. Her mother had obtained a Social Work degree with honours while caring for two children. “She is a role model and having her and my dad see me graduate was my inspiration,” says Sherisse. “I knew if I didn’t go back to school, I wouldn’t pursue or finish my education.”

She was drawn to the Human Resources Management program at MacEwan University for its seemingly endless opportunities and the variety of jobs from recruitment to management. “Human Resources isn’t always viewed as important, but when you think about it, you’re responsible for hiring the people and creating the culture for an organization,” says Sherisse. “I like that aspect of it.”

After receiving her HR diploma, Sherisse completed her Commerce degree. Now she has her sights set on one day owning and operating an employment agency to help people achieve their own ambitions. Exploring her Indigenous roots is also paramount.

“My culture is important to me and the older I get, the more I want to learn about my culture and traditions, who I am and where I came from,” says Sherisse. Her family strengthens that connection

while her volunteer work keeps her engaged in the community. She participates in the Aboriginal Women’s Professional Association, Canadian Native Friendship Centre and Edmonton’s Heritage Festival.

Sherisse believes there is a great future for Aboriginal people to participate in the economy. “We’re the fastest growing segment of the population and education provides opportunities for us,” she says. “I want to be a role model for future generations of Aboriginal youth in the business sector.”

Sherisse received financial assistance for her studies as the 2017 recipient of the Stephen Mandel Aboriginal Business Award, presented by Syncrude. The scholarship is awarded to a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit student enrolled in MacEwan University’s School of Business. It was created

to honour Edmonton’s former mayor and continue his work in support of the long term success of Aboriginal people.

Says Sherisse, “On my graduation day, I could see how proud my parents were. As crazy as it was, I felt their love that day more than ever.”



Sherisse and her mother Maxine on the campus at MacEwan University.

“We’re the fastest growing segment of the population and education provides opportunities for us. I want to be a role model for future generations of Aboriginal youth in the business sector.”

IN WAITING



Sherisse Salopree
is the 2017 recipient of
the Stephen Mandel
Aboriginal Business Award,
presented by Syncrude.

HIGH ACHIEVERS

**FORT MCMURRAY SCHOOLS BOAST HIGHER GRADUATION RATES
OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS THAN THE REST OF ALBERTA**



Father Patrick Mercredi High School hosts a community feast every fall to welcome the families of new students coming from outlying communities such as Fort McKay and Anzac. And every fall, principal Natasha MacArthur-Poole knows some people might not be comfortable entering the building and understands why. “People who attended residential schools aren’t just going to walk into a school,” Natasha explains. “You have to work at building that relationship.”

In addition to making adults more at ease with entering the school, both of Fort McMurray’s school districts are making phenomenal progress at seeing their children and grandchildren leave as graduates, so much so that Alberta Education has approached both districts to look at their programs, activities and other practices. The reason: both districts have graduation rates far higher than the rest of the province while their dropout rates are far lower than the rest of Alberta.

Doug Nicholls, superintendent of Fort McMurray Public Schools, sees the success stemming from a district-wide focus along with support from the wider community, including Syncrude.

“We have a lot of advantages here in Fort McMurray that other communities don’t have, including great support from industry and a very strong Indigenous business community who are committed to the success of First Nations and Métis students,” says Doug.

Both districts have committed to working with Aboriginal students from the time they enter the school system.

“We have had liaisons for our Aboriginal students and their families since the early 1990s,” says Monica Mankowski, deputy superintendent for Inclusive Education at the Catholic district, whose graduation rate for Aboriginal students was more than 85 per cent in the 2015/16 school year, more than double the national average. That support continues right through Grade 12, but Natasha sees it as vital for students coming in from outlying communities, such as Fort McKay.

“Liaisons have a key role in maintaining relationships with families. We encourage families to come to school to see it’s a safe place for their children. We’ve done family feasts for many years, with the fall feasts. We usually get 300 or so families coming in. Some students are billeted so it’s important for them to come and meet us,” she says. “At Father Mercredi, Kayla Aikins is our new liaison working with classroom support teacher Jeff Power to build supports for our Aboriginal students, and educating parents about the needs of our kids and the requirements they need to be successful in school.”

In addition to personal relationships, both districts have emphasized the importance of learning about Aboriginal culture and traditions.



Local graduate and Acden business development manager Mitch Mercredi.

“When you come into Dr. Clark School and the office, there’s a very large dreamcatcher and posters with the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers,” says Merrie-Rae Mitsopoulos, who served as principal of the downtown elementary school until this summer. “We also have activities such as the drumming and leadership group that learns traditional drumming and wears traditional regalia that’s headed by Eileen Lucas. This allows Indigenous students to celebrate their own culture but all students are invited

to be a part of the group so others can learn about that culture.”

The districts also access experts in the wider community to provide additional programming for Aboriginal students, such as the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program at Father Mercredi High School. A national program started by former Prime Minister Paul Martin, it has proven enormously successful due to access to mentors such as Mitch Mercredi, the business development manager for Acden.

“I wish I had this kind of program when I was going to school,” says Mitch. “Fortunately I received that mentorship from my father, who is a local business entrepreneur and one of the founders of the Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association (NAABA). As a mentor in the program, I discuss the hard work and challenges involved in running a business. My goal is to ignite that spark in them and help them understand what it takes to be successful. It’s very rewarding for me – I value the opportunity to watch and guide these young minds as they find their entrepreneurial spirits.”

Annalee Nutter, principal of Walter & Gladys Hill School, also sees benefits of engaging with the wider community to provide additional activities for students. Sonia Burke-Smith of the Boreal Artist Institute has worked with students on everything from medicine wheels to decorating a teepee.

“There’s a lot of art-based activities but there are cross-curricular activities such as social studies and even health,” says Annalee. “We incorporate the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers at our school with curriculum and activities tied to a different teaching every month.”

These programs, supports and activities have provided the building blocks that have led to successful results.

Says George McGuigan, superintendent for the Catholic district, “When you pay attention to your students and provide the supports where necessary, they will succeed.”

A BIG HEART A TRUE CALLING

EDUCATION

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he school hallways are like busy city streets when it's time for class change. Trudie-Ann

Plamondon watches over the chaos while visiting with students, singling out a few to focus on their studies, and hurrying them off to their next class.

She is one of nine First Nations, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) liaisons in the Fort McMurray Catholic School Division who support Indigenous students and connect them to their culture and traditions.

Trudie-Ann's beat is Father Mercredi Community High School with 1,200 students, of which 28 per cent are of self-declared Indigenous descent. In many ways this is her dream job, but it wasn't an easy journey.

A member of Métis Local 1935, Trudie-Ann was born in Fort McMurray and raised in Fort Chipewyan. After her children were well into their school years, Trudie-Ann pursued a career as a paramedic. The plan hit a roadblock when she was diagnosed and treated for cancer on three separate occasions.

When the battle ended and her health returned, her interest in being a paramedic had waned. She turned to the Educational Assistant program at Keyano College where she also became an active participant in the Aboriginal Room where students held meetings, potlucks, study groups, and organized events like Aboriginal Days on campus. Then a friend told her about an FNMI liaison position.

