

Pathways

ISSUE NO X • SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD. INDIGENOUS REVIEW 2019



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Welcome

There are many different pathways to success. It could be forging strong connections with Mother Earth or finding your voice as a storyteller. It could be the journey from welder to teacher or the moments that lead a person toward a life of healing.

There is no end to the remarkable achievements among First Nations, Métis and Inuit 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 important issues 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 Syncrude's commitment to encourage greater understanding of Indigenous culture, history and traditions. 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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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 Indigenous communities celebrate success and continue to build capacity for further progress and achievement.



ENVIRONMENT

We work with local Indigenous 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 Indigenous 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 Indigenous 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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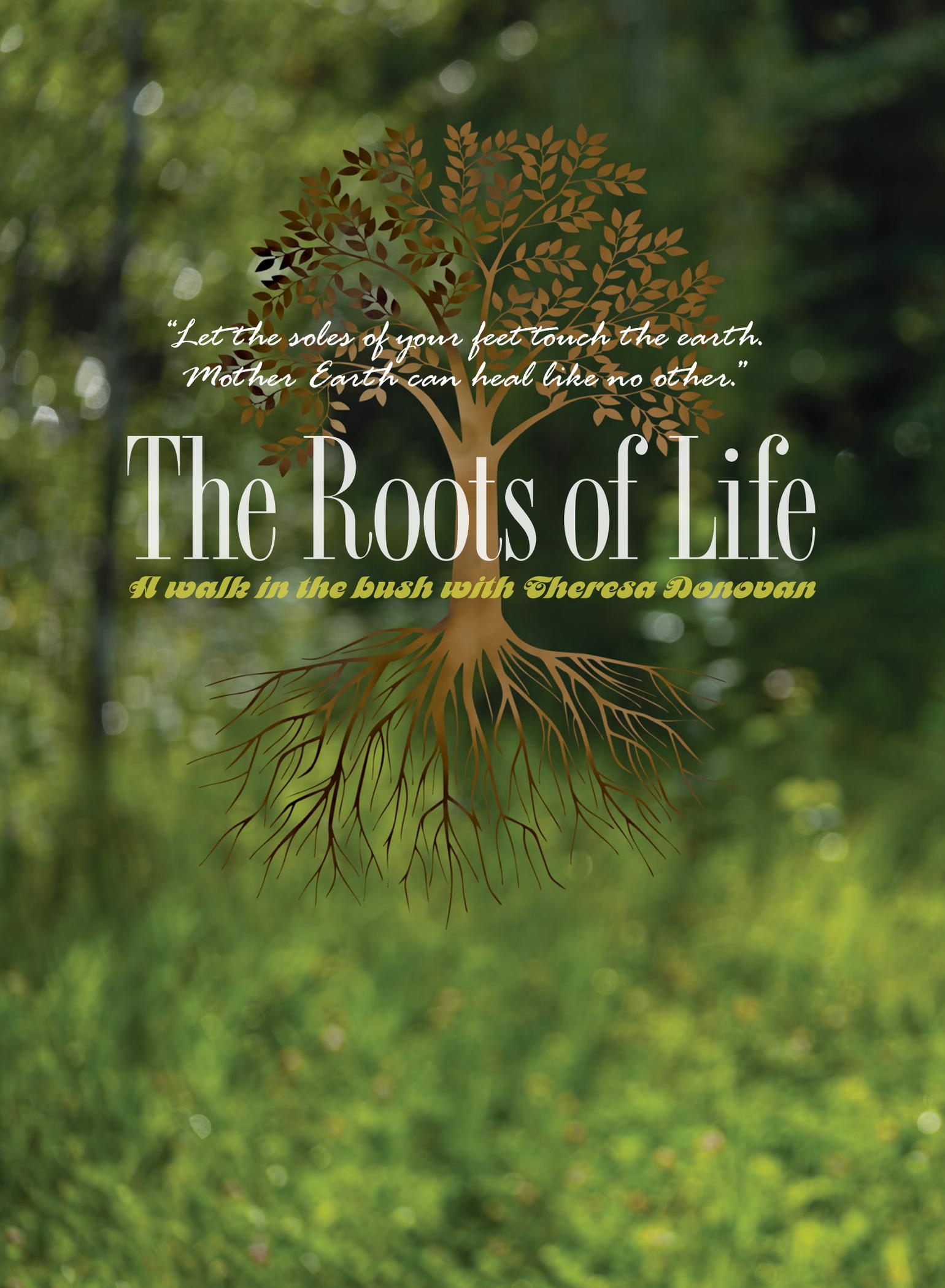


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*"Let the soles of your feet touch the earth.
Mother Earth can heal like no other."*

The Roots of Life

I walk in the bush with Theresa Donovan





Métis Elder Theresa Donovan believes there is a reason that a tree resembles a human so closely. Its trunk mimics our body, and limbs reach out like arms and legs. Its roots stretch out underneath the earth like our veins, coursing through our being and sustaining life.

Theresa has called the Wood Buffalo region home since 1968, having spent many years in Waterways, Conklin, along the railroad line south of the city, and in her current community of Fort McKay. Theresa feels a connection with Mother Earth, and throughout her life has found strength through that unbreakable bond. This foundation began during her birth and subsequent years being raised in the bush on a trap line with her mother, stepfather and brother.

Some of her earliest memories involved traveling by dogsled, picking berries and catching a rabbit in a snare. She paints a picture of walking in the bush alone, listening to the wind, trees rustling, and the surrounding quietness. Life was simple and beautiful.

“My mother would get us ready to go check her snares,” recalls Theresa, who spent her childhood in a cabin near May River, Alberta, without any power or electricity. “She’d bundle us up and put my baby brother in a homemade backpack, made from a sugar or flour sack. She would pull me in a sleigh. I can still remember the sight of my brother’s little legs and moccasins dangling out of the sack.”

Theresa’s mother was a strong woman, both mentally and physically, from whom she learned many lessons and skills. She recalls her mother’s resourcefulness, picking berries along any path they traveled, and tending to her own traps that were spread out many kilometres apart. Theresa recalls her mother using a certain type of berry to dye fabric, one which Theresa has searched to find its name years later with no avail.

Her stepfather was also an experienced hunter and trapper.

“He would stack pelts high on a toboggan and used teams of dogs for heavier loads, because it was quite a distance. We had to camp outside in the winter in the bush,” recalls Theresa. “We always had plenty to eat and ways to keep warm. My stepdad would leave supplies in special spots that he could go back and find on a later trip. Or he would put hot rocks from the fire into our blankets, wrapped in cloth.”

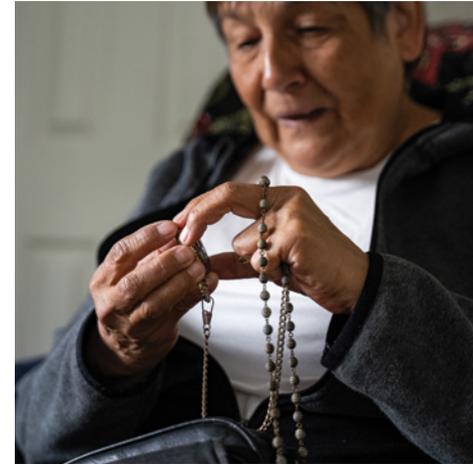
Theresa cherishes the special memories of her early years. “I used to walk in the bush alone near the river, it was so beautiful. I was never fearful,” she says. “Wild animals were always nearby. I was a curious child who had to see what was going on.”

This curious nature of wanting to know more has carried with Theresa throughout her life. It is also a quality she hopes to pass along to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She believes it is important to share her knowledge of the land and traditions with her family. “I want to teach my great-grandbabies and my older grandchildren. They can carry this knowledge on for me and our family.”

Later in life, Theresa experienced some heart-breaking loss. She attributes her connection to family, the community and her grounding to the earth, for allowing her to begin the healing process.

“When I was going through a difficult time, another Elder told me, ‘when you’re feeling down, go on your own and find yourself a tree. Sit there and talk to it. Tell that tree your story, what’s bothering you and why. That tree is just as human as you are,’” recalls Theresa.

“That strength and grounding is what helped carry me through.”



Her stepfather's rosary and pocket watch remind Theresa of the importance of never forgetting her roots.



**“I don’t go by
books. I go by
the knowledge
that is passed
to me. I watch
and observe.
”**

“

Everyone should take a walk in the bush. It’s good for the soul.”



Theresa is a member of Syncrude’s Reclamation Engagement Focus Group who provide feedback and share their traditional knowledge to help guide the company’s reclamation activities. Here, Theresa provides her personal insights on some of nature’s bounty.

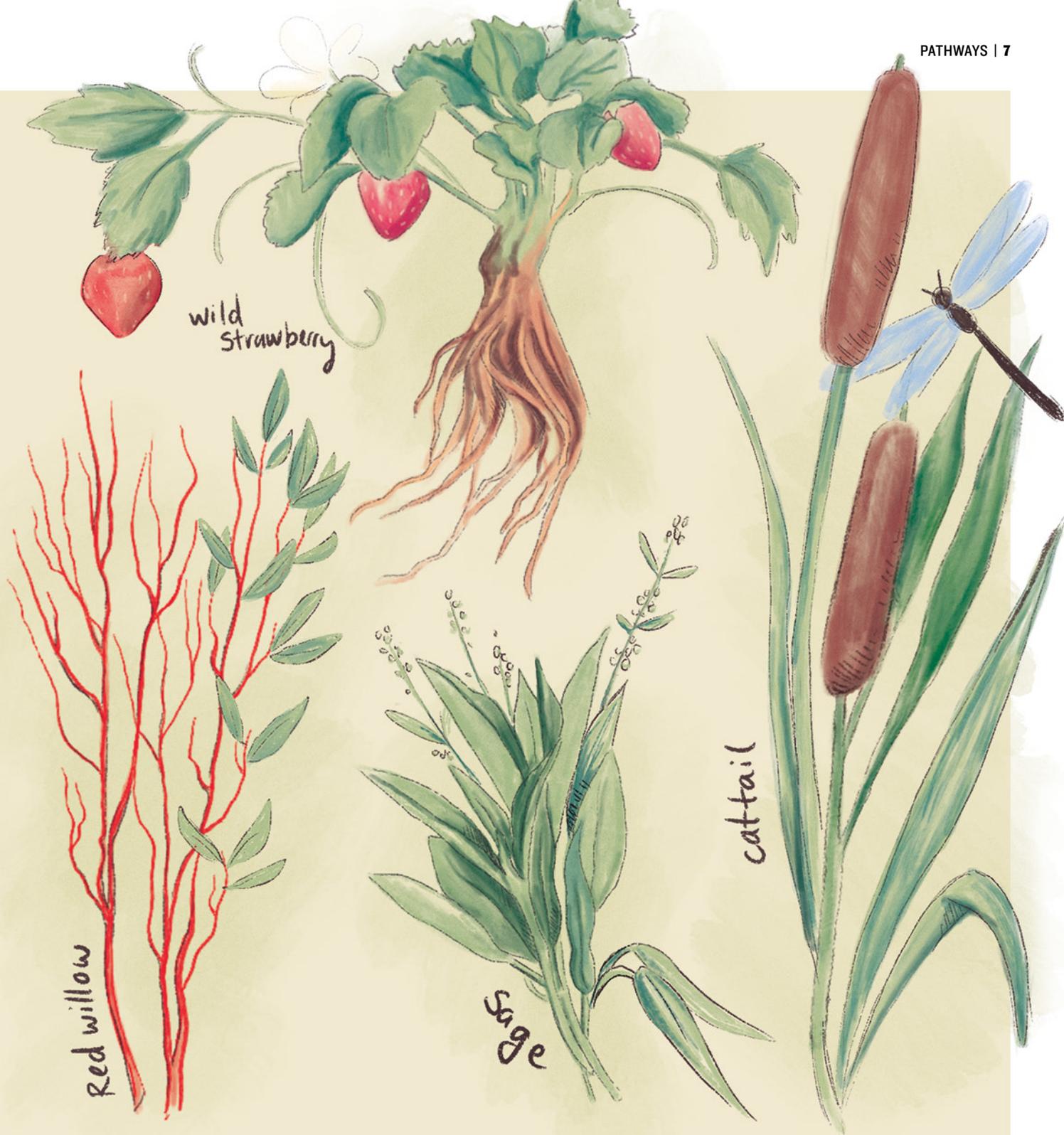
Sweet Grass
There is a certain way to pick sweet grass. You must have 21 strands of it. Then you braid the strands and say a prayer. What you take from Mother Earth you should always give back. If you pull the roots, leave tobacco in its place. Sweet grass can be

