

Pathways

ISSUE NO XI • SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD. INDIGENOUS REVIEW 2020/21



The Art of Powwow

A legacy passed down for some and a calling for others.

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There is no end to the remarkable achievements among First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in the Wood Buffalo region, Alberta and across Canada. Words on the pages of this publication help bring to life the exceptional courage, perseverance and talent in the heartfelt stories shared.

Pathways captures these journeys and connects with those bringing new perspectives to important issues, influencing a positive change in our society, and trailblazing paths that may not have existed before.

Join us as we explore these many diverse pathways and get a glimpse into the remarkable lives of the people who lead them.

Syncrude respectfully acknowledges that we operate on Treaty 8 territory and the homeland of the Métis people. We honour and acknowledge all the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who have lived, travelled and gathered on these lands.

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.

Email us at info@syncrude.com

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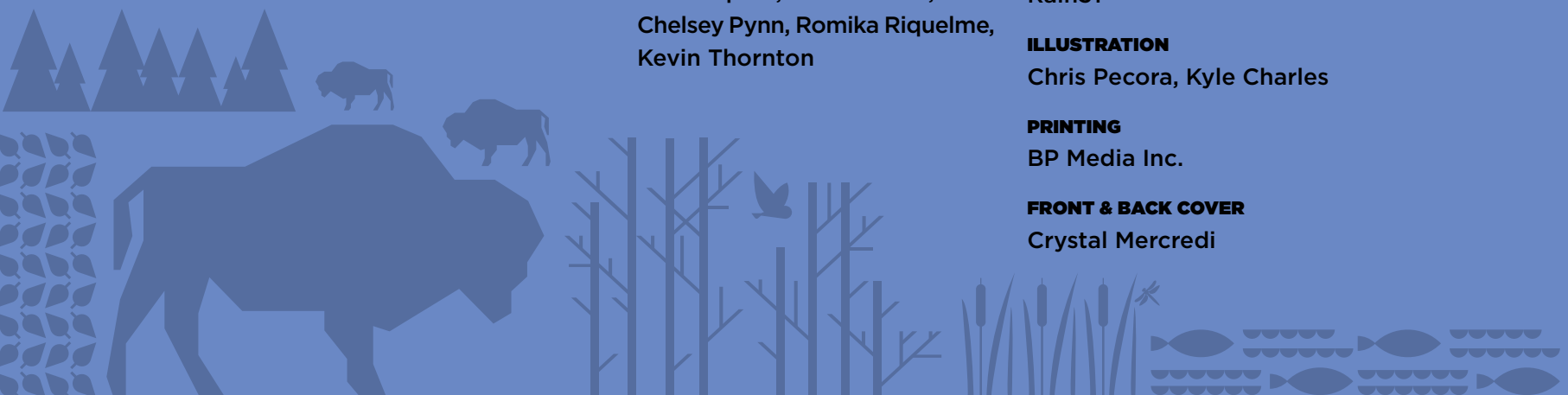
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The Art of Powwow

A peek behind the scenes with Mitch Mercredi & Audrey Redcrow



Vision, Hard Work & Success

A conversation with First Nations leader Jim Boucher



Welcoming Mamawi

Standing together with our bison herd



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The Art of Pow- wow

**MORE THAN
A TIME-HONOURED
TRADITION,
POWWOW IS AN ART
FORM FILLED WITH
POWER, PRAYER,
CELEBRATION AND
CEREMONY. FOR THOSE
WHO DANCE, IT IS
A DEEP CONNECTION
WITH ANCESTORS
AND CREATOR.**





Mitch Mercredi carefully ties his son Sawyer's porcupine roach headpiece in place as they adorn layers of striking grass dance regalia.



LEFT Powwow is more than a tradition—it is a way of life for the Mercredi family.

BELOW A touching father and son moment between powwow dances.



Mimicking tall grass blowing in the wind with every careful movement, the swirling of ribbons and rhythm of footsteps creates another world.

The inner powwow circle transcends all space and time for grass dancer Mitch Mercredi—and others like him—in the countless generations before.

The art of powwow is a legacy passed down for some, and a calling for others.