"She saw something in me that I never realized myself," says Trudie-Ann. "She said, 'You're always here to support other people. This job is you.'"

Trudie-Ann landed the job

and with the help of mentors Sara Loutitt and Debra Kitching she has never looked back. She eventually took over duties for organizing the annual Traditional Celebration of Achievement and also helps organize the twice annual Family Feasts to celebrate Aboriginal culture with staff, students and their family members. "The first time we had a family feast only four people attended and they came all the way from Janvier. Today we regularly have 250 people attending," says Trudie-Ann.

As the school year ends, Trudie-Ann does a handover with the other liaisons to identify high-risk students and those who may need some help. She reaches out to all of them in the fall and, in particular, the students from smaller communities who live with local families while they attend high school.

"It can be difficult for these students to leave their community," says Trudie-Ann. "They don't have the connection right away and they are lonely. I'm there, I'm visible. It means a lot to me to support them."

She knows this first-hand having moved from Fort Chipewyan to attend school in Fort McMurray, and through her involvement with the Athabasca Tribal Council's Boarding Home Program for the last 17 years.

With such a great reputation, Trudie-Ann gets a lot of encouragement to remain in her role. This includes her granddaughter who, despite being in the fifth grade, is excited about coming to her grandmother's school.

"If I keep hearing, 'Don't leave until I graduate,' I'll never retire," laughs Trudie-Ann.



A woman with dark hair and glasses is sitting in a black office chair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a white cardigan over a dark patterned top and a lanyard with a blue and red floral design. She is holding a small white object in her hands. The background features a wall with a large abstract painting and a circular object hanging on it.

**I'M THERE.
I'M VISIBLE.
IT MEANS A
LOT TO ME TO
SUPPORT
THEM.**

Preserving language through technology

The Cree language is spoken by some 120,000 people across Canada, but a declining number of youth are continuing to learn it. The Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC) hopes to reverse that trend with a unique mobile app developed to help preserve the language for future generations.

"We wanted to create an application that younger Indigenous people could easily access. Today's youth spend countless hours on their mobile devices, so why not bring the information to them in a form they can relate to," says Byron Bates, councilor with Fort McMurray #468 First Nation and creator of the ATC Cree App.

The free application is downloadable from iTunes and Google Play. It allows users to look up English words and see the Cree translation. An audio feature lets them hear how the Cree word is pronounced. The app focuses on Cree dialects of northeastern Alberta.

It was designed for beginners and those with some previous knowledge of the language. It can be used for self-study or as a

conversational aid when talking with Elders who are Cree speakers.

To date, the team working on the application has collected and recorded more than 447 words with 120 already installed.

"Our goal is to continue to build on the library of words," says Byron. "It's important as an Indigenous person to be proud of your heritage and want to speak the language. The app's vocabulary currently includes important nouns as well as words for medicines, numbers, directions, weather, the calendar, and parts of the body."

The ATC is also now building a Dene language version of the mobile app.

Byron, who holds a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Computer Science from Vancouver Island University, was pleased to offer his support in creating the app. "I am glad to be a part of this unique project and excited to watch it grow," he says.

To date, the application has been downloaded more than 5,000 times.

App developer Byron Bates demonstrates the language translator to Robyn Milton.



Pîkiskwiwin manâcihcikewin sâposci isi technology

Nîthithawewin pîkiskwîwin mitoni nânithâw 120,000 ithisiniwak itâpacihtâw wâsakâm Kânata, maka oskâya ithiniw akilhâson ayahci-isi kiskêyithamowin ohci. Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC) isi pakoseyimiwak ta-asêpitha ekwanima trend asici peyakwayith sêwêpicikan app osihcikewin ta-wichihkoyin nîsohkamâkewin pîkiskwewin kici ayaniskach nîkâniwin.

“Ni-nithawêyihthâkwan ta-osîhcikâtik osâkaskinahtamohiwewin nîthithaw oskâyak kici ta-wêhcasik ta-âpacihtât. Anohc kâ-kîsikâk osk-ithisiniw mâmawaci kwanta ayiwâk mestinikew wiyawâw ka-tepeyihthahkwâw sêwêpicikana, êcika ani tânêhki mwâc ka-pêtayin âcimostakewin ta-nistohtâhkwaw,” itwew Byron Bates, wiyasiwêhkâniwiw asici Fort McMurray #468 First Nation mîna otôsihcikew ohci ATC Nîthithawewin App.

Ôma mosci-mêkiwin osâkaskinahtamohiwewin isi pakitinkâthêw ohci iTunes mîna Google Play. Pakitinkâthêw ta-âpacihtâ kici ka natonamihk kîkway âkayâsimowin êkospîhk ta-wapahtam nîthithawewin itwêstamâkêwin. Pîkiskwîwin mina ta-ke natohtamwak tanisi isi nîthithawewin isi pîkiskwî. Ôma app nahâpahcikewin kici nîthithawewin dialects isi northeastern Alberta.

Isîhcikâthêw ôma kici nistam mâcihtawin mîna aniki asici kayâhtê ka-kiskeyitamwak ôma pîkiskwîwin. Ke-âpacihtâk kici tipiyaw awîyak wiyapoko ahpo ka âtotamihk kîkway kispin ka-pîkiskwîyin asici kihthayah aniki nîthithawewin isi pîkiskwîwak.