used for smudging and cleansing the spirit with the Creator.

Rat Root
When you dig it you need to go to the end – pull – and keep going as it can be very long. Watch out for any frogs that may surprise you in the muskeg. It’s a medicinal

plant that can be boiled and used for tea to help with colds, sore throats, and stomach ailments. Add honey and sip until it’s gone.

Sage
It is traditionally used more by women for smudging or blessing the home.



Red Willow

A tree that grows along the MacKay River. Young plants are used to bend and make dreamcatchers. Scrape the marrow and boil to make tea. It aids in treating arthritis. My mother used to keep a bucket full of it.

Cattail

The starchy roots have a gel with healing properties, which can be used similar to an aloe plant to soothe burns and cuts.

Dandelion

Use the leaves to eat in salad. The root can have positive medical effects for individuals with diabetes, when boiled and made into tea.

Strawberry Root

Dry the root and make it into a powder form to use as medicine for stomach or heart problems. My mother and stepdad used it, along with many other Elders I know.

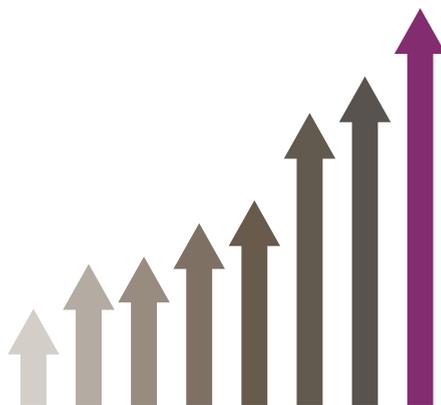


People were saying,
'yes, keep moving,'
and that's the way
it's been."

Audrey Poitras

Headed in the Right Direction





Audrey Poitras, president of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), never pictured herself as a political figure nor ever imagined she would be the leader of anything. But working as the certified management accountant for the Métis Nation in 1996, she noticed a change was desperately needed.

“It was very obvious to me just being in our finance department that there was so much we were missing that we could be doing for our citizens,” says Audrey.

So, with the encouragement of her peers, and with the knowledge that change could only be made from the top down, she ran for office.

“There was a lot of doubt, because there’d never been a woman president before,” says Audrey. “Certainly there’d never been a finance person before — but I did win with a huge majority.”

During her first term, Audrey laid down a lot of groundwork to change the direction of the Métis Nation. It was then that she gained the trust and respect from her people and, when she won her second term, it became even more rewarding.

“People were saying, ‘yes, keep moving,’ and that’s the way it’s been,” says Audrey. “I’ve been elected eight times now, and I think I’ve managed to do some of the things I do because I don’t see myself as a political person — I see myself as being at a position where I can make decisions, along with our council, that take us in the right direction.”

And her decisions brought her and the MNA to the signing of the first ever self-government agreement between the Government of Canada and a Métis Nation earlier this year. The agreement states the

Canadian government recognizes the MNA as its own distinct jurisdiction and will address all matters nation-to-nation.

“The whole focus from day one of the Métis Nation establishing itself, which was 91 years ago, was about recognition of who we are as a people and the place we have as one of the Indigenous people of Canada,” says Audrey.

It doesn’t stop there. Another exciting venture is the building of a 512-acre cultural gathering centre on Métis Crossing, located along the North Saskatchewan River.



“Our people talked about this all the time — of having a place that was ours where we could tell our own stories,” says Audrey.

But one area she’s had concern was the lack of involvement from Métis youth. “I would say to them, ‘people get old like me and you need to be taking over for us,’” says Audrey. “And today, I’m so happy that our youth took us up on it and said, ‘okay, we want to be involved.’”

Indeed, young people from across Alberta took the initiative to table a resolution stating they want a paid youth coordinator to work in each region. The coordinator will encourage more youth involvement, facilitate

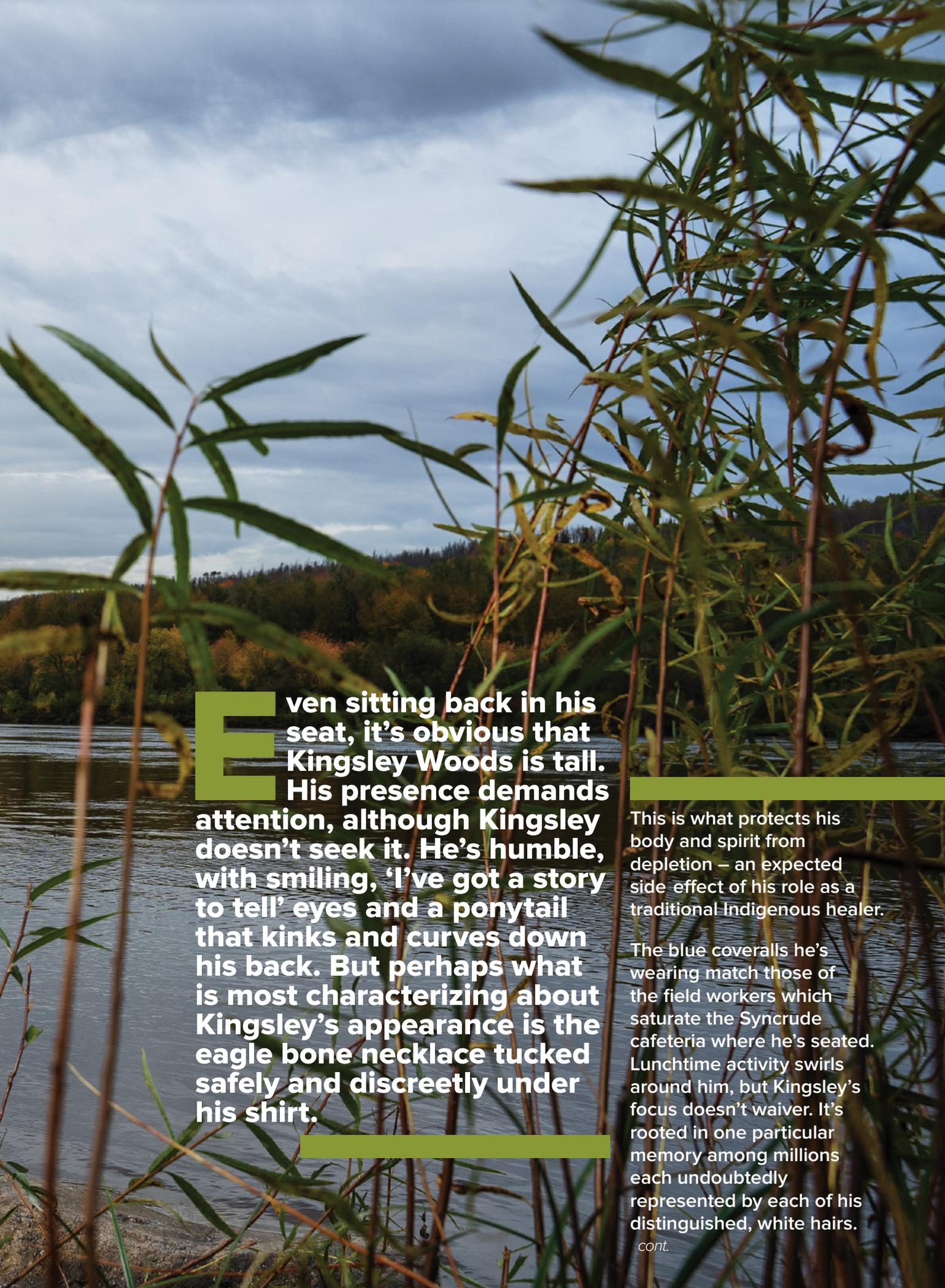
cultural programs and revive the Métis culture through programming and workshops.

“And as long as I’m here, I will continue encouraging them and I will continue working with them,” says Audrey. “It’s amazing how much our young people are interested, and I believe that we are in good hands for the future.”



The Healing Gift





Even sitting back in his seat, it's obvious that Kingsley Woods is tall. His presence demands attention, although Kingsley doesn't seek it. He's humble, with smiling, 'I've got a story to tell' eyes and a ponytail that kinks and curves down his back. But perhaps what is most characterizing about Kingsley's appearance is the eagle bone necklace tucked safely and discreetly under his shirt.

This is what protects his body and spirit from depletion – an expected side effect of his role as a traditional Indigenous healer.

The blue coveralls he's wearing match those of the field workers which saturate the Syncrude cafeteria where he's seated. Lunchtime activity swirls around him, but Kingsley's focus doesn't waiver. It's rooted in one particular memory among millions each undoubtedly represented by each of his distinguished, white hairs.

cont.



L to R: Sophia,
Olivia, Kingsley,
Belinda and Julia

He recalls one Sun Dance – he’s participated in many – he attended with his healing mentor, Keith, a Sundance Chief. As always, people gathered from all over Mother Earth to take part in this sacred ceremony, to pray and be healed from their ailments. Among them was a man unable to walk, brought in his wheelchair by his family. During the ceremony, he and his family prayed for his healing. The Sundance Chief prayed over the crippled man, and the spirits listened to his prayers. Then, Keith spoke up.

“He can walk now,” Keith said, as Kingsley recalls.

The man began to squirm, his joints cracking and popping like campfire kindling as he stood. His family watched – jaws dropped and eyes tearful – as the man proceeded to walk, and then miraculously perform a jaunty red river jig, then left the altar.