“Powwow is a celebration of people coming together. It’s a place where people come to meet, and honour and celebrate traditions. It is ceremony,” says Mitch, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. “There are some people who go to church every Sunday, and powwow is the same kind of spiritual commitment. It’s just not every Sunday. Throughout the powwow trail, different nations gather at different times of the year.”

Growing up in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, powwow was not part of Mitch’s life until much later. Through a cultural rediscovery event brought to the community, as a young teenager he had the opportunity to experience many big firsts: dancing, singing, drumming and praying.

“I had seen dancers before and this was my opportunity to learn and a real chance to participate. I visited a sweat lodge for the first time, and learned the spiritual way to pray. I was praying for things I never knew how to pray for. I was a sponge,” says Mitch. “I started singing and joined a drum group. They taught us how to sing and we practiced three or four times a week. I became really involved with my culture. It was my calling and what I really wanted to do.”

Mitch recalls wanting to become a dancer, but he had only seen performances, not a powwow. He started dancing based purely on memory, moving to the drum beat. It wasn’t until his twenties when he attended his first powwow outside of Edmonton, Alberta.

“I was a spectator and didn’t know any protocols. I kept thinking, am I allowed to be here? I didn’t know what some of the dances were, but I was so interested to learn.”

Mitch soon found himself at Heart Lake in 2013, for the first time singing at a powwow after being invited by the Thundering Spirit drum group. As powwow typically takes place over three days, the singers are needed throughout the entire event.

On the Sunday evening, each drum group was asked to walk a flag into the powwow circle. Mitch was nominated by everyone in his group to represent them and carry the flag—he felt immense honour. That experience would be his first time entering the sacred powwow circle.

“I’ve heard the songs for grand entry before, but once I walked into the circle, I felt I was supposed to be there. I immediately started crying—with happiness. Heaviness was lifted off my shoulders. I was so proud of where I was at that moment. I am crying and carrying the flag, and overcome with pride. This is what I was longing for. This was the missing piece. In my journey, this is what I was needing in my life. After that, I knew I needed to be inside the circle.”

Years later, and now a father to three children, Mitch has made powwow part of his family life and he is passionate about dancing. All three children dance in the powwow celebrations they attend, and he and his wife Crystal are raising the next generation to embrace the tradition, the ceremony and a full heart.

“Powwow is what’s working for me. It’s a way of life and a tradition; to teach my kids at a young age that it’s okay to be Aboriginal. They should be proud of it,” he says. “We are teaching the respect behind our culture, and why this part of it is so beautiful and meaningful.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Mitch and his wife Crystal are raising their three children to take pride in their Indigenous roots: four-year-old Nova, a jingle dancer; Sawyer, eight-year-old grass dancer; and 10-year-old Brielle, a jingle dancer.



IN THE POWWOW CIRCLE

Before the sun comes up on the morning of powwow, a sacred fire is lit and acts as the spirit of the celebration. It is tended to throughout the entire ceremony to keep it burning, and is a place for people to pray and smudge.

Sacred songs and honour songs are different for every nation, and hold a great deal of significance. For some people it is a time for prayer or connecting to the spirit world. For others, the songs are part of a healing process.

There are two types of powwow celebrations that dancers can take part in—traditional and competition. Both will have performances in deeply honoured dances such as traditional, grass, chicken, fancy, traditional shawl and jingle. Intertribal songs are also part of the powwow event, which brings everyone in attendance together—regardless of age or experience—into the powwow circle.

The grand entry ceremony kicks off each day of the powwow weekend. Dignitaries and Elders enter first, followed in order from the most senior to junior dancers. During powwow dances, participants are grouped by age category: tiny tots, juniors, teen, junior adult, senior adult and senior.

Just as the song and drumming tells a story, the regalia is often a reflection of the individual dancer. Sometimes the artisans who sew and design the pieces offer to select colour or themes for the dancer. Other times, themes are selected based on an individual's heritage, passed down through a historical bloodline tradition, or determined during a sweat ceremony. It's important to always ask permission before touching a dancer's regalia.