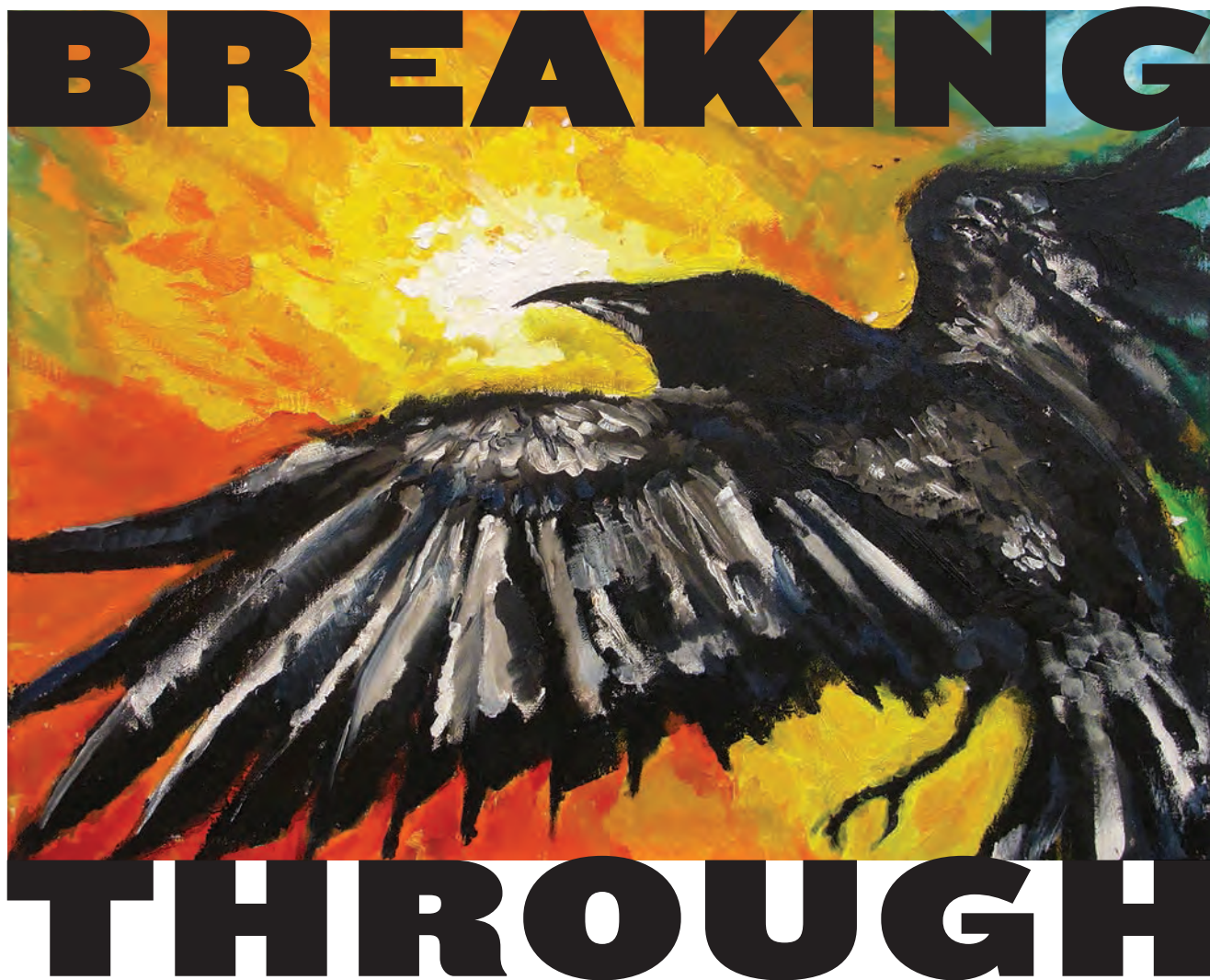
Anohc ôma kâ-kîsikâk, mâmawi atoskathamwak ôma osâkaskinahtamohiwewin ke-mâwasakonamwak mina masinahikâtiw athiwak 447 pîkiskwîwina asici 120 asay takwascikewin. “Nîyanân eyoko ohcithaw âhkameyithamowin ta-osihtha isi ayamihcikâwikamik pîkiskwîwina,” itwew Byron.” Mâmawaci nîkâneyihthâkwan isi indigenous ithisiniwak ta-mamihteyita ohci nanâtohkôskânesiwin ikwa ta-nohte kiskeyithamin ôma pîkiskwîwin. Ôhi app’s nîthithawewin âsay ewakomîna kihci nouns mina pîkiskwîwina kici maskihky, akilhâsowin, kiskinwahikewin, tanisi isi-kîsikâw, calendar, mina kithaw.”

ATC mina osehtawak Cîpwēyān pîkiskwîwina isi sêwêpicikana app.

Byron, miciminam Bachelor of Science degree asici major isi masinatakan science ohci Vancouver Island University, takahkêthimow ta-mekihth nâthamâkêwin ka-osehtah ôma app. “Ni-takahkêyithin ta-wîchihiwewiyan ôma peyakwayask isi poko mina ni-miyowâthin ta-wâpathaman ta-ohpiki.

Anohc ôma kâ-kîsikâk, ôma osâkaskinahtamohiwewin ki-tahki âpatan athiwak tahthaw 5,000.

BREAKING THROUGH



Program opens up a world of hope and possibility

If art is a window to the soul, a new traveling exposition is opening the shutters and raising the blinds.

The exhibition, *Breaking Barriers – The Artist Inside*, features artwork created by Indigenous artists who are or were incarcerated in provincial corrections centres. Part of the Traveling Exhibition (TREX) program sponsored by Syncrude at the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA), it has proven to be a positive influence for those who've fallen through the cracks.

Featured artist Abray 'Tiger' Isaac was thrilled to be included. A member of

British Columbia's Boston Bar First Nation, he moved to Edmonton in 2014 to secure employment. However, a year later, with the economy sagging, Tiger, an experienced logger and construction worker with seven months of apprenticeship carpentry under his belt, was laid off from his job.

"I'm 34 years old and can't believe how foolhardy I was to wind up in jail," says Tiger. "As a child I had a rough beginning and for the most part grew up on the streets. Before I was 15 years old I had been in and out of more than a dozen foster care and group homes and as a result have had to overcome a lot of negativity in my life. The six-month sentence I

was serving when I created the art for this exhibit is another setback, but one that I have learned a great deal from."

The opportunity to be featured in the exhibit has given Tiger new hope and his graffiti-style artwork is garnering many positive comments. "I've been creating art most of my life but this is the first time my work has been showcased in a public forum," he says. "Being involved has helped me to re-evaluate myself and I am confident that the inspiration I'm taking away from this experience will enable me to achieve even greater heights."

Wendy Vanderbleek, deputy director of programs

at the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, helped organize the exhibition together with colleague Kathryn Wheaton and AGA curator Shane Golby. She notes Tiger's gratitude is not unique. "The art program draws a lot of interest," she explains. "The success really belongs to inmates who are serious about their work and the many staff members who work alongside them."

Like Tiger, Marty Deslauriers also forged a new path through the program. "Creating art has really helped me to not only adjust to the surroundings of a corrections facility but it has also given me a better understanding of who I am as a person," he says. "I've

LEFT: Matthew Michaud
The Raven Who Stole the Sun and got Burnt, 2016.
Oil on canvas,
18 inches x 23 7/8 inches.

RIGHT: Shane Blyan
'Untitled', 2016.
Ink on paper,
14 inches x 17 inches.

BELOW:

Marty Deslauriers *'Summer Reflections'*, 2016. Pencil on mailing envelopes,
5 3/4 inches x 9 1/2 inches.

Abraay *'Tiger' Isaac 'Rookie'*, 2016. Pencil crayon on paper, 9 inches x 12 inches.



been doing well since my release and I believe that has a great deal to do with the support I received in Fort Saskatchewan Correctional, especially being able, even encouraged, to draw and paint and create art. I am now on the outside looking in and feeling more confident about my future than ever before. The opportunity to be a part of this unique exhibition has made me realize that maybe I do have some talent as far as art goes and I think I can expand on that by making life better for myself in all areas."

Breaking Barriers is on tour throughout Alberta, including visits to Fort McMurray's Timberlea

School (see sidebar) and the Spruce Grove Public Library. Britney Robinson, the library's community services coordinator, notes the exhibit was well received. "It is truly an uplifting and inspiring exhibition designed to open minds and create new doors of opportunity," she says.

The exhibit continues until December 2019. A gratuity of \$7,380 from the AGA is being directed to the Inmate Welfare Fund to support art programs and projects in Alberta's correctional centres. For more information, visit www.youraga.ca.