Experiences like that of the crippled man didn’t shock Kingsley, who says he always knew he was meant to be a healer. It wasn’t a

duty he chose, it was simply an intrinsic gift passed through the bloodline of his ancestors.

“Traditionally, we always had medicine people in our communities. But through the trauma of residential schools and other circumstances, that tradition was lost for a time,” he says. “My father and grandfather didn’t use their gift because it was forbidden.”

Yet, Kingsley said they always saw it within him.

“When I was a kid, I would communicate with everything – I would always be talking to animals and spirits that nobody else could see,” says Kingsley. “Now, people like that would be labeled schizophrenic so quickly. But my parents always trusted it was part of my journey.”

At age nine, Kingsley says the spirits revealed what this gift indicated and what it was meant to be used for: healing. Even at that time, Kingsley knew its magnitude. Feeling unready and scared, Kingsley’s father helped him arrange a ceremony to ask the spirits for a little more time before

having to take on such a large responsibility.

More than 25 years later, the spirits came back. This time, though, there was a familiarity to the revelation that helped provide clarity to Kingsley’s purpose.

“My great-grandmother who had passed away a number of years before came to me in a dream. She looked at me and simply said, ‘it’s time,’ and walked out the door,” says Kingsley. “I fasted and prayed about it before realizing she was right – it was time for me to start helping people.”

Kingsley says that as soon as he began to use his gifts, his life fell into place. This included meeting and marrying his love, Belinda.

He recalls a defining moment when, with one baby girl and another on the way, they traveled together from Manitoba to Alberta during his university break to visit Belinda’s parents. Kingsley was eager to help them in any way he could but, while chopping wood for their fire, the clip of the axe projected something into his eye.

Before he could flush it out with water, Kingsley's body had absorbed it. A few days later when he returned back to Manitoba, he felt intense flu-like symptoms. A visit to the doctor was quickly scheduled, where he was reassured that the illness would pass. Kingsley went home with his family, but the symptoms worsened.

Thankfully, Kingsley's gifts helped him know what to do.

"An owl came to me that night, as my health started to worsen. It said, 'you've got something really bad in you. You have to take care of it today, or this will be the end.' So, back to the hospital we went," Kingsley says. "I remember blacking out, and when I woke up, there were eight-or-so doctors standing above me that evening."

In the small city of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Kingsley suspects that might have been all the doctors available.

"I blacked out again – I couldn't help it. I was in a coma for six weeks," says Kingsley. During that time, his great-grandmother visited every night.

"While with her, she urged me to protect our natural resources – she said we were going to run out of water if we don't do something about it. Then, she took me to heaven. I call it 'the happy hunting ground.' I wanted to stay, but they said I had to come back and finish raising my family."

Kingsley draws a lot of inspiration from that experience and is confident his daughters – 14-year-old Olivia, 11-year-old Julia and nine-year-old Sophia – also have the gift of healing. Olivia, for instance, was already showing glimpses of her spiritual sensitivity when she was just a toddler.

"After my dad passed away, he came to see me in a dream. He saw Olivia hugging me around my legs and asked me who she was," says Kingsley. "I handed her to my father and they went off for a while. When she came back, she was really happy."

"Traditionally, we always had medicine people in our communities. But through the trauma of residential schools and other circumstances, that tradition was lost for a time."

"When I woke up, Olivia asked me, 'who is Ross?' I told her it was her grandfather. 'He has a nice smile,' she said."

Kingsley's Sioux father and Saulteaux mother instilled a strong connection to the land with their son. It is now something he shares with his wife and daughters as together they frequent fishing spots around Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche and Athabasca, and assist him in healing ceremonies.

While Kingsley waits for the day he can help his daughters along their own journey as healers, he finds other opportunities to mentor. One of these opportunities exists at Syncrude, where Kingsley currently works as a technical team leader in extraction and tailings.

"Everyone here is part of one big family, even though we come from different backgrounds," Kingsley says.

Here, his compassion and healing talents illuminate his leadership.

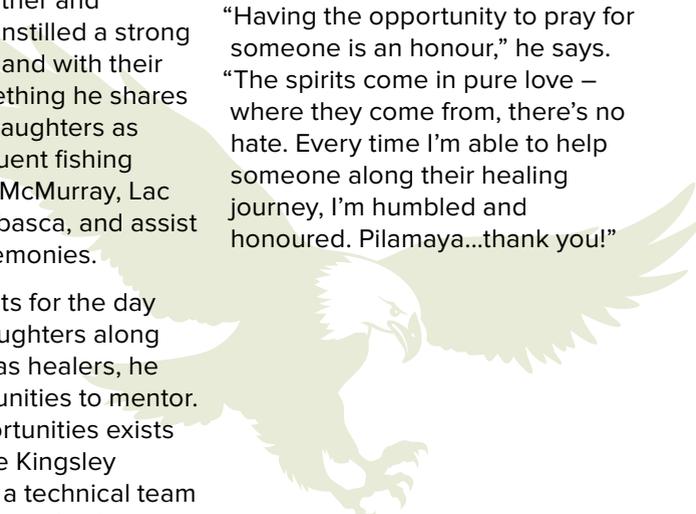
"My door is always open, and for some reason people here feel comfortable to come talk to me about things they're going through or things on their mind," he says.

As a traditional healer, Kingsley helps people through all sorts of trauma – be it physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. He says they are all connected.

"When we think about something and dwell on it, sometimes this can manifest itself physically. We take that out of people," he says. "I put it this way – we're spiritual beings having a human experience. Our spirit is forever. That's why we, as Natives, always think about the future generations when we make big decisions – even if the effect will occur generations beyond our time in this life."

When Kingsley thinks about his future, he imagines himself continuing to use his gift as much as possible.

"Having the opportunity to pray for someone is an honour," he says. "The spirits come in pure love – where they come from, there's no hate. Every time I'm able to help someone along their healing journey, I'm humbled and honoured. Pilamaya...thank you!"



A vibrant landscape featuring a lush green field in the foreground, a bright red ribbon or path winding across it, and a dense line of trees in the background under a clear blue sky. The text 'finding her voice' is overlaid in a red, elegant serif font with decorative flourishes.

finding her. voice

“

It wasn't until I started looking within myself and going back to my roots as an Indigenous woman that I started to find my voice and my calling in art.”



The time is now for Indigenous people to start rising and getting back to their inner artists, believes Teneil Whiskeyjack, an artist and actor from Saddle Lake Cree Nation.

Since she was a little girl, Teneil knew she wanted to be a performer, but it wasn't until she was nine years old that her mother brought her to a film festival and she received the opportunity of a lifetime.

They met an Indigenous actor at the festival and he gave them the card to his agent, who they immediately contacted. Soon, Teneil started going on auditions. She started out voice acting for *Stories from the Seventh Fire* and went on to act in feature films like *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* and *Dream Keeper*.

"I've always loved to dance and perform, and I'm involved in many other elements of performing," says Teneil. "To me, that's always been a way of expressing myself and a way of igniting conversations."

But the path wasn't always straightforward. Becoming a mother at a young age, she was forced to grow up quickly.

"For a while, I was sitting stagnant, and I found myself conforming to what I thought society needed of me," she recalls, adding that she went into social work and make-up artistry before she was pulled back to the performing arts.

"It wasn't until I started looking within myself and going back to my roots as an Indigenous woman that I started to find my voice and my calling in art."

Teneil performed *Ayita* at Edmonton's Nextfest, sponsored by Syncrude, in June. It is actually her thesis project for the Bachelor of Arts degree she received earlier this year. The story follows three generations of women and explores the reclamation of women's voices through movement.

"I feel as if I've been led to tell the story of *Ayita*," she says, adding it is in remembrance of her late maternal grandmother. "We had the voiceover of Kohkom and she would guide *Ayita* throughout the story."

Not only has she found her way in the performing arts, Teneil has also paved the way for future Indigenous actors. This includes her own daughter with whom she collaborates to perform *Ayita*. "She's a trained dancer," says Teneil, "and the fire in her soul inspires me."

An unwavering drive, along with her passion to succeed, has made Teneil look at life like one big puzzle. She says our paths aren't clear in the beginning, "but, as you go forward and evolve as a person, connections start to come together, and when you start opening yourself up to receiving and living in gratitude, a lot of opportunities present themselves."



A Collaborative Cultural Shift

Vianne Timmons' interest in Indigenous education began with her first teaching post on the Babine First Nations Reserve in British Columbia. It became personal when she found out about her own family.

Dr. Timmons is the president and vice chancellor of the University of Regina. She has been at the forefront of indigenization, creating an environment that makes education relevant and supportive for Indigenous people. She has also been honoured many times for her work – the Order of Canada, Regina's Citizen of the Year, and from 2008 to 2011 she was listed as one of the Top 100 Most Powerful Women in Canada. Then they put her in the hall of fame.

This year Dr. Timmons was the 2019 Indspire laureate in Education. It's an award that would seem logical given her lifelong work. Yet she didn't feel she deserved it.

"I've always described myself as of Mi'kmaq heritage," she says, "as I only discovered my culture and history when I was nearly 30 years old."

Sadly Dr. Timmons' story is all too familiar. "My father was taught the hard way it was shameful to be even part Indigenous. His own grandmother from the other side of the family used to call him 'the dirty little Indian boy'."

She told the Indspire organization how she felt. It didn't matter to them and it may have been one more reason why they knew they'd made the right choice. On the evening of the awards, Dr. Timmons accepted on behalf of the team who has done so much at the university to indigenize the culture on campus.

There have been many parts and partners in this transformation. Nearly everyone at the university has been

involved: students, faculty, staff, the wider community. Key to this has been the Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC) set up by Dr. Timmons. This voluntary group of First Nations and Métis staff help to create indigenization strategies, work to decolonize courses and create Indigenous content, among many other initiatives. The IAC is listened to and respected by Dr. Timmons, who has made the entire indigenization process collective and collaborative.

"Professionally," says Dr. Timmons, "the Indspire award is something to be proud of as it is recognition by our Indigenous peers that we are on the right path."

"The Indspire award is something to be proud of as it is recognition by our Indigenous peers that we are on the right path."

Vianne Timmons

It is a path that is all-encompassing and the changes are measurable and noticeable. The percentage of self-declared Indigenous students is at its highest ever – 13 per cent – and rising.

While the big decisions have been easier to incorporate, sometimes it has been the minor details that needed more of her tact and resolve.

"We were looking into the names of the roads on campus," she recalls. "We wanted to change them to reflect the heritage of the community, and there was some discussion. One Indigenous name was too long, it was said, and couldn't be put on an official sign. I mentioned they were all shorter than Diefenbaker Drive. We were allowed to proceed."

Her journey, and the university's change to inclusivity, is not over yet. So far it has been an inspiring – or make that Indspiring – tale with more to come in the future.

Syncrude is a proud sponsor of the Indspire Awards and congratulates Dr. Timmons on her achievements. ■



BRIGHT IDEAS

“Understand the energy, reduce the energy and then produce energy,” says Rik Kaminsky, explaining the simple philosophy of Solaré Canada, the company he and Jay Kaminsky started in 2013.