Audrey Redcrow is a traditional jingle and fancy dancer with hopes to inspire the next generation of dancers in Fort McKay, and throughout the Wood Buffalo region and beyond.

ABOVE LEFT Audrey Redcrow is helping to keep the art of powwow alive.

ABOVE RIGHT Smudging helps to cleanse the mind, body and spirit before dancing.

“A healing dance; a prayer dance. Jingle dancers will put on their dresses, adorned with small bells, to heal those around them.

“He who dreams” is an interpretation of powwow that Audrey Redcrow has lived first-hand. “It’s the most beautiful feeling in the world when you get on that floor,” she says. As a ladies jingle and fancy dancer, the power of spirit, prayer and healing is an integral part of how Audrey dances.

“You will see dancers crying their hearts out while they’re dancing. They are giving all their energy in prayer. Drumming is the heart of the nation, and your ancestors come into the circle and listen to your prayers,” says Audrey, a member of the Fort McKay First Nation. “During this ceremony, you are praying for those who are sick or who need it most.”

When she was only nine years old, Audrey remembers attending a powwow during Treaty Days in Fort McKay. She didn’t have any regalia of her own, but someone handed her a blanket to use as a make-shift shawl to dance during the Intertribal ceremony. The experience changed her.

“The drum makes you want to dance, and I wanted to join and be part of it. It was so beautiful to watch. It is something that captivates you,” recalls Audrey, now grown with four children of her own. Audrey says it was the late Chief Dorothy MacDonald who brought powwow to the community at that time, as it is more common in southern parts of Alberta. Audrey danced with teacher Clara Mercer, who led the Fort McKay Northwind Dancers—a group which started in 1987. Clara sewed and made regalia for all the participants. Shirley Hill was a champion powwow dancer at the time, and still a force to this day. She also taught Audrey and the kids in Fort McKay. Audrey’s grandparents were trappers and she recalls they “always had hides on-hand.” Her Granny enjoyed beading, sewing and making clothing and regalia for her granddaughter.



“I started fancy dancing because my Granny and Mother made my first fancy shawl regalia. The shawl represents a bird or butterfly with its vibrant colours and graceful swift movements,” adds Audrey. “The crow hop is my favourite to dance to, which mimics a crow’s movements—it comes naturally to me, maybe because I’m from the Redcrow family.”

Throughout her teenage years, Audrey attended powwow all summer long, throughout the province and even across the country. She learned different styles of traditional dance and had the opportunity to showcase this passion for thousands of school students.

After many years of dancing, Audrey took a hiatus for more than a decade. It wasn’t until 2012, after the passing of her Granny, that she realized the importance of handing down the dancing traditions to her own children. She started offering dance practices with some children in Fort McKay and was eventually offered a very special gift. “In 2014, Clara gifted the name of her dance group for me to lead. It was an honour, and I promised to carry on the tradition,” she says.

Through the Fort McKay Northwind Dance group, Audrey now leads 35 dancers of all ages—from one to 85 years old—and five drummers. She also volunteers her time at the Nistawayou Friendship Centre to teach dance in Fort McMurray.

In 2017, Audrey brought powwow back to Fort McKay for the first time in 30 years. The anticipated event saw participants join from across the province from areas such as Treaty 6, 7 and 8. In 2020, the event would have been the fourth annual powwow, but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a cultural driver, Audrey is determined to do what she can to keep powwow traditions alive in the region. She remains encouraged and optimistic that the next generation will do just that. 🍁 🍁 🍁 🍁

“You will see dancers crying their hearts out while they’re dancing. They are giving all their energy in prayer. Drumming is the heart of the Nation, and your ancestors come into the circle and listen to your prayers.”



LEFT: Audrey helps her daughter Emma put on the finishing touches.

BELOW: All four of Audrey's children have been part of powwow: (pictured here) Lexi and Emma, ages 12 and eight, are jingle dancers; (not pictured) Xavier, 19, makes drums and sings while Dawson, 21, prays and smudges with the family.



A look through the lens

The experience of feeling different or “other” is familiar to many of us. For Jessica Vandenberghe, it is in her differences that she finds strength and power.