Picture Perfect

When works of art began appearing in the atrium of Timberlea Public School, Drew Starr didn't realize he was going to have the "most fun I've ever had in my life at school."

Drew, a Grade 6 student, is one of hundreds of youth from Timberlea and Christina Gordon public schools who had the opportunity to view the TREX exhibit. "All the artists had their own ideas," Drew says. "They were all unique and special in their own way."

Timberlea School principal Waleed Najmeddine says the exhibit presented a unique learning opportunity for students at both schools.

"Not all of us are very artistic but we need to bring that to the students in our schools. I can't model that but I'm not limited by my lack of artistic ability as an educator when you have a program like this," Waleed says. "We can expose students to this creativity through artists and their artwork. The children can see what's possible and spark their own imaginations and creativity."

Gavin Rutledge, a teacher at Christina Gordon, sees the exhibit as providing something that can't be found on the page of a textbook or a computer screen. "Some of our students don't have that opportunity to look at artwork first hand. Having the art in front of you makes it a completely different experience," says Gavin.

Along with the exhibit, the Art Gallery of Alberta provides schools with lesson plans and activities based specifically on the artwork in the exhibit.

The assignments proved to be a lot of fun for Grade 6 student Alexandria Harrison. "It was pretty cool because we got to learn about the art and write about it," she says. "I enjoyed learning about art and other cultures. You could really see the artist's emotions in their work."



Chief Bernadette Sharpe and
Elder Dolly Letendre outside
of the Loon River School.

**SETTING THE
PATH
TO**

“

I've learned over the
years that you can
have aspirations to
lead and succeed,
but to do so you need
to have support.”

Chief Bernadette Sharpe

**A
POSITIVE
FUTURE**



t's been said we don't choose our destiny, destiny chooses us.

For Chief Bernadette Sharpe of the Loon River First Nation, however, it was also clear members had a say in the matter when she achieved a landslide victory in the band election a year ago. Now the community's destiny has become her own.

A successful businessperson, Chief Sharpe hadn't set out to become an official voice for her First Nation. But it all started in 2004 when many encouraged her to run for a position on the band council.

"I've learned over the years that you can have aspirations to lead and succeed, but to do so you need to have support," says Chief Sharpe. "I think people in the community believed in me and had faith in me."

After serving three terms on Council, she was encouraged to run for the position of Chief. She accepted the challenge and was voted in unanimously by the 600-member community. "I sold my business to avoid any type of conflicting interest and put my nose to the grindstone while I learned exactly what it was to be Chief," she says.

In her role, Chief Sharpe has three areas of focus – education and employment, economic

development and personal growth. Already, the band council has added around \$400,000 to the \$135,000 received from the federal government to support post-secondary education. In addition, the council supports any member who pursues an education degree with the intent of returning to teach in the community.



"Education is first and foremost, it is the key to success," says Chief Sharpe. "We want to ensure that those who want to move ahead have the opportunity to do so."

Self-respect and respecting others are also key mandates. "We are very involved in our school system and are in the process of establishing our own education authority," she says. "We would like to have a say in how our children are taught and to achieve

that we are getting more local people involved in the schools. We want to ensure a mixture of Indigenous and Western culture so that our people are able to make choices about what they want to do and where they want to do it."

When it comes to the local economy, the First Nation operates five businesses, including a new truck stop which employs 18 community members. Loon River Cree Contracting is also going strong with about 25 employees. Established in the early 90s, the company offers such expertise as road building, reclamation and snow removal.

Chief Sharpe's accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. In 2016, she was inducted into the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women's Esquao Circle of Honour, sponsored by Syncrude. "It was both a thrilling and humbling experience," she says. "I am so grateful for the acknowledgement."

Even with such a list of successes, Chief Sharpe stresses the future of the First Nation is not hers to guide alone. "Community support means everything, as does the positive relationship I have with my Elders. They help put things in perspective. The wisdom and guidance I've received from them has helped our community become a better place to live."

EDUCATION ANGELS

A

n initiative by the Fort McMurray Catholic School District is having

a positive impact on learning outcomes for First Nation, Métis

and Inuit (FNMI) students. With the goal of ensuring students complete high school, the FNMI Program also provides a greater understanding of Aboriginal history, cultures and traditions to families and the greater community.

The key to the program is the FNMI liaisons assigned to each school. They create a welcoming environment for the students, use a one-on-one approach to addressing student needs, and track attendance and overall student progress.

“Our liaisons build a team with the students, their teachers and their families,” says Lucy Moore, director of Indigenous Education for Fort McMurray Catholic Schools. “When the families take part, their kids attend school. And when they attend school, we can teach them and they graduate. It’s a big wheel of success.”

In addition to supporting learning for FNMI students, the liaisons also make Aboriginal culture meaningful and active in the schools for all students. This is achieved through family feasts, multicultural nights, special celebrations like mini Treaty Days, or events like Louis Riel Day and Orange T-Shirt day in recognition of residential schools. Also, an entrepreneurship program matches students with Aboriginal business owners.

The variety of interactions Aboriginal students have with their liaisons from kindergarten to high school has resulted in an increase in high school

Education and culture guide students to graduation

completion rates. In fact, Fort McMurray has one of the highest graduation rates for Aboriginal students in the province.

“Certainly graduation rates are our biggest payoff, but what

you can’t see on paper is the pride students feel about their culture,” says Lucy. “Some families buried their culture and our liaisons dig up the culture and help the kids be proud that they are First Nations, Métis, or wherever they come from. That pride is going to carry on and we’ll see it growing in the next generation where they are proud of their culture to start with instead of learning to be proud of it when they come to school.”

Financial and in-kind support from Syncrude and other businesses in the region help the FNMI Program deliver services beyond what can be done with the liaisons in the schools. Funds are used for materials, field trips, professional development for staff, and scholarships.

“We are very lucky to provide the best of both worlds: we have the human resources to deliver the program and the funds for the extras we need because of the generosity of so many companies,” says Lucy.

One of the biggest events of the year comes at the end of May when the liaisons participate in the Traditional Celebration of Achievement for students who are eligible to graduate. This year, 149 were invited to the Keyano Theatre to recognize their success and receive a dressed eagle feather from a respected Elder.

And, afterwards, their liaisons gave themselves a group hug. Mission accomplished for another year.

FNMI liaisons pictured from left to right: Alyssa Mayers, Beverly Pierce, Christine Alexander, Allison Flett, Janice Kendell, Elaine Dampier, Trudie-Ann Plamondon, Kayla Aikins, Yvette Friesen.





Fort McMurray #468 First Nation youth coordinator Nick Vardy and youth counselors Tyrone Chalifoux and Erica Cree.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

EDUCATION

The Fort McMurray #468 First Nation's Summer Work Program aims to motivate youth today while preparing them for tomorrow.

"We want to provide an opportunity for the youth of our community to grow, build their confidence and in the end discover their possibilities for the future," says Nick Vardy, youth coordinator for Fort McMurray #468 First Nation. "The program's whole intent is to get these teens ready for life as an adult."