The two Métis brothers had just sold their oilfields electronics firm and were looking for something challenging and interesting to do next. “We bought and fixed a warehouse in Spruce Grove,” says Rik. “It was ready for business before we even knew what the new business was.”

The brothers felt that solar was the way of the future. At the 2013 Solar Power International Conference in Chicago, they found a way to use their business and electronics knowledge in a new and meaningful way. The conference displays the latest technical advances in solar power capture and storage. Combining this with LED lighting and energy efficiency allowed Solaré to bring a complete business package to the Canadian market.

“Electricity from the sun is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing expenses.”

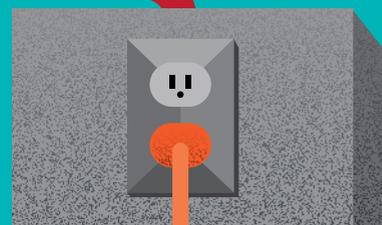
The work they have done since then, notably among Indigenous communities, saw the Kaminsky’s company win the Indigenous Award of Distinction, sponsored by Syncrude, at the 2019 Alberta Business Awards.

Solaré was also a finalist in 2018 and has been recognized for its innovation, social responsibility and environmental consciousness. They offer an analytical look at a client’s power needs and then help to create a plan.

“Sometimes it’s as simple as showing the kids in a family how much money they can save if they turn off the lights when they leave the room,” says Rik. “LED lighting can also create savings as high as 90 per cent in comparison to traditional incandescent fittings. Likewise, garnishing electricity from the sun is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing expenses.”

Based in Spruce Grove, Solaré is ideally positioned for projects in the West and has completed new installations and retrofits all over Alberta, especially on First Nations land.

“Combining renewable energy with increased energy efficiency means the only real limitation is battery storage, which is where the next quantum technical advances will be made,” says Rik. “It won’t be long before all the electrical needs of a home or business could be renewable. That’s good for the land, it’s sustainable and it’s cost effective.”





Samuel Metacat-Yah has wisdom beyond his 19 years. A quiet and reserved aura surrounds the young man, and his inward reflection paints a portrait of a person spilling over with courage and possibility.

Sam's mother and father – Lisa and Robert – have always believed in and nurtured his potential. Although leaving school early themselves, their experiences have shaped the important role education plays in the lives of their five children.

"Sam wasn't accepted into kindergarten at the same time as his friends because of the birthday cut-off, but I couldn't accept that he

would be behind other kids his age. I thought, I'll teach him myself," recalls Lisa, a member of the Little Red River Cree Nation. "I drove around the city and bought all the school supplies I could find. We spent the next year in our own little classroom at the kitchen table."

"MY NUMBER ONE GOAL WAS TO MOVE MY KIDS AHEAD IN LIFE."

Robert, Sam's Father

Robert recalls a spark of interest from his son as a child, and would encourage his enthusiasm when

Sam would spend hours counting electrical poles during road trips. Robert eventually obtained his GED and became a journeyman welder at Syncrude, where he has spent the last decade. He credits wanting to be an example for his kids as the reason he continued to push himself.

"My number one goal was to move my kids ahead in life. I've fought for everything I have today. I see those same qualities in Sam," says Robert, a member of the Dene Tha' First Nation. "He amazes me."

Sam didn't set out to win any awards, but in 2019 the awards found him. He was recognized in *YMM Parent Magazine* among the

SAMUEL METACAT-YAH

COURAGE AND POSSIBILITY

Sam with siblings Katherine, George, Rosalie and Sara.

Robert, Sam and Lisa.



Top 20 Under 20 and chosen out of hundreds of nominations to receive an Honouring Spirit: Indigenous Student Award by the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA). Both highlighted his academic success as well as his accomplishments as a volunteer, tutor for other students, and member of his high school's First Nations Métis Inuit (FNMI) Student Advisory Council.

In addition, Sam received academic funding through the Syncrude Higher Education Awards Program (SHEAP) for children of the company's employees and retirees. He was also a recipient of

Syncrude's Rod Hyde Scholarship for local Indigenous students.

"I've always had a bad habit of letting self-doubt get to me, thinking I couldn't make it to the same level as other people," says

"RECOGNITION LIKE THIS SURE HELPS TO BOOST MY CONFIDENCE."

Sam Metacat-Yah

Sam. "Recognition like this sure helps to boost my confidence."

This year, Sam was excited to have a summer student position

with Syncrude's reclamation department and is now enrolled in the Environmental Technology Diploma program at Keyano College. "I always tell my siblings that it doesn't matter how long something takes to finish, if it means something to you it's worth doing," he says.

Sam is also appreciative of his parents – and the feeling is mutual. "I don't know what I did to have such smart and beautiful kids," says Lisa. "How they are turning out is so incredible." ●



Small Town. Big Goals.

Roughly 200 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle lies the town of Inuvik, in the Northwest Territories. Sheltered by boreal forest and hugged by the Mackenzie River Delta, it's secluded. It's quaint, too. Travelers may come and go by ferry in the summer, by ice road in the winter, and exclusively by air in the seasons between. Only about 3,200 people call it home.

One of these people is 19-year-old Tyra Cockney-Goose. Despite having grown up in the small, isolated community, Tyra has big goals for her education and career. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor's of Science in

Mathematics at the University of Victoria, but hopes to end up right back where she started – Inuvik – as a teacher.

In this role, Tyra hopes to encourage youth like her. “As an Indigenous person and someone from a small community, it's common to feel like you can't really achieve much,” says Tyra. “Growing up, I found there weren't a lot of opportunities to pursue the things I'm passionate about. I learned that you have to seek opportunities out yourself.”

One of Tyra's passions is science, and pursuing this has paid off. Last year, she presented a science project about sleep deprivation. The success of this project at the



regional level eventually led Tyra to the Canada Science Fair and the Prime Minister's Science Fair. Here, she made a friend who told her about the STEAM Horizon Award. Supported in part by Syncrude, the award presents five students annually with a \$25,000 prize for their post-secondary education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and math.

Tyra said she scrambled to get an entry together in order to meet the quickly-approaching deadline. "It was just something that I applied for not expecting much," she says. To her surprise, she won.

"When I got back to Inuvik, I couldn't even go to the grocery

store without being congratulated. The community definitely has my back, and it's warmed my heart to see how I've been welcomed back home," Tyra says. "I never thought it could turn into something so big."

In addition to feeling supported by her community, Tyra said the money has helped support her education.

"Last year, I would get so worried about budgeting everything – tuition, books and rent. This scholarship has enabled me to focus more on what I want to do rather than how I'm going to pay for it," she says.

Ultimately, Tyra hopes her hard work, this experience and her

future role as a teacher will help her inspire youth to pursue careers in the STEAM fields.

"Sometimes people say, 'you're so inspiring.' I just reply that I'm not someone who has accomplished unachievable things – everything I've done is within reach," says Tyra. "I hope youth, especially in the North, believe they can and it's possible." ◆

BIG WHEELS

Keep on Rollin'

When Chris Wilson started his own company with one mechanic service truck in 2005, he never expected it to grow into one of the largest contractors in the oil sands.



“It was a goal to get bigger but I would have never imagined what we’ve turned into,” says Chris, the founder and president of Birch Mountain Enterprises (BME).

The Fort McKay-based company has grown into a leader in fluid handling services, with about 225 units and 335 employees taking on tasks that include water hauling, steam cleaning, waste disposal, fueling stationary equipment, dewatering, waste water treatment and flatbed hauling.

One of the company’s first clients was Syncrude, where Chris worked as an employee for 11 years before starting BME.

“I started out at Syncrude as a general labourer in the tool crib before getting an apprenticeship to be a heavy-duty mechanic,” says Chris, a member of the Fort McKay First Nation. “Syncrude was my first industrial client. Syncrude has been a stable part of my company’s growth and expansion. Syncrude understands the value of working

with local contractors who understand the industry.”

BME is one of more than 50 Indigenous-owned businesses in the region that supplies goods and services to Syncrude. In 2018, the company spent more than \$518 million with Indigenous-owned contractors and suppliers, surpassing the previous high of \$342 million in 2017.

“We set a goal to do \$500 million in business with Indigenous-owned businesses, which generally represents about 10 per cent of our total annual spend. I’m very pleased to announce we met that goal in 2019,” says Doug Simms, Syncrude’s vice president of business services. “Our challenge now is to ensure we sustain that goal even while becoming more cost competitive in our spending.”

Syncrude has also committed to helping foster businesses in the region as part of its Indigenous Relations program that started more than 40 years ago.

“We are fully committed to developing a vibrant Indigenous

business community in the Wood Buffalo region. Some businesses have needed special considerations for a time in order to gain experience, improve cost competitiveness and achieve their potential,” Doug says. “Over the longer term, we expect all of our vendors to earn our business by competing on price, safety, service and quality. Achieving this goal will strengthen the sustainability of both Syncrude and our Indigenous suppliers, making us all stronger.”

Syncrude began tracking spending with Indigenous-owned businesses in 1992 and surpassed the \$1-billion mark in overall spending in 2006. Spending reached \$2 billion in 2014 and the \$3 billion mark was passed just three years later.

Providing opportunities also helps support the region.

“Locally-owned Indigenous companies are huge supporters of the region so the dollars spent by Syncrude with those contractors are going to stay here,” Chris says. “That benefits all of Wood Buffalo and the communities in it.”



HELENE WILSON

A PIONEERING SPIRIT

Helene Wilson is proud of her family, Métis heritage and career. One of the many people who arrived in Fort McMurray during the 70s, she was passionate and driven to succeed. And those qualities would serve her well over the years to come.

Spending her earlier years living in British Columbia, Helene studied welding at North West Community College. “My first job was as a welder at ALCAN Aluminum Smelter and I really loved this job. Then I heard that the north was opening up and there might be a career for me at Syncrude,” she says.

So in 1977, Helene, her four children, cat and dog piled into the car and towed a U Haul 1,700 kilometres in search of a better life. “I was part of the big wave of pioneer like people who came to Fort McMurray,” she says.

Soon after arriving, Helene was hired on to Syncrude as a welder with the maintenance team. “I was one of the company’s first female welders and they had to find me a place to work that had a separate bathroom,” says Helene. “When I arrived, base plant was still a construction site which meant there were only men’s washrooms available.

Helene started her career working in the plant during its construction. When a unit was turned over to maintenance, teams would do pre-commissioning on equipment and piping. This meant

taking piping apart and adding mock up flanges and flushing the system with water. From that starting point, her career spanned across the organization. In 2002, Helene was presented with the opportunity to be loaned by Syncrude to Father Mercredi High School to instruct and develop welding classes for Grades 8 to 12. Helene continued this significant work,



Helene Wilson and her granddaughter Cassie.

interacting with students, until her retirement in 2003. She fondly reminisces about her time spent there.

Instructing was a highlight of my career. I promised my dad that one day I’d be a teacher and I felt that even though I didn’t have the credentials as a teacher, I had sort of fulfilled that promise,” she says.