Jessica is a professional engineer, a professor, and the acting assistant dean of Outreach at the University of Alberta. Jessica is also a Sixties Scoop survivor.

“You can look at any person through a number of lenses,” says Jessica. “For myself, there are definitely a lot of ways to look back on my life and see how I got here.”

Admittedly, Jessica’s journey has been full of peaks and valleys. For her, being honest about her experiences is critical for healing and growth.

At three months old, Jessica was adopted. She grew up in a farming community in rural Northern Alberta where she says she was one of only a handful of “people who looked like me.”

Jessica says she was very fortunate to be raised by a family that was inclusive and supportive, especially later in life when it came to pursuing her post-secondary studies. Jessica received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Alberta in Chemical and Mining Engineering—and later spent 10 years at Syncrude developing her skills before moving on to a career in education and advocacy.

Though she always felt like somewhat of a champion for equality, university experiences—both positive and negative—ignited a passion to dive headfirst into the world of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Often being the only female engineer and Indigenous person in the room, she used to wonder—why? Was she supposed to be there? What was stopping other women and Indigenous people from taking a similar path? She took it upon herself to learn more about the barriers and advocate for a more inclusive culture in the engineering field.

When she started her career in the early-2000s, the EDI perspective was still quite new in the workplace and education systems. Since then, Jessica has dedicated countless hours leading and participating in

initiatives that work to address Indigenous access to engineering education and reconciliation within the school system itself.

“I believe truth and reconciliation work falls under the EDI umbrella, through providing support for a specific group,” says Jessica. “When calls to action came from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I was very happy to see that universities stood up fairly quickly to want to do something.”

A mother of two, Jessica sees promoting equity education as an opportunity to not only positively influence students and the engineering profession, but society as a whole.

Jessica hopes that by sharing her story, she can continue to help leaders and decision makers gain a better understanding about the importance of EDI and implementing equity values in their respective fields.

“It’s so important that people of all cultures and genders cannot just feel comfortable and safe in their workplace as a baseline, but that they can thrive,” says Jessica. “It’s about understanding that each individual is unique and celebrating these differences.”

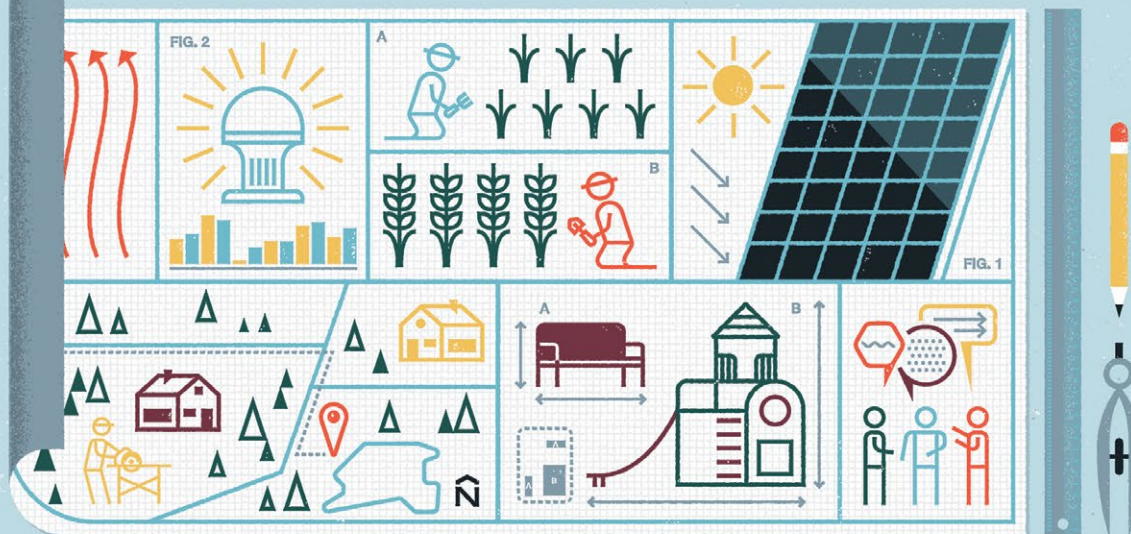
Jessica’s various professional roles at Urban Systems, APEGA (Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta), and now the university have allowed her to directly impact the field of engineering by advancing equity awareness. As an industrial professor of Indigenous engineering, she oversees a new community program, funded in part by Syncrude, which takes her passion into northern and Indigenous communities. The program is currently working in Alberta Avenue, an inner-city neighbourhood and district in Edmonton, with plans for Fort Chipewyan, where engineering students are helping to solve diverse infrastructure challenges and bring positive change.