The Summer Student Program is an annual program open to all youth above the age of 15 who live in the First Nation community. The program remodeled in 2017 to offer internships with local businesses. Work placements were provided to students throughout the summer with a few other added development opportunities.

"We want to get the youth of our community off the couch and help prep them for what lies ahead," says youth counselor Tyrone Chalifoux. "As a teen, I participated in the program, but it was different back then. It was just a work-placement around the community, picking up garbage and odd jobs. We've really added to the program to help these youth build their independence."

In 2016, Nick, Tyrone and youth counselor Erica Cree knew they needed to add more depth to the program so they allocated every Friday of the eight-week placement to personal development.

The new and improved program, supported in part by Syncrude, offers a variety of additional training every Friday. Youth participate in a personal financial course provided by RBC, First Aid training, driver's licence preparation, a drug and alcohol abuse course, visits to universities and colleges, and an annual tour of local industry to speak with company representatives about trade and technical opportunities.

New to the program in 2017 is a focus on cultural programming for the Friday development days.

"The cultural component is about preserving our culture and ensuring knowledge that our Elders have is passed down," says Nick. "The youth worked with our Elders and participated in workshops on hunting, fishing, and even beading this past summer."

Most of the program improvements seen in the past two summers were ideas generated from the local youth themselves.

"The Youth Council set up a private Facebook account for all teens in our community to share their ideas and tell us in their own words what they are interested in accomplishing," says Erica. "We then took their feedback and incorporated as much as possible into the program. The response was overwhelmingly positive and really helped shaped the eight-week program."

COMMUNITY

Standing Ovation

Recognizing the greatness in our communities

The Academy Awards. The ESPYs. The Pulitzer. Each year, thousands of awards are given out across the world for success in entertainment, sports and science, to name a few. But for those in Wood Buffalo, there can be no greater gift than the thanks of their community.

Each year, the Regional Aboriginal Recognition Awards (RARA) applaud residents who have made a positive and visible difference in the world around them.

At the 2017 ceremony, Fort McKay Métis President and deputy fire chief Ron Quintal received the Leadership Award for his selfless actions during the Fort McMurray wildfire.

When Ron and firefighters from throughout the region battled the blaze, they were fighting to keep family, friends and homes in the community safe. The selection committee noted Ron as “a great leader who loves his community and works hard to ensure that his members are treated fairly and respectfully.” They also commended him for his “ethics, accountability and grace in handling situations.” In addition, Ron has been recognized as one of Fort McMurray’s Top 50 Under 50.

To read more about Ron’s and other firefighters’ experiences during the wildfire, check out the 2016 edition of *Pathways*, available on www.syncrude.ca.



Ron and Trace Quintal were featured in the 2016 edition of *Pathways*.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL 2017 RARA RECIPIENTS!

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

Taylor Golosky
Exander Lacorde
Darian Milton
Meeah Morice
Sam Olson
Precious Paquette
Tayden Shott
Russell Tipler
Aiden Voyageur

FEMALE YOUTH OF THE YEAR

Alexis Herman

MALE YOUTH OF THE YEAR

Adam Boucher

ELDER

Aneta Bone Quintal

TRAPPER

Justin Bourque

CULTURE

Bertha Cyprien

LEADERSHIP

Ron Quintal

OUTSTANDING ATHLETE

James Poitras

OUTSTANDING ADULT STUDENT

Megan Plews

ARTS AWARD

Mary McKenzie

VOLUNTEER

Jessica Herman

ENTREPRENEUR

Marie Boucher

FEMALE CITIZEN

Joanne Clark

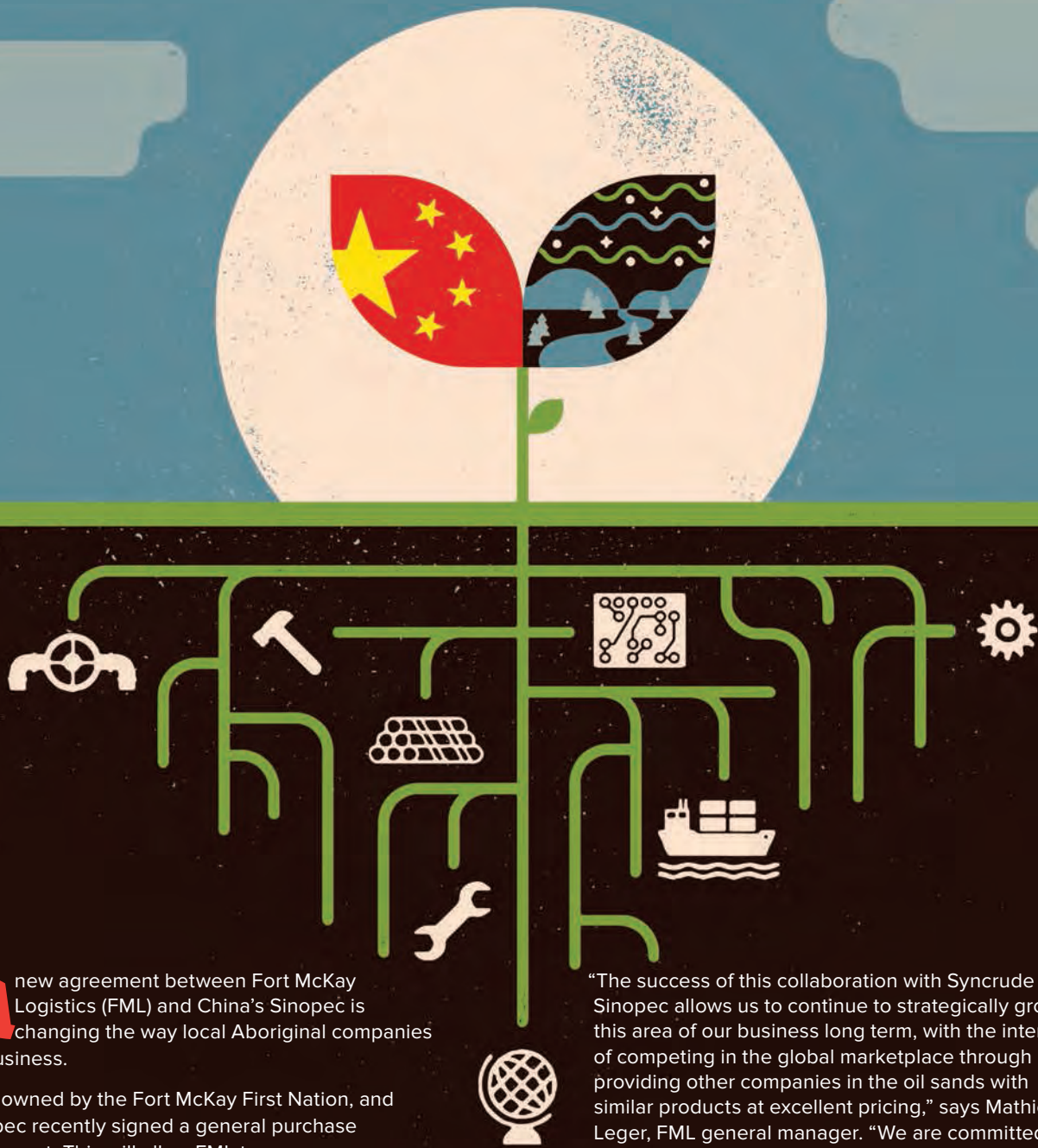
MALE CITIZEN

Darrin Bourque

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Violet Hansen

A Growing Landscape



A new agreement between Fort McKay Logistics (FML) and China's Sinopec is changing the way local Aboriginal companies do business.