Helene’s youngest daughter and son both went on to become millwrights at Syncrude. At one point, there were four family members working at Syncrude, including her late husband, Wayne.

In more recent years, it’s no surprise that her granddaughter Cassie was inspired to work towards a rewarding career of her own. Cassie graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Law degree and received her call to the bar in 2018. She now practices in the areas of regulatory, environmental, Indigenous and land at a firm in Calgary.

“My grandma is, and always was, a tough lady. Raising four kids and coming from very little, she showed us the possibilities that come from hard work.”

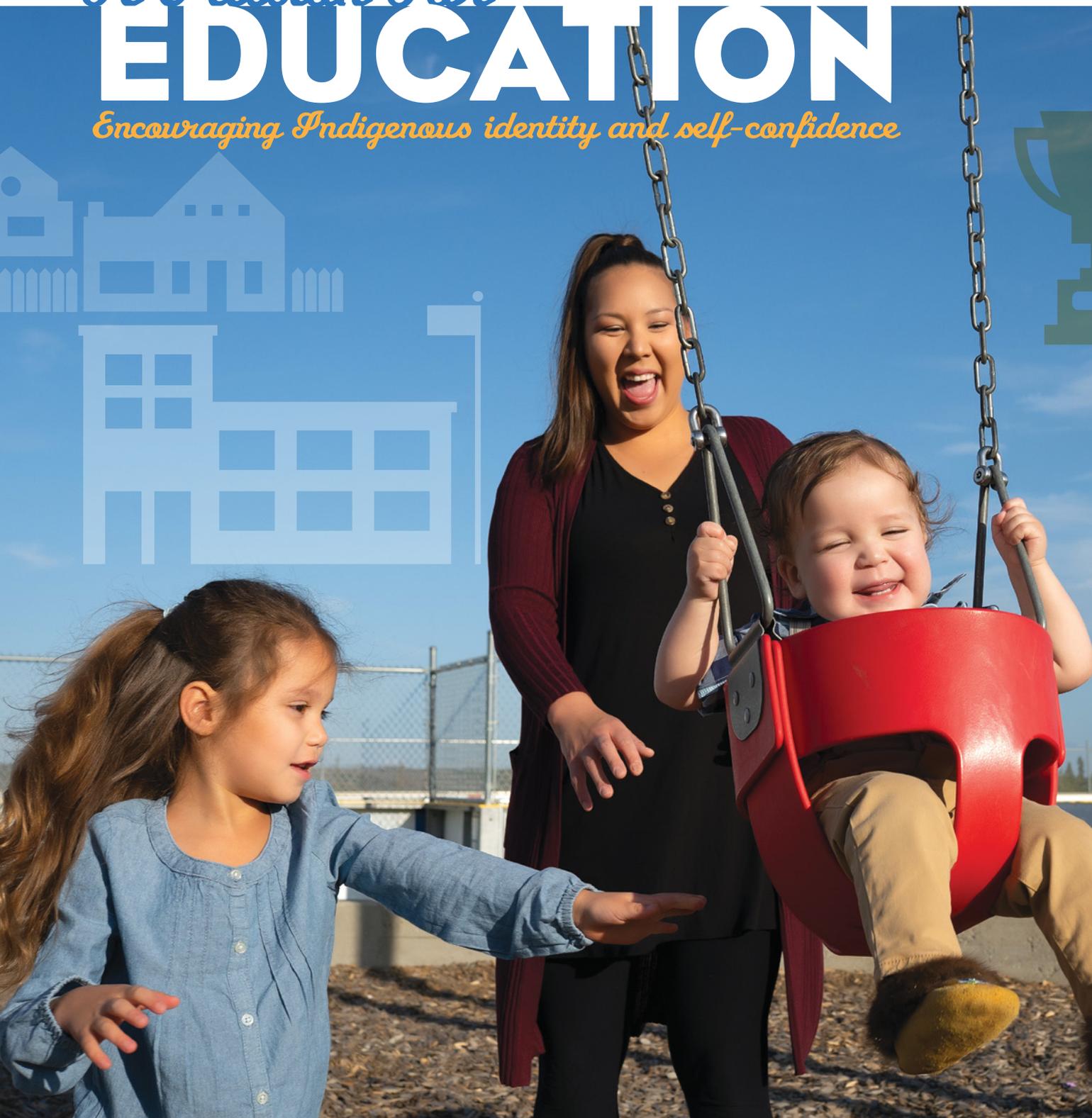
Cassie Richards

I wanted to continue my education and was drawn to a career that would allow me to research, read, write and do meaningful work,” says Cassie, who grew up in Fort McMurray. “I’ve been lucky to have positive female role models throughout my life.

My grandma is, and always was, a tough lady. Raising four kids and coming from very little, she showed us the possibilities that come from hard work. ■

A Passion For **EDUCATION**

Encouraging Indigenous identity and self-confidence



Completing a Bachelor of Education – with Distinction – is a tremendous accomplishment for anyone, but is especially impressive for Lori-Lei Mercredi, a proud mother of two. While many circumstances were working against her, Lori’s desire to make a difference in Indigenous communities and love for children – her own and others’ – provided the motivation she needed to finish triumphantly.

Education seemed like a clear choice for Lori, who recalls having many positive relationships with her teachers growing up.

“I always liked going to school, and I want to help other kids feel the same way,” Lori says.

One teacher, who she knew as Coach Maz, particularly stands out in her mind for helping her navigate a difficult stage of life.

“I had just moved to Edmonton to live with my sister after I had been getting into the wrong things. Maz gave me many chances in growing as a student and athlete, and was so understanding when I’d make mistakes. It helped me feel safe in an environment that was much healthier for me,” she says. “Eventually, I became captain of the basketball team and I was getting really good grades. Without him, I don’t think I would have been as focused to finish high school.”

This guidance redirected Lori’s life for the better. Among her many achievements, her greatest were bringing her children, now four-year-old Anna and one-year-old Jake, into the world. Lori returned to school shortly after Anna was born to prepare for a career which would allow her to spend more time with her family.

“Having to leave my daughter at a day home in order to go to class – that was hard,” says Lori. “The scholarships I received, or more specifically the Rod Hyde Scholarship, allowed me to focus solely on school and my family, and be more present with my children.”

Syncrude’s Rod Hyde Scholarship is annually awarded to an Indigenous student in the Wood Buffalo area based on academic achievement, community involvement, and other criteria. Her studies now complete, Lori has secured a full-time position at the Fort McKay First Nation teaching junior high.

“School was not always easy, but I feel motivated knowing there are students that need the consistency and

guidance just like I did. That is why I continue to do what I do,” she says. “What I really want to instill in my own children and those I teach is pride in their Indigenous identity and belief that they can achieve anything they set their mind to.”



“I always liked going to school, and I want to help other kids feel the same way.”

*L to R:
Family time
with Anna,
Lori-Lei and Jake*



Before he could even read, Drew Hayden Taylor knew he wanted to be a writer. At only five years old, Drew remembers sitting on the steps of his childhood home on Curve Lake First Nation with a pile of comic books on his lap. He had a very distinct memory of, “wow, next year I’ll go to school and I’ll actually be able to read these.”

Drew would read exotic stories from all over the world. He thought, “wouldn’t it be cool if someday I could write stories about my community and send them out all over the world, too?”

And he did. Drew went on to be an award-winning author, playwright, journalist, novelist, scriptwriter and much more.

But he actually didn’t immediately pursue a career in writing. In fact, he even wondered if Indigenous people could become writers because he didn’t see people like him anywhere in the writing industry. He asked his grade 11 English teacher if it was possible to make a living out of creative writing and without looking up from his desk his teacher said, “No, not really.”

Disheartened, Drew told his mom he wanted to be a writer and she looked at him with a perplexed look on her face and asked, “Why do you want to be a writer? It’s not going to get you anywhere.”

From that point, Drew was convinced he’d never pursue his dream.

But what he describes as a bizarre series of events finally led him to write an episode for *The Beachcombers* at the age of 25. He went on to write for *Street Legal* and *North of 60*, and Drew began to build traction for his career.

Being “a little Native kid” from Curve Lake First Nation, Drew became more successful than he thought he ever would be. “Most of my life is encased in layers of irony, so I find that in a lot of the work I do,” he says.

Earlier this year, Drew received an Honourary Doctorate of Law from Mount Allison University. His cousin pointed out, “Isn’t it odd you received a doctorate and you’ve never been to university?”

He was also a speaker at the University of Alberta’s Loughheed College Lecture Series, sponsored by Syncrude, last November. His lecture, titled “The Changing Face of Storytelling in the Indigenous 21st World,” takes the audience through his career as an Indigenous storyteller.

“What I find really interesting in my life is that for every success

that I’ve had, I’ve had three or four non-successes,” he says. “So, what I tell people — whenever a dream, a hope or a wish falls through, as clichéd as it sounds, something potentially better is around the corner, and I truly believe that.”

DREW HAYDEN TAYLOR’S THREE SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITERS:

1 All good writers are good readers, and all great writers are great readers. I have never taken a writing course in my life. Everything I learned about writing I learned from reading. Every book you read, you learn about story progression and story arcs. If you take the time to look at them, you’ll recognize the structure.

2 There’s no such thing as a good writer, only a good rewriter. At the very least, I have three drafts of everything I do. Don’t be afraid to rewrite.

3 Try and lead an interesting life. Join clubs, travel, see the world, meet interesting people, do things, get some experience. Don’t spend all of your time in the basement playing video games. You’re not going to have a lot to draw on if you want to become a writer.

FROM **Beachcombers** TO **Doctorate**

The Journey of an Indigenous Storyteller



Kindness, Compassion & Understanding

Building bridges to better health

While the Stollery Children's Hospital is based in Edmonton, roughly half of its patients come from somewhere else. For many Indigenous families in central to northern Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and beyond, the Stollery is the closest place to get care in the case of an emergency – even though it could be a ten-hour drive from where they live.

Yet distance is not the only challenge parents face. Many experience language and cultural barriers, unmanageable expenses for everything from accommodations to meals, and other difficulties that come with navigating a large, unfamiliar city. But thanks to the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program, supported in part by Syncrude, these barriers are being broken down.

It all started when the Stollery felt they could provide better support for Indigenous families. This was followed by a team of one: Sherri Di Lallo.

“My goal was to build bridges and help bring care to communities,” says Sherri. “It’s not about simply providing a program – it’s facilitating an entire cultural shift within our health services to better support Indigenous families.”

“Based on the historical experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada, they often have a level of mistrust with government institutions and workers. The difference in western medicine and Indigenous worldviews has also led to cultural misconceptions. These directly impact children and their families’ health care experience and have discouraged them from accessing proper care when needed.”

In order to achieve their goal, Sherri used Indigenous protocol to understand the path forward.

“We worked with an Elder, had a sweat, and asked for guidance from the Creator,” says Sherri. “The program is spiritually inspired and endorsed – we believe it’s been blessed by our ancestors, who we see as our guardian angels.”