“In field-driven disciplines like mining or construction, issues of bias and discrimination are still very real,” says Jessica. “But I believe that through advocacy, education and collaboration, the opportunity to change and progress is greater than ever.”



“It’s so important that people of all cultures and genders cannot just feel comfortable and safe in their workplace as a baseline, but that they can thrive.”

ENGINEERING WITH COMPASSION



At the University of Alberta (U of A), a new program is taking students out of the classroom and into the community. In a field heavily based in applied mathematics and sciences, the school's Engineering Department recognized the importance of developing stronger connections toward achieving a greater good.

Torrey Dance, director, Special Projects (Outreach) with the Faculty of Engineering, has been heavily involved with the program since its inception.

"The idea began when Dr. Ania Ulrich, the associate dean (Outreach), came across a program in the United States called Rural Studio. Although it was focused on architecture, it was something that could be translated to engineering," says Torrey.

Two years ago, Torrey was asked to join Ania's team to get the ball rolling.

He jumped at the incredible opportunity to enhance traditional engineering education, while making a real difference in his community.

"What's unique about this program is our long-term commitment to very specific communities," he says. "Our goal is to bring teaching, research and student engagement directly into the community in a way that benefits everyone involved."

Today the program has started initial discussions and work with Alberta Avenue, a neighbourhood and district in Edmonton, and Fort Chipewyan, a rural community with a significant Indigenous population within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Jessica Vandenberghe, assistant dean (Outreach), who is helping to run the program, sees this as an opportunity to not only make a significant impact on communities but on future engineers.

"Engineers need to play a socially engaged role to ensure we design and build with a sense of service to the communities we work with," she says.

To support that initiative, Syncrude has provided a \$300,000 donation. "We believe a focus needs to be on meaningful social engagement between the students and the communities they will eventually serve through their professional work," says Doreen Cole, Syncrude's managing director. "In particular, we want students to participate in developing healthy northern communities—many of them Indigenous communities—by addressing core quality of life issues."

The program officially kicked off this past summer with three co-op students. As their first project, in partnership with the Alberta Avenue Community League, the team is designing and building benches and other outdoor seating options.

Community members recognized that during outdoor festivals, crime went down. There was a desire for spaces to gather organically during times when there were no festivals taking place.

The key focus of the program is citizenship and community. Torrey says he hopes it will foster more ethically and socially minded student development, while having a direct impact on the communities and people who live there.

"We see this as more than a program for students, but rather something that exists and blossoms within the community for many years to come," says Torrey.

The holistic approach of the program is already helping to bring people together, including various university disciplines, high school students, community groups, tradespeople, industry and local business, to collaboratively address challenges and create stronger, more vibrant communities.

"The hope is never to replace," says Torrey, "but to supplement, fill gaps and connect community members with resources that better their lives today and into the future."

Views and Voices

We live in a world with many diverse voices. A connected global community of different backgrounds, perspectives and cultures. Among those are Indigenous peoples who today are charged with energy and confidence like never before. We asked a few Wood Buffalo residents to express their pride and share with us what being Indigenous means to them.

Lina Gallup, Fort McKay First Nation

I think being Indigenous means being Indigenous to the land. I think we are the First People, being from here and not any other country. It's about being proud of who we really are. In my generation, we really lived off the land. We lived as a family and everyone in Fort McKay pretty much lived off the land. Being isolated, we looked after one another, sharing, which is our cultural and traditional way. We didn't have electricity or running water. I remember going down to the creek or the river. The adults were doing the laundry and the kids had fun swimming. Going hunting was a whole family affair. We would go to Moose Lake and camp in tents, and we stayed there until it was cold. There was no transportation except for dogs and in the summer, they were our carriers. We really depended on them.