FML, owned by the Fort McKay First Nation, and Sinopec recently signed a general purchase agreement. This will allow FML to access manufacturers through Sinopec. It also enables FML to expand their business through the sale and distribution of commodity and specialty products.

"These two organizations were brought together as a result of Syncrude's commitment to promote and develop local Aboriginal business," says Ken Cheng, Syncrude procurement advisor.

Ken explains that the idea behind the agreement was simple – combine FML's local know-how and logistics strength with Sinopec's immense purchasing power overseas.

"The success of this collaboration with Syncrude and Sinopec allows us to continue to strategically grow in this area of our business long term, with the intention of competing in the global marketplace through providing other companies in the oil sands with similar products at excellent pricing," says Mathieu Leger, FML general manager. "We are committed to delivering reliable, safe and quality products and services to meet the needs of our clients and appreciate the opportunities provided by Syncrude, allowing us to achieve this goal."

The synergy between FML and Sinopec is the first of its kind and will assist FML in expanding their footprint to markets outside of the Wood Buffalo region, while delivering total supply chain solutions. FML can now position themselves as a one-stop shop for a wide selection of materials needed to run an oil sands operation. And for customers like Syncrude, this will be a tremendous opportunity to reduce overall operational cost while supporting Aboriginal business.



ENVIRONMENTAL



UPDATE





Efforts to reduce odours underway

Syncrude is working alongside the community of Fort McKay, the Government of Alberta and other industry partners to address odour issues in the region.

A task force has been set up to ensure consistent and integrated air quality monitoring, assess emission sources, improve emergency response related to air quality, improve odour complaint response protocols, and conduct a more detailed assessment of links between some air quality parameters and human health.

“Syncrude understands that odours from our operation can cause apprehension and any assistance we can provide in easing of these concerns is important to us,” says Anne Simpson, regulatory advisor and task force member. “Brooke Bennett of the Environmental team and I are working on two recommendations which relate to improving communications and enhancing the notification protocols. These aspects are key for ensuring Fort McKay is kept well informed of situations occurring on our site.”

“Indigenous people of this region are very knowledgeable about the land, wildlife and particularly plant life. By working together we can accomplish so much more and ensure our reclamation efforts are meeting the needs of our stakeholders.”



Learning from traditional knowledge

Syncrude is taking steps to provide greater opportunity for local communities to become more involved in reclamation activities and planning for the future.

“Indigenous people of this region are very knowledgeable about the land, wildlife and particularly plant life,” says Colleen Legdon, manager of Community Relations. “By working together we can accomplish so much more and ensure our reclamation efforts are meeting the needs of our stakeholders.”

Each First Nation and Métis association is invited to participate on the newly formed Reclamation Engagement Focus Group.

“We specifically asked the First Nations and Métis associations to nominate residents with traditional knowledge and potentially a youth to ensure the knowledge and discussions are passed down to the next generation,” says Colleen.

Engaging with stakeholders on the environment is one of the six key commitments of Syncrude’s Aboriginal Relations Strategy. The focus group will look to address common areas of interest, share information with all surrounding communities to help build awareness of successful reclamation, and ensure traditional knowledge is being transferred into reclamation activities.

The group will be overseen at Syncrude by Colleen along with Paul Kearney, manager of Integrated Planning; Audrey Lanoue, reclamation and closure team leader in Research and Development; and Byron Fediuk, manager of Operations Support Mining.



Returning land to nature

Oil sands reclamation takes years of planning and begins well before trees and shrubs are actually planted.

Each year, Syncrude collects seeds from the region then has them shipped to the Alberta Reforestation Seed Bunker in Smoky Lake for cleaning and storage. Seedlings are then grown for when Syncrude is ready to plant them.

“At Syncrude, we use a broad range of plant species that are native to the Wood Buffalo region – as many as seven kinds of trees and 15 species of shrubs,” says vegetation specialist Eric Girard.

A reclamation plan is developed annually using the Guidelines for Reclamation to Forest Vegetation, produced by the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), which takes into account traditional knowledge provided by local Indigenous people and their communities. Once the plan is approved for the following year, processes and tasks begin to take shape.

In 2017, about 200 hectares of land at Syncrude’s Mildred Lake and Aurora sites were planted. Work will continue next year on reclaiming the former East Mine area located next to Highway 63.

"Incorporating traditional knowledge into our plans provides tremendous value in making the landscape more sustainable and productive."

HOME
IS WHERE
THE
is



While Ken Bell may not wear the brightly coloured arrow sash or speak Michif, he's proud of his Métis heritage and the contributions of Aboriginal people working in the oil sands.

"Hiring local Aboriginal people is the right thing to do. That's just always been the culture of the organization," says Ken, Syncrude's manager of tailings and lease development. "It's also a smart thing to do from a workforce perspective as it provides a reliable long-term source of employees. The desire to go back home isn't there because they are already home."

Fort McMurray is also home for Ken, who moved to the city at the age of eight when his father took a job at Syncrude. Today, part of his job is overseeing Syncrude's Bird and Environment Team (BET), which focuses on keeping birds and wildlife away from Syncrude's operation.

"This is a seasonal rotational program that provides meaningful, sustainable employment while allowing our employees to practice traditional lifestyles, such as trapping in the winter," says Ken, also a member of Syncrude's Aboriginal Steering Committee which helps to steward company goals and commitments. "Many of our Aboriginal employees bring a lot of knowledge to the table that's invaluable to how we run our operation."

While over nine per cent of Syncrude's workforce is comprised of Aboriginal employees, Ken feels it's also important for industry to understand the roadblocks that prevent greater participation in the workplace.

"It's important to understand the issues in communities. If you understand the challenges, you can work to address them," says Ken, who also serves on the board of directors for Indigenous Works, a national group with a mission to improve the inclusion and engagement of Aboriginal people in the Canadian economy. "A good example is the mobile mine simulator Syncrude sponsored that is brought directly to communities in the Wood Buffalo region so people can train to be heavy equipment operators without leaving home. Bringing resources like that directly to students addresses a key training obstacle for many people in remote communities."

Ken also sees continued opportunities for bringing greater input into company activities, such as land reclamation. "Incorporating traditional knowledge into our plans provides tremendous value in making the landscape more sustainable and productive," he says.

ABOVE: Ken Bell, centre, and members of Syncrude's Bird and Environment Team.



Celebrating **OUR PEOPLE**

Syncrude's greatest resource is our people.

Today, over nine per cent of our workforce is of First Nations, Métis or Inuit descent. Here, we recognize our Aboriginal employees who reached service milestones between October 2016 and October 2017. Congratulations and thank you for making a career with Syncrude!