Sherri believes the program has made a difference. “We met one family from Fox Lake, a fly-in community in northern Alberta. Their child had complex issues, including meningitis. They were Cree-speaking, and the child’s mother knew little English, was shy and barely talked.

“One of our pediatric social workers started speaking to her in Cree, and she opened up. The parents began to understand the treatments and we answered their questions in their language which helped them really understand.”

The child first visited the Stollery for six months at just three months old. Now, at four years old, the child is doing well and has only returned to the hospital for a few short visits.

For Sherri, witnessing this positive change is very meaningful.

“I am of Métis descent, from Buffalo Narrows in northern Saskatchewan. Being Indigenous, I’ve experienced racism and discrimination. I believe that when we serve our families with kindness, compassion and understanding, sometimes it’s the only time they can experience that.”

Sherri’s team has now grown to include six people with different specialties, all excited to see how the program will continue to grow.



A patient at the Stollery Children's Hospital participates in a healing circle at the facility.

“

It's not about simply providing a program – it's facilitating an entire cultural shift within our health services to better support Indigenous families.”

Sherri Di Lallo

Independence Through Opportunity

The name on the door may have changed and the workforce grown but the Mikisew Cree Group of Companies has maintained the same commitment over the years.

“We exist to create capacity and economic prosperity for the Mikisew Cree First Nation, through direct employment and generating profits that are invested back in the community,” says Ed Courtoreille, the Group’s CEO. “Right from the start, we established a vision for ourselves to take advantage of the opportunities in the region. We would create as many opportunities as we could for Mikisew members as well as others in the Wood Buffalo region.”

Ed is not only an executive but a Mikisew Cree Elder who keenly remembers the humble beginnings of the Group in 1991, when they started with eight employees and a vision. Syncrude was also one of its first customers.

Twenty eight years later, the Group hit a significant milestone by completing the acquisition of a former partner. The Group announced it would purchase Guthrie Industrial Services Ltd. and Guthrie Mechanical Services Ltd. in May, two years after forming the Mikisew Guthrie Limited Partnership.

The purchase was enabled by a five-year Master Service Agreement with Syncrude to provide consolidated facilities maintenance, mechanical maintenance, tool repair, and project services. “Working with Syncrude to secure a

long-term agreement limited the risk to this purchase,” says Malek Eid, Mikisew Group’s vice president for corporate strategy and development. “It made the acquisition a lot more feasible for our company.”

The deal also made sense for Syncrude Managing Director Doreen Cole. “We have had long, successful relationships with the Mikisew Group of Companies, Guthrie Industrial and Guthrie Mechanical,” says Doreen. “We look forward to working with them as a key partner in a safe, reliable, responsible and profitable oil sands operation.”

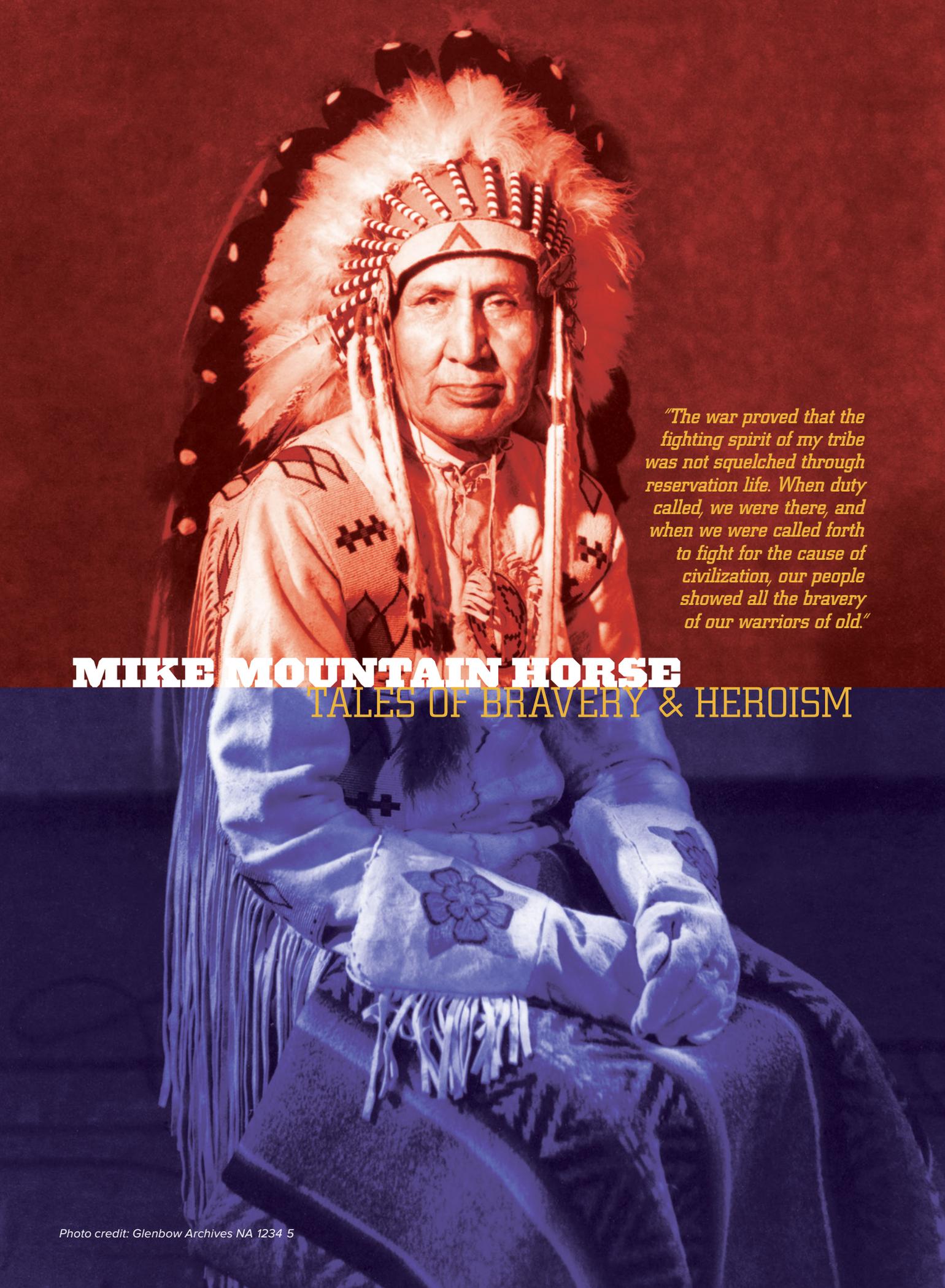
The new company is one of the largest employers in the region, with a peak workforce of close to 800 employees during winter. The Group provides site services, fleet maintenance, transportation services, emergency medical response, fire response, camp services, catering services, construction services, structural steel, electrical and instrumentation services,

aerodrome handling and facilities maintenance. However, Ed doesn’t see a change in philosophy.

“It is good to see the progress and success we’ve achieved,” he says. “But our vision remains the same. We want to take advantages of the opportunities that come from the industry to achieve independence and self-sufficiency in the community, and to create jobs and other benefits for members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and others who live in this region. That won’t change.”



“Working with Syncrude to secure a long-term agreement limited the risk to this purchase.”



"The war proved that the fighting spirit of my tribe was not squelched through reservation life. When duty called, we were there, and when we were called forth to fight for the cause of civilization, our people showed all the bravery of our warriors of old."

MIKE MOUNTAIN HORSE
TALES OF BRAVERY & HEROISM

Inspired Learning

The story of Mike Mountain Horse is one of many the newly established History and Heroes Foundation Alberta hopes more people will hear.

“The history of our province,” says Foundation chairman Ralph Young, “including Indigenous history and the stories of the people who helped to build this province, are all very important. There has been concern that some of this knowledge hasn’t been given the attention it should in our school system.”

One of the Foundation’s first initiatives was the SPIRIT of Peace competition, commemorating the centenary of the end of the First World War. Senior high school students were challenged to unfold the stories and discover the history of their communities during the war years 1914–1918.

Sophia Lin from Westmount Charter School in Calgary won second place in the competition for her presentation on Mike Mountain Horse. Using the competition’s SPIRIT guidelines – sportsmanship, perseverance, integrity, resiliency, inspiration and teamwork – she showed how the First World War veteran and Blood Tribe member exemplified all of these qualities in abundance.

The Foundation also offers Alberta Historian Awards through a number of post-secondary institutions, including Maskwacis Cultural College, Blue Quills University and Portage College. Keyano College in Fort McMurray is also part of the program.

Syncrude is proud to support the Lieutenant Governor’s History and Heroes Alberta Foundation and the vision of its founding patron The Honourable Lois Mitchell. To learn more, visit historyandheroes.ca.



Over a century later, images of the First World War still strike an emotional chord. Over 70 million people reportedly fought or served in “the war to end all wars,” making it one of the largest and deadliest conflicts in history. But among all those faces – symbols of heroism and bravery forever etched in time – one stands out and continues to inspire today.

Mike Mountain Horse was born in 1888 and, prior to the war, was a respected scout with the Northwest Mounted Police. When Mountain Horse enlisted in 1917, he didn’t fit the portrait of most soldiers, who were primarily English-speaking white men. He was a member of southern Alberta’s Blood Tribe and one of nearly 4,000 Indigenous Canadians, including 10 from his own community, to sign up.

Much of what is known about Mountain Horse has been told by his great-nephew, James Dempsey, associate professor in Native Studies at the University of Alberta. “Mike Mountain Horse joined the army for three reasons,” says James. “He supported his country and the righteousness of the cause. He wanted to avenge the death of his brother, Albert, who was injured in action and died in hospital. Mostly though he wanted to test himself, to prove that, despite being relegated to life on a reserve, he was still a warrior.”

In the two years served, he fought, at first, in the

third Battle of Ypres at Passchendaele. Despite being wounded and cut off from his unit, he hid in the abandoned enemy trenches for days until it was safe to return. On his way back, he captured several German soldiers and brought them in for questioning.

He also fought in the Battle of Cambrai, the Battle of Hill 70 – part of the Vimy Ridge campaign – and the Battle of Amiens. He was wounded by bullets and by bayonet, and was buried alive for four days in a house that collapsed on him when it was bombed. He was an advance scout, one of the more dangerous jobs in an already deadly war, and was promoted from private through the ranks to sergeant.

He earned a Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery, which at the time was the second highest award a soldier could receive, just below the Victoria Cross. And the respect continued when he returned home. “He was recognized as a hero by the Blood Tribe,” says James, “and celebrated at sun dances, powwows and grand entries.”

After serving, Mountain Horse went back to working for the police, retiring in 1933, but continued to be honoured each year at local legion gatherings.

Yet the war was only a small part of his life and his grandson Tom Sindlinger, who served as an MLA in the 1980s, remembers different aspects of the

decorated and lauded veteran. “I grew up in my grandfather’s home. My mother Nina Marie was his daughter. Times were tough so my mom and my dad found work wherever they could. As a result, my grandparents provided the stable home life for us when we were kids.”