What being Indigenous means is that I'm very happy to be what I am. I wouldn't want to be anything else.

Mel Boostrom, Métis Local 1935

It's about listening to the land. My brother taught me to enjoy the land and all it has to offer us, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. I owe my brother so much for all the knowledge he freely gave me, as each teaching is a gift. This knowledge was passed to him by my parents and their parents before them. My brother is now with the Creator, but I believe he shared these gifts, knowing I will carry them as he did, so they can be honoured and valued by the generations to come.

Chief Peter Powder, Mikisew Cree First Nation

Being Indigenous means we are fortunate to have been loaned this beautiful land from the Creator to use and to protect, forever hiy hiy.

Nicole Bourque-Bouchier, Mikisew Cree First Nation

A responsibility to step up, and step out, elevating each other to the next level!

Cheryl Alexander, Mikisew Cree First Nation

My thoughts are flooded with so many perspectives that seem to pull in various directions with words like overcomer, survivor, stories, traumas and racial stereotypes. Let me start with this. I walk proudly of who I am! Children examine how their parents respond to life's journeys and I must be a positive example to my children. I have First Nation, Métis and Non-Status children and it's important that they understand who they are and to be proud of themselves. I aspire to show the coming generation that they can be more than what society may dictate. Being Indigenous means breaking generational curses and rising above all expectations. Let me end with this Cree word, *Kiyam*, meaning be at peace with yourself and your surroundings.

Justin Bourque, Willow Lake Métis Nation

Being Indigenous brings a strong sense of pride! Understanding the history of Indigenous peoples in our country and the different paths each First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures had to walk to get to where we are today, in a society finally ready to accept the past and move on to a future of inclusion of our Indigenous people. I am proud to be Indigenous.

Clay Kuncio, Métis Local 1935

It's a few simple but important things. It means remembering my ancestors and traditions. Not taking for granted the traditions and beliefs Indigenous people have. It means being strong even when you are down. Resilient by standing up to adversity in times when we feel defeated. But, most importantly, it means respecting yourself, the land and all life, having gratitude for what we have and our surroundings, and remembering the wisdom our heritage has taught us.

Joey Hamelin, Métis Local 1935

To me it's about honour and respect. It's an honour to be able to practice traditional Indigenous harvesting from the land, harvesting the way our Elders have taught us passed down from our ancestors before them. It's about respecting our Elders for their knowledge and traditions so that they can be passed down for generations to come and not be forgotten.

Melanie Antoine, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

My outlook of being an Indigenous person of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation means respecting our Elders, as well as the land, highlighting and encouraging our cultural traditions to one another and working together as one. Being of Indigenous descent, hard work and ethics were always instilled from a very young age. I will ensure my children embrace and share the values with their children so that our culture continues to flourish.

Tayden Shott, Fort McKay First Nation

I am a Cree and Dene member of the Fort McKay First Nation. I grew up learning about my culture and my Métis background from my family, Elders, and my drumming teachers. I love to hunt, fish and trap because my family has done this for generations, and it makes me feel connected to them. I feel the happiest when I'm at the trapline and on the land.

A Community Builder in the Making

Jack Bartlett has a laser focus on his future that involves helping guide local students towards secure and skilled careers.

ABOVE Jack leads a hands-on workshop for youth who live, and hope to eventually work, in the Wood Buffalo region.

A passion for working with Indigenous youth

A University of Alberta student in the Bachelor of Native Studies program with a minor in Business, Jack's plans after graduation include working with Indigenous students so they can take advantage of career opportunities in the region. Growing up in Wood Buffalo, he saw first-hand how Indigenous-owned businesses play a role in the industries here. And now he wants to be a part of the action and encourage youth to do the same.

So much so that he has spent the last two summers working as a career coach for CAREERS: The Next Generation's Indigenous Career Pathways program, helping students explore the trades, technology and health care through presentations, workshops, camps and internships.