Retirement Congratulations

**Melvin Callan • David Dewart
Delbert P. Hodgson • Joseph Lafond
Mabel Laviolette • Gary Plante
Myles Roy**

5 YEARS

Laurie A. Cox
Rodney P. Curtis
Matthew Flaro
Jonathan Franklin
Maggie Grant
Jacques Maurice
Daniel Perepeluk
Michael S. Roberts
Blaine Simpson
Mitchell Tremblay
Trina Walker
Jessie Webster
Gale Wood

10 YEARS

Damien H. Alexander
Everett Alexander
Buck Beaton
Barb M. Buchanan
Arthur Bunning
Sarah Callan
Joyce A. Decoine
Anthony Drew
Glenn J. Drew
Richard G. Duncan
Travis Gibson
Chad C. Hildebrandt
Chad John
Kenny Kaskamin
Marlene L'Hirondelle
Linda Littlechilds
Wayne W. London
Real N. Loutitt
Derek J. Organ
Stephen Perry
Karen Pruden

Russell F. Renaud
Trevor F. Russell
John M. Sheehan
Dustin Sidoroff

15 YEARS

Tanya Begin
Cory Bennett
Thomas Champagne
Leonard Florence
George Frye
Lisa Hamm
Decker Harpe
Kerry Hefferan
Lana Hill
Marlene Lane
Shari MacRae
Jennifer McLeod
Robert E. Tourangeau
Ruby Wheeler

20 YEARS

Andrew C. Bacon
Melvin Boostrom
Tracy Coombe-Young
Margaret Horvath
Leon Kreutzer
Brad Paquette
Tracy Unger

25 YEARS

Steve Benoit
Joey Hamelin
Larry A. Roussin

30 YEARS

Henry Castor
Fran Clarke
Guy Cote
Stephen Graham
Leonard Hansen
Peter Hansen
Darrell Humphrey
Brad Swanberg
Sandie Thompson
Stuart Tourangeau
Douglas Webb

35 YEARS

Judy Coote
Ennis Gladue
Reshelda Hobbs
Lyle Huppie

40 YEARS

Allen Michalko

ABORIGINAL RELATIONS SCORECARD



SYNCRUDE DIRECT WORKFORCE

Total Aboriginal Employees (#) 2016

470

2012	2013	2014	2015
474	467	464	461

ABORIGINAL REPRESENTATION IN:

Permanent Syncrude Workforce (%) 2016

9.8

2012	2013	2014	2015
9.1	8.8	8.9	9.4

Leaders and Management (%) 2016

7.3

2012	2013	2014	2015
6.0	6.2	5.8	6.1

Administrative, Professional, Technical (%) 2016

6.7

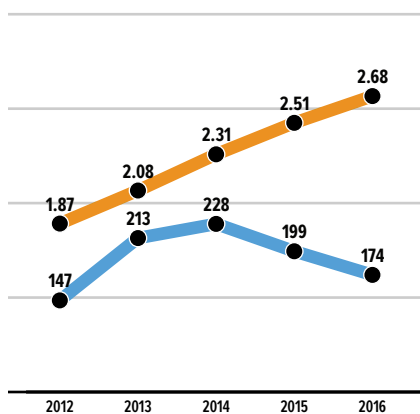
2012	2013	2014	2015
5.9	6.0	6.2	6.5

In 2016, Aboriginal representation in our workforce reached one of its highest levels ever at 9.8 per cent.

Business

Spending with Aboriginal Companies

— \$ millions annually
— \$ billions cumulative

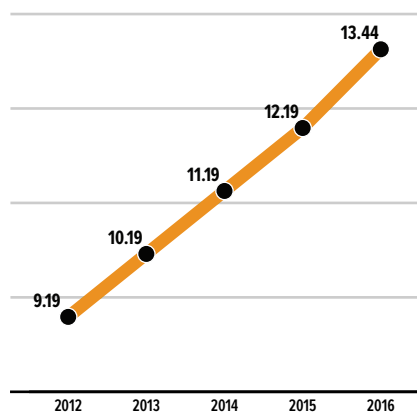


Total Aboriginal business spending for the year was \$174 million. While lower than 2015, Syncrude's Aboriginal procurement relative to our total Alberta procurement increased by 60 per cent over 2014. The cumulative total for Syncrude business with First Nations- and Métis-owned companies is over \$2.6 billion.

Community

Investing in Aboriginal Communities

\$ millions, cumulative since 2001

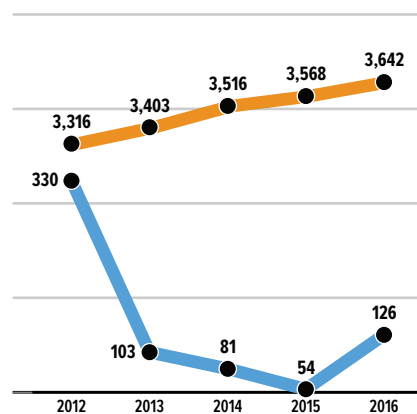


Syncrude invested over \$1.2 million in Aboriginal initiatives and projects during 2016.

Environment

Permanent Land Reclaimed

— hectares per year
— hectares cumulative



Syncrude has permanently reclaimed over 3,600 hectares to date. Another approximately 1,000 hectares are ready for revegetation.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Trades and Operators
(%) 2016

12.3

2012	2013	2014	2015
11.7	10.6	11.1	11.9

New Hires
(% of all hires) 2016

19.1

2012	2013	2014	2015
9.8	6.3	11.6	14.7

Attrition Rate
(%) 2016

6.2

2012	2013	2014	2015
10.4	8.2	6.0	6.0

Average Years of Service
(# of years) 2016

12.2

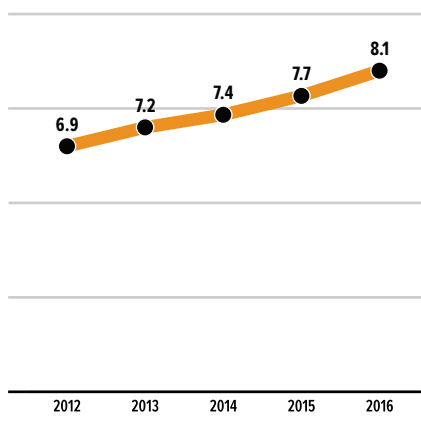
2012	2013	2014	2015
10.2	10.7	10.7	12.3

Syncrude has planted over eight million trees and shrubs on reclaimed land.

Environment

Trees and Shrubs Planted

millions, cumulative

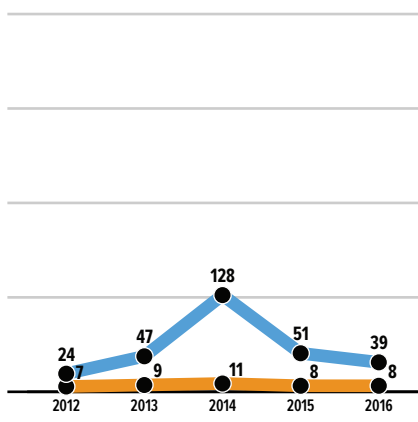


In 2016, approximately 408,000 tree and shrubs seedlings were planted.