Tom remembers his grandfather, who passed away in 1964, as a kind man, generous to a fault. “No one was ever turned away from his door. He was a great storyteller and would regale visitors and us children with adventure from his time in Europe.” On occasion he would show them his medals or bring out his buffalo hide robe to help tell his tales. The robe was a traditional skin he had used to document his military adventures. It is now on display in the Esplanade Museum in Medicine Hat. It is a unique pictograph melding the old traditions with the new world. Much like the man himself.

Mountain Horse fought with pride as a Blood warrior, and straddled the chasm between the Indigenous peoples of Canada and expanding western settlement. For all the heroism and warrior image that traveled with him, his most enduring legacy however may be his individual ability to overcome the racism and stereotyping that plagued so many of his community. At a time when both sides viewed each other with suspicion, he was respected and listened to by all. 🦄



A POWERFUL VENTURE

A newly formed joint venture didn't take long to make a big impact.

NorCan Infinity, a joint venture between Infinity Métis Corp, the business corporation owned by Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, and NorCan Electric, one of the largest electrical and instrumentation contractors in the oil sands, signed a five-year services agreement with Syncrude in March 2019.

It was the first of several contracts signed by NorCan Infinity, which is quickly establishing itself as a major player in northeastern Alberta.

“Syncrude understands the value of working with Indigenous-owned businesses,” says Kelsie Francis, project manager for Infinity Métis. “Doug Webb, who is Syncrude’s Indigenous business liaison, understands the culture because he is Métis. He is actually a member of 1935 so he really understands what we’re looking for.”

NorCan Infinity is one of five joint venture partnerships formed by Infinity Métis Corp, underscoring the importance of ensuring benefits from development flow to the entire community.

“Work is a big part of Métis culture, so we hold a monthly meeting with community members that feature all of our partner companies so they can learn about employment opportunities.”

“Whenever we look at a partner, we want to make sure there are employment opportunities for our members,” says Kelsie. “Work is a big part of Métis culture, so we hold a monthly meeting with community members that feature all of our partner companies so they can learn about employment opportunities.”

Stephen Jardine, NorCan’s vice president, sees real value for companies working with Métis and First Nations in helping to develop the next generation of employees.

“It makes so much sense,” says Stephen, who joined NorCan in 2014. “We enjoy working with young people and have a clear path for them to pursue. We start them as parts runners either on the electrical or instrumentation side of the business. We provide them with the necessary information about apprenticeship programs. We also want them to understand that opportunities extend beyond working on the tools at a trade. There is room for growth and advancement.”

Stephen sees great potential in the next generation. “We want to keep kids here in the region and build a strong community.” 





“This technology is about finding the best outcomes and making our company and the industry better.”

ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATE

Pursuing an innovative new water treatment process

This summer, Fort McKay-based Bouchier Group finished building a commercial water treatment pilot that could become a game changer for Syncrude’s tailings management practices.

The Syncrude pilot involves treating oil sands process water from tailings facilities using petroleum coke sourced from the company’s coker.

The treatment removes suspended solids such as clay, hydrocarbons and dissolved organic compounds – including naphthenic acids – and supports aquatic life. It features two large ponds which are comparable in size to 13 football fields and is located on the company’s Mildred Lake Settling Basin.

The project is currently designed as a closed loop and will only return treated water to the Mildred Lake tailings facility, which is Syncrude’s source of recycled water. It expands upon extensive laboratory and field pilot research between 2005 and 2012. Construction of the commercial-scale pilot started in 2017 and testing began this September. Initial results are encouraging and consistent with previous findings.

“Water is important for all of us. As an oil sands mining company, we need to clean up our process water to make sure it is safe for downstream uses,” says Warren Zubot, Syncrude engineer and project lead.

The closed circuit testing will provide additional insight to confirm whether the quality of the



Aerial of Syncrude’s water treatment pilot, located on the Mildred Lake Settling Basin, built by The Bouchier Group



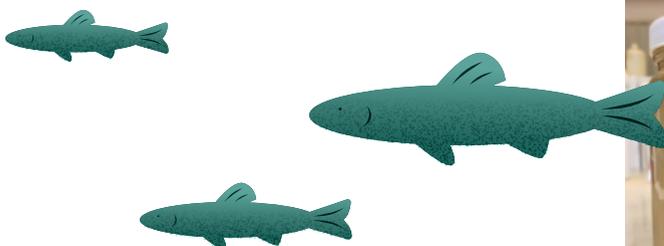
“This technology and the work being undertaken by Syncrude is going to change the face of tailings in our region,” says Nicole Bourque-Bouchier, CEO of The Bouchier Group. “We’re proud to provide Syncrude with a local perspective as we undertake all the construction work for the project.”

Syncrude’s petroleum coke is a form of activated carbon and the treatment is similar to that of a home water filter. First, oil sands process water is mixed with petroleum coke and piped to a filtration cell where it flows through the coke and is collected by drainage piping at the bottom. Next, treated water is pumped to a second pond where samples are taken to confirm it would be safe for release.

treated water is suitable for return to the Athabasca River and if it is a viable long-term solution. Regulatory approval would still be required for any release.

Over the summer, several meetings and tours were held for local Indigenous communities to learn more about the demonstration.

“This technology is about finding the best outcomes and making our company and the industry better,” says Warren. “It will result in major environmental advances for the oil sands mining industry, including advancing progressive reclamation and meeting our mine closure targets.”



Samples of process water from tailings pond before treatment (left) and after coke filtering (right).



Sharing results from the Base Mine Lake demonstration

Syncrude is sharing results from its full-scale demonstration of water capped tailings technology at its Base Mine Lake project. This year, the company opened a new walking trail at the northwest corner of the lake, enabling local Indigenous community members to see the progress up close.

“It was such a nice day to visit this reclaimed area,” says Shirlee MacDonald, member of Fort McMurray #468 First Nation. “Seeing the plants and beautiful berries along the trail made me feel hopeful for the future of this place.”

The company’s water capping process involves placing fluid tailings (a mixture of clay, fine

Six Canadian universities help support the Base Mine Lake demonstration, including the University of Toronto, McMaster University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan. Results to date show fluid tailings are settling and water quality is improving as expected.

“It takes time for nature to develop,” says Carla Wytrykush, Syncrude reclamation and closure research ecologist. “Just as we wouldn’t expect a six-month-old baby to ride a bike, we don’t set unrealistic expectations on this lake in its early development. The key thing is that we continually monitor and make adjustments as needed to make sure it’s heading in the right direction.”



LEFT: Viewpoint overlooking Base Mine Lake.

RIGHT: Base Mine Lake reclamation area.

solids, water and trace bitumen) at the bottom of a mined-out pit, and then adding water to form a lake. The fluid tailings settle at the lake bottom and the depth of water ensures they are not mixed again by the wind, while the addition of fresh water improves the water quality.

In 1995, Syncrude began depositing fluid tailings in the mined-out west pit. Once the fluid tailings were placed, a mixture of process-affected and fresh water was added and forms what is known today as Base Mine Lake. Officially commissioned in late 2012, it is now seven years into a full-scale commercial demonstration.

Through a comprehensive monitoring and research program, Syncrude scientists collect data on the physical, chemical and biological components of the lake and measure key performance indicators. This helps identify whether the lake is meeting expected outcomes towards full reclamation or will require intervention to keep it on track. This process is known as adaptive management.

An adaptive management approach allows Syncrude to ensure that Base Mine Lake reaches its end land use goals. Different methods are currently being used to tackle issues such as turbidity and removing the leftover bitumen on the lake’s surface and shorelines.

The Alberta government will be developing additional direction and performance criteria to support the assessment of water-capped tailings technology. With 40 years of experience and research on this technology, Syncrude looks forward to participating in and supporting this work.

“Our long-term vision is for the lake to be incorporated into the closure landscape,” says Carla. “We will gather the evidence to be certain that the lake achieves suitable surface water quality and the biological and ecological conditions that support certification.”





Celebrating Our People

**Syncrude's
greatest
resource is
our employees.**

**Today, around
ten per cent of
our workforce
is of First
Nations, Métis
or Inuit descent.**

**Here, we
recognize their
contributions
and applaud
those who
reached service
milestones
between
October 2018
and October
2019.**

**Thank you
for making
a career with
Syncrude!**

5 Years

Terrance Biggin
Stefan Downey
Vaughn Fidler
Patricia Grandjambe
Tyler Harlow
Christopher L'Hommecourt
Ian MacQuarrie
Andrew Mcdonald
Cassandra Noel
Cory Paul
Perry Turner
Carissa White

10 Years

Wendy Adonyi
Herman Alook
Drew Anderson
David Bennett
Mark Benoit
Cindy Berry
Eric Boone
George Brown
Christine Cardinal
Michael Carrigan
Deana Chalifoux
Tristan Cook
Misty Courtoreille
Gregory Curl
Grant Curnew
Shayne Davis
Margaret DeCorby
Patrice Ethier
Jonathan Farrell
Peter Fleming
Ian Flett
Lester Flett
John Gillingham
Connie Gladue
Robert Grandjambe
Larry Grills
Mark Harding
Matthew Hobbs

Cory Jahelka
Willis Janvier
Phillip Jean
Byron Jesso
Patrick Kachur
Christina Laboucane
Norman Lands
Trista Luscombe
Amy MacKenzie
Gregory Mahoney
Bella Marten
Ryan Owen Marten
Matthew Martinook
Rhonda McKay
Robert Metacat-Yah
Jerry Molnar
Shawn Netmaker
Patrick Organ
Jody Pierce
Jamie Plamondon
Derrick Quilty
Katherine Sharpe
David Sinclair
Sylvia Skinner
Matthew Steinhauer
Jamie Sullivan
Cody Tremblay
Alan VanWalleghem
Terri Lynn Villebrun
Jeff Voyageur
Gabrielle Wiles-Moss

15 Years

Chad Collier
Keanyn Coutu
James Helmer
Kristin Higney
Benny Larocque
Adam MacDonald
Peggy Mooney
Joanne Nickel
Scott Pruden

20 Years

Deanna Adams
Gordon Grandjambe
Wayne Noskiye
Michael Punko

25 Years

Glenn Beebe
Clifford Cardinal
Brenda Lee Ganter
Mathew Grant
Jason Jonasson
Ken Leece
Clinton L'Heureux

30 Years

Mike Cardinal
Raymond Courtorielle
Donald Foy
Travis House
Loretta Mercredi
Burton Metchewais
Darren Squire