He works with Indigenous communities and their summer student coordinators on career exploration and exposure, and coaches students through résumé writing and interview

preparation. Once they are placed, he will follow up with students on the job.

"I'd like to continue this kind of relationship building in some way when I graduate," says Jack. "It's rewarding to bring people out to present career path options to our students, especially when it ignites their passion to pursue a career that is meaningful to them."

Elaine Read, regional manager for CAREERS, knows Jack's affinity for the Wood Buffalo region and the communities he visits. "His heart is in everything he does," says Elaine. "He goes above and beyond."

While the COVID-19 pandemic restricted some of his access to communities last year, Jack has worked personally with 116 students over the last two summers.

His passion to learn about Indigenous issues and culture began at home and was fostered in high school. He is First Nations—Non-Status from Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation in Newfoundland—and was

raised in Fort McMurray. Moving on to the University of Alberta has expanded his interest. He is continuing his studies in Cree language and culture, and taking advantage of the opportunities to learn from Elders who visit the First Peoples' House on campus. "While Cree is not my own Indigenous language, it is important to this community, and to use it is respectful and helps build relationships," says Jack.

Ultimately, building relationships is the foundation for what he hopes to do when he returns to the region after his studies. In the meantime, his main focus is on the Indigenous students assigned to him.

"Visiting students in their placements and seeing them grow their confidence and skills is the biggest reward for me. I'm here to help them succeed."

THE PUCK STOPS HERE



As a role model, you always want to give your best and put your best foot forward every time you step on the ice.”

Rylan Parenteau has played organized hockey since he was just four years old.

Since then, he's played in several leagues, and unlike his Métis ancestors before him—who faced constant racism on and off the ice—his identity has proven to be a benefit to his career.

“I definitely have to acknowledge some of the opportunities I've received due to my heritage,” he says, adding that he participated in the National Aboriginal

Hockey Championship and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network's *Hit the Ice*—where young hockey players go through an elite development camp and play showcase games in front of scouts.

He even got to play at the Fred Sasakamoose “Chief Thunderstick” National Hockey Championship in Saskatoon, which helps promote Indigenous hockey players so that one day there can be an Indigenous hockey team in the Olympics.

“That's always such a great opportunity to be involved in the community and to be a role model for some of the younger players,” says Rylan, who's currently a goaltender for the University of New Brunswick men's hockey team, the UNB Reds. “As a role model, you always want to give your best and put your best foot forward every time you step on the ice.”

But it's not all fun and games at school. Rylan, who received a Syncrude Indigenous Engineering Scholarship through Indspire, is a third-year Geological Engineering student with a minor in Business, and he hopes to

open his own consulting company specializing in geo-tech. With his company, he would visit mine locations, monitor slope stability, and work on different construction sites to ensure top safety and ecological health measures are being met.

His love for the land came from his grandfather who worked at a potash mine in Saskatchewan when Rylan was growing up.

“I've always been intrigued by earth sciences,” he says. “How the earth works and how it was created—I want to leave the world in a better position than we started with it, and I want to make sure we treat it with the utmost respect.”



Rylan Parenteau is the recipient of a Syncrude Indigenous Engineering Scholarship through Indspire.



Before he attended residential school, Jim Boucher lived an idyllic life—hunting, trapping and living off the land. His people, the Cree and Dene from Fort McKay First Nation, were affluent in the fur trade and had made their living selling furs to settlers and Europeans for generations.

“I had a very good, healthy lifestyle, raised in the bush in Fort McKay,” he says.

JIM BOUCHER | VISION, HARD WORK & SUCCESS

Growing up Dene meant he was taught to work from an early age. When Boucher was six, he trapped and cleaned enough weasels and squirrels to buy his very first bike for \$25 from the Hudson's Bay Company.

"I worked for that, and my grandparents were really proud of me," he says.

But that good way of life would soon come to an end. When he was 13, Jim was forced into the Blue Quills Residential School at St. Paul. His time was a terrible experience, much the same as the 150,000 First Nations children who were forced to attend similar institutions across the country. But Jim didn't let that get in the way of his success.