Wildlife Incident Tracking

of Incidents

avian¹
other animal²



¹ Includes all bird and waterfowl mortalities related to oiling. Incidents are reported to the Alberta Government and Environment and Parks department. An additional 25 mortalities were reported in 2016 related to vehicle collision or natural or unknown causes.

² Includes all animal mortalities, regardless of cause, including those in which the cause was natural, due to predation or unknown.

Education

Interested in a Syncrude scholarship?

Since starting operations in 1978, Syncrude has provided ongoing financial support towards the educational endeavours 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 and click on *Community-Syncrude Award and Scholarships*. Many of the awards available are prioritized for Indigenous and northern Alberta recipients.

Our Aboriginal Relations Program

The goals of Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations program are to:

- Be recognized as a leader in Aboriginal relations and business development, and an employer of choice
- Attract and retain qualified candidates from local Aboriginal communities
- Maintain support from regional communities of Syncrude's role in the oil sands
- Ensure effective, two-way relationships and consultation
- Focus community investment on education and recruitment, community relations, cultural retention and Aboriginal leadership
- Ensure regional communities have the capacity to engage with Syncrude regarding consultation, employment, business, and environmental and socio-economic impacts
- Ensure environmental programs are well understood by our stakeholders and designed to mitigate impacts to traditional land uses, and incorporate traditional knowledge where possible
- Achieve a balance of economic, environmental and social outcomes through engagement and evaluation of impacts
- Achieve regulatory and public confidence

Progress towards these goals is stewarded by Syncrude's Aboriginal Relations Steering Committee, which includes executives, senior managers and advisors who meet quarterly to guide and champion strategies to ensure positive outcomes for Aboriginal stakeholders. An Aboriginal Relations team supports the Committee; they manage the day-to-day interactions and relationships with local communities of interest.

THE ABORIGINAL RELATIONS STEERING COMMITTEE

Mark Ward
President and Chief
Executive Officer

Kara Flynn
Vice President,
Government & Public Affairs

Greg Fuhr
Vice President,
Production Mining

Peter Read
Vice President,
Strategic Planning

Ken Bell
Manager, Tailings & Lease
Development

Lana Hill
Advisor, Stakeholder Relations

Suzanne Hutchings
Manager, Human
Resources Services

Dr. Tom Lawley
Chief Medical Officer

Colleen Legdon
Manager, Community
Relations

Chaim Lum
Manager, Procurement

Prashant Mehta
Manager, Site Services

Ross Noble
Advisor, Regulatory Affairs

Michelle Velez
Manager,
Environmental Affairs

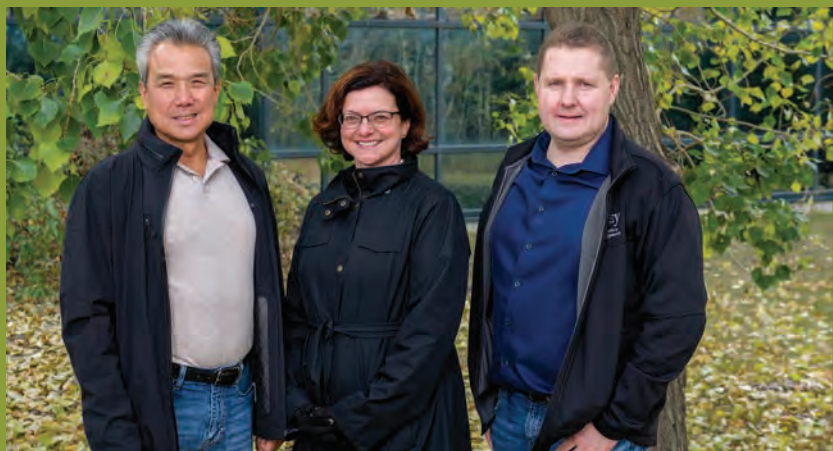
Doug Webb
Aboriginal Business Liaison



L to R: Doug Webb, Suzanne Hutchings, Mark Ward, Ross Noble



L to R: Dr. Tom Lawley, Lana Hill



L to R: Chaim Lum, Michelle Velez, Ken Bell



L to R: Peter Read, Kara Flynn, Colleen Legdon
Missing: Greg Fuhr, Prashant Mehta



A



B



C



D



E



F



G

OUR ABORIGINAL RELATIONS TEAM

Our Aboriginal Relations Team supports the Aboriginal Relations Steering Committee. They manage the day-to-day interactions and relationships with local communities of interest.

A – Colleen Legdon
Manager of Community Relations

B – Lana Hill
Stakeholder Relations Advisor

C – Doug Webb
Aboriginal Business Liaison

D – Tracey Stephen
Stakeholder Relations Advisor

E – Jo Anne Hulan
Community Investment Advisor

F – Lisa Nelson
Aboriginal Relations Representative

G – Marty Quintal
Aboriginal Recruitment Advisor

THOUGHTS FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



information across enemy lines. Or the daring feats of people like Francis Pegahmagabow, Canada's most decorated Aboriginal soldier, and Henry Louis Norwest, one of the most famous snipers of the entire Canadian Corps in World War I.

Closer to home, we learn about Bertha Clark-Jones, who was a drill instructor at bases across the country during the Second World War, and went on to become one of Canada's most respected activists for Indigenous women's rights. Also, we hear from members of the local Métis community about the dedication and sacrifices of their own brothers, fathers, cousins and uncles in conflicts around the globe.

Thanks to the commitment of our nation's armed forces, Canadians today enjoy an unprecedented high quality of life and are free to pursue our dreams and ambitions. We explore some of these stories – from a visit with Fort Chipewyan's Robert Grandjambe and his dog sled team to a reflection on the outstanding achievements of the late Métis entrepreneur and philanthropist Herb Belcourt. The next generation too are making great strides as we learn about the phenomenal Aboriginal high school graduation rates in Fort McMurray and the support provided to students through the local First Nation, Métis, Inuit (FNMI) school programs.



For most of us, the experiences of battle during wartime is something only read about in school textbooks or seen on the television from the comfort of home.

But, for many others, these experiences are far more real, whether it was firsthand or in accounts told by family members. This edition of *Pathways* honours the contributions of our nation's veterans and those Indigenous men and women who for more than a century have stood side-by-side with their fellow Canadians in defence of liberty and democracy across the world.

Take, for example, a little known story about the code talkers during World War II who developed secret messages in the Cree language for relaying tactical

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Ward'.

Mark Ward

President and Chief Executive Officer



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





Syncrude

www.syncrude.ca

The Syncrude Project is a joint venture undertaking among Imperial Oil Resources Limited, Mocal Energy Limited, Nexen Oil Sands Partnership, Sinopec Oil Sands Partnership and Suncor Energy Inc. (with the Suncor interest held by Canadian Oil Sands Partnership #1 and Suncor Energy Ventures Partnership, both wholly owned affiliates of Suncor Energy Inc.).



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