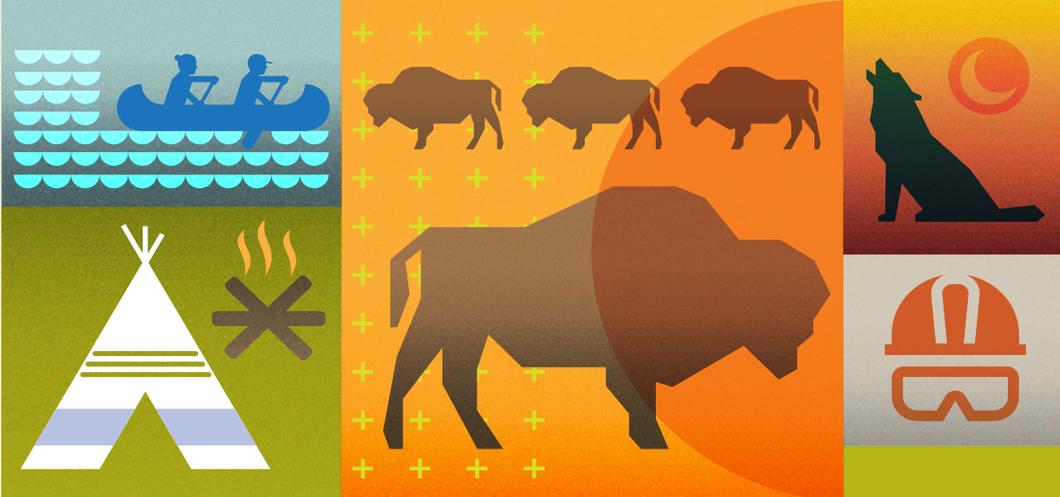
40 Years

Leo Keith

Congratulations on Your Retirement

Andrew Bacon
Leonard Hansen
Peter Hansen
Granni (Grant) McLeod
Dawn Sneddon
Todd Sneddon
Stuart Tourangeau
Elizabeth White-Dover

INDIGENOUS RELATIONS SCORECARD



SYNCRUDE DIRECT WORKFORCE

Total Indigenous Employees (#)
2018

481

2014	2015	2016	2017
464	461	470	481

INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION IN:

Permanent Syncrude Workforce (%)
2018

10.0

2014	2015	2016	2017
8.9	9.4	9.8	10.1

Leaders and Management (%)
2018

7.3

2014	2015	2016	2017
5.8	6.1	7.3	6.8

Administrative, Professional, Technical (%)
2018

7.4

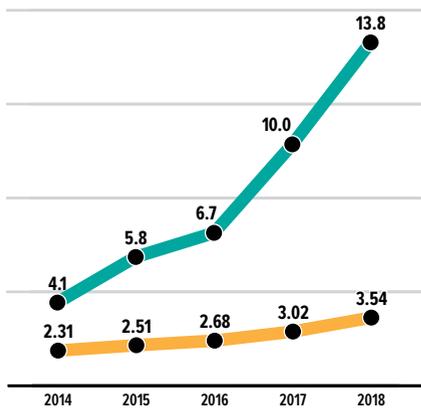
2014	2015	2016	2017
6.2	6.5	6.7	6.9

In 2018, Indigenous representation in Syncrude's direct workforce remained near its highest level ever.

Business

Spending with Indigenous Companies

— (percentage of total annual procurement)
— \$ millions annually

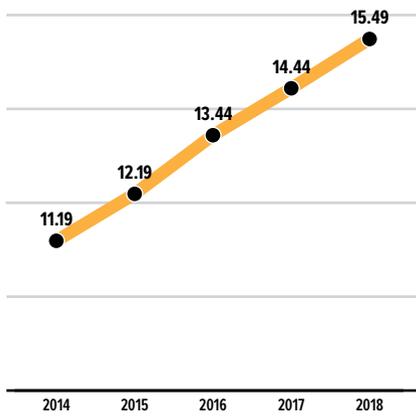


Total Indigenous business spending for 2018 was a record \$518 million, representing about 14 per cent of our total annual procurement. The cumulative total for Syncrude business with First Nations- and Métis-owned companies is over \$3.5 billion.

Community

Investing in Indigenous Communities

\$ millions, cumulative since 2001

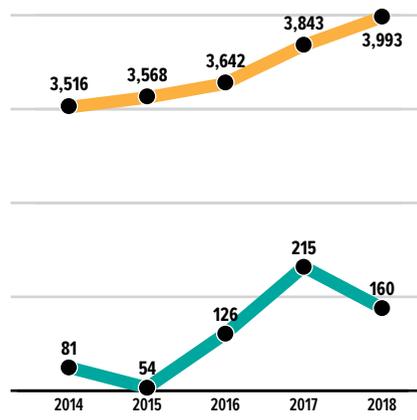


Syncrude invested over \$1 million in Indigenous initiatives and projects during 2018.

Environment

Permanent Land Reclaimed

— hectares per year
— hectares cumulative



Syncrude has permanently reclaimed over 3,900 hectares to date. Close to 1,000 additional hectares are ready for revegetation.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Trades and Operators (%)
2018

12.1

2014	2015	2016	2017
11.1	11.9	12.3	12.7

New Hires (% of all hires)
2018

6.8

2014	2015	2016	2017
11.6	14.7	19.1	10.6

Attrition Rate (%)
2018

4.3

2014	2015	2016	2017
6.0	6.0	6.2	4.4

Average Years of Service
(# of years) 2018

12.5

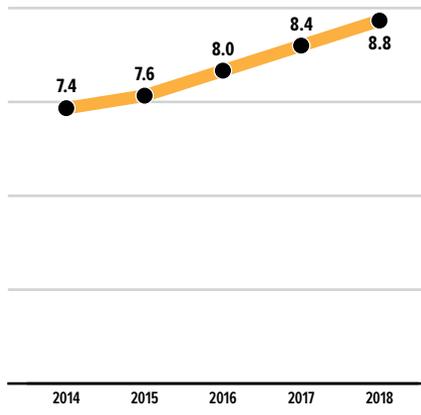
2014	2015	2016	2017
10.7	12.3	12.2	12.9

As of 2018, Syncrude had planted around nine million trees and shrubs on reclaimed land.

Environment

Trees and Shrubs Planted

millions, cumulative

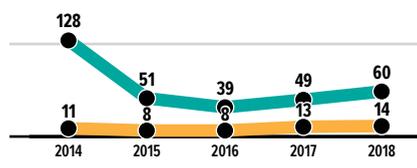


In 2018, over 400,000 seedlings were planted, including five species of trees and 13 species of shrubs. We also added over 1,500 rat root plants into wetland areas.

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 Environment and Parks department. An additional 35 mortalities were reported related to 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?

Through our major endowments at several Alberta education institutions, students are able to access Syncrude 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-Scholarships and Awards*. Many of the awards available are prioritized for Indigenous and northern Alberta recipients.



OUR INDIGENOUS RELATIONS APPROACH

Syncrude operates in Treaty 8 and traditional Métis territory and is committed to productive, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with local Indigenous communities. Relationships and interactions are based on our guiding principles of care, honesty and respect, as well as transparency and integrity.

We believe that stronger Indigenous communities mean a stronger, more successful Syncrude.

We are committed to being a leader in fostering greater engagement and inclusion; and encouraging other businesses to do the same.

We acknowledge that each First Nations and Métis community in our region is unique. Syncrude will seek a shared understanding with our Indigenous neighbours as we work towards achieving support for our projects and meeting our commitments.

- We respect the Canadian Constitution’s protection of Indigenous peoples’ rights in Canada and recognize their unique cultural perspectives, practices and knowledge. We understand the importance of Indigenous peoples’ connection to the environment and acknowledge that our operations and energy development have impacts on traditional land uses. We will seek to understand these uses and their cultural importance, and where reasonably possible to do so will mitigate identified impacts through leading environmental practices and sharing benefits such as employment, training and skills education, business, and community development.
- We will work collaboratively with local First Nations and Métis communities to understand and respectfully integrate their perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge, or TEK, throughout the life cycle of our operations.
- We will support socio-economic outcomes that enhance the quality of life of local First Nations and Métis communities upon whose traditional territories we operate. We will work collaboratively with the communities to define these outcomes, so they are inclusive of their needs and interests.
- We will uphold mutual trust and understanding by actively seeking, and being responsive to, ideas, input and feedback.
- We will maintain the terms of our agreements and work collaboratively to ensure effective and expected outcomes are achieved.
- We will support capacity development so local First Nations and Métis communities can effectively participate in engagement and consultation processes.
- We will foster greater understanding of Indigenous culture, history and traditions, and empower our employees to achieve excellence in Indigenous relations and engagement.
- We fully comply with Canadian law, agreements and standards and will strive to achieve the intent of more progressive national and international protocols and principles such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

MEET OUR INDIGENOUS RELATIONS TEAM

A diverse cross functional team oversees our Indigenous relations program, as well as our commitments and agreements. Syncrude's face in the community, they manage the day to day interactions and relationships with our Indigenous neighbours and identify new opportunities to work together.



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



A Colleen Legdon
Community Relations Manager

B Lana Hill
Community Relations Team Leader

C Jennifer Gagnon
Talent and Development Manager

D Mel Boostrom
Community Relations Specialist

E Jessica Lipton
Community Investment Specialist

F Lisa Nelson
Community Relations Representative

G Tracey Stephen
Community Relations Advisor

H Doug Webb
Indigenous Business Liaison

MESSAGE FROM SYNCRUDE'S MANAGING DIRECTOR



Henry Ford once said, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” And while this may have been true as he brought together teams of people over a century ago to revolutionize transportation, the same can be said for SynCRUDE today. Bringing people together is in our nature.

Indeed, we’ve run our business on the commitment to bring diverse peoples and communities together to not only build a great industry, but to also create value and shared opportunity in our region and throughout our country.

Pathways provides us an opportunity to share stories about our impact. Take, for example, SynCRUDE scholarship and bursary recipients Lori-Lei Mercredi and Tyra Cockney-Goose. These outstanding young women are devoted to bringing educational solutions to Indigenous schools in the North. Or local businesses Infinity Métis Corp and the Mikisew Cree Group of Companies, which are creating opportunities that benefit their entire communities. As well, leadership is exemplified through people like Métis Nation of Alberta president Audrey Poitras and award-winning author and playwright Drew Hayden Taylor.

Coming together also means learning together from people like local Métis Elder Theresa Donovan, who shares her environmental knowledge and perspectives on the natural world. Or SynCRUDE employee Kingsley Woods, who takes us on his journey of traditional healing and caring for others.

SynCRUDE’s success is due in large part to the incredible relationships we share with First Nations and Métis communities. Together, we’ve achieved over \$3.5 billion in spending to date with Indigenous suppliers and 10 per cent Indigenous representation in our direct workforce. SynCRUDE also continues to champion economic reconciliation through groups like the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), Indigenous Works and the Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM) initiative of the Mining Association of Canada.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of *Pathways* magazine. As SynCRUDE celebrates three billion barrels of production in 2019, the stories in these pages demonstrate how we achieved this milestone – by working together with communities and leaders to create meaningful opportunity for everyone.

Doreen Cole
Managing Director





A buffalo hide robe was used by Mike Mountain Horse to document his military adventures in the First World War. It is now on display at the Esplanade Museum in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Read more about the amazing life of the honoured military veteran on page 30.

From the Collection of the Esplanade Museum, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada.



Syncrude

www.syncrude.ca

The Syncrude Project is a joint venture undertaking among Imperial Oil Resources Limited; CNOOC Oil Sands Canada; 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.), as the project owners, and Syncrude as the project operator.



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