"In my family, I was instrumental in making sure that my siblings and I came out of residential school in a good way, in the sense that we have to be careful about the road of life we walk on," he says. "When we come upon obstacles we take care of those obstacles properly—no matter what, we have to continue to make things better in our life."

As a teen, Jim moved to Edmonton where he was placed in the care system to continue his education. He spent most of his time in the public library reading about Canadian history, in an effort to try to understand why all this was happening to his family and community.

Jim moved back to Fort McMurray to continue high school and afterwards secured his first construction job with Syncrude as a surveyor at the Poplar Creek spillway. His tenacity would lead him to work in several capacities within the company, including working at the extraction plant, and becoming an apprentice millwright in 1986. But during that same year, a work injury would force him to take time off. Then, while he was healing at home in Fort McKay, people in the community nominated and elected him as Chief. He spared no time in getting down to business.

"The trapping economy was marginalized by the anti-fur activists in Europe," he says. "They instituted a fur ban, which caused a decline in fur prices substantially, and

our people were forced into poverty. I designed a consultation agreement with [the oil] industry, and we focused on getting more of our people working and developing our skills and capacity."

Throughout his 30 years as Chief, he continued and expanded relationships with the industry, and in 2018, was named Canadian Energy Person of the Year by the Energy Council of Canada.

"I think it's the results of my ability to generate partnerships with industry," he says. "I think we do a tremendous amount of work ensuring the perception of Canadians is changed with respect to how positive things can develop in the interest of First Nations people."

Boucher established the Fort McKay Group of Companies in 1986, which provides service work in the oil sands. The Group works to create employment opportunities, develop capacity and generate profit for the benefit of the First Nation.

"The people had aspirations to maintain their way of life and their economy," he says. "It took a lot of hard work, and we eventually became very successful in doing business. We built up our community with both employment and business opportunities."

In fact, during his tenure as Chief, 96 per cent of revenues generated for the First Nation were generated by the Group of Companies. When the community relied on government revenues, Boucher says they were very much impoverished.

"The whole industry saved the community and gave us the ability to build up our infrastructure," he says, which included water and sewer systems, housing, buildings and amenities needed to run programming.

"We took care of our people—I think our work with the oil industry was fruitful for the community," he says. "It allowed us to make a transition from a hunter-trapper economy into a modern economy based on resource development."

In 2020, Boucher was awarded the Alberta Order of Excellence—the highest honour

a person can receive from the province—for his unfaltering commitment to providing for his community.

Accomplishments are something that Jim has in abundance. His awards and accolades reach back as far as 1998, and include the Regional Aboriginal Recognition Awards—Leadership Achievement Award and Lifetime Achievement Award, Grand Chief of Treaty 8, Commendation from the Governor General for Outstanding Service, and many more.

He is also proud that Fort McKay was rated number one according to the Canadian Community Wellbeing Index—which includes education, health, labour force activity, income and housing.

"I hope we continue to have a really good, strong, healthy community," he says.

With everything that he's achieved in his life, Boucher has earned some downtime. While he spends the majority of his time with his grandchildren, whom bring him much love and happiness, he doesn't plan on slowing down anytime soon.

"My grandparents instilled in me a work ethic," he says. "So, I like to work. I'm looking at being an entrepreneur and being an entrepreneur means that I'm looking for opportunities to give back not only to my community but to Indigenous people elsewhere. I have the entrepreneurial spirit to give back, develop our people and bring autonomy to our people, and that's what I intend to continue doing."

His interests are expanding through new ventures, providing quality virtual care and education services. He has also established partnerships into clean fuel, technology, digital, oil rig servicing and drilling, engineering, procurement, and construction maintenance contracts with major players. He looks forward to continuing his work to bring opportunities to other First Nations communities.

"The economy is pretty tight right now," he says. "But what I know is that if you continue working, at the end of the day, you get the harvest."

TRAPPER MUSICIAN



“

At the end of the day, it's about the land.”

A

lot of Kyle Sand's downtime, such as it is, is filled with hunting and working the family trap line.

It sounds like a very traditional way of life, but surprisingly Kyle's extended family wasn't able to identify their Métis ancestry until he was well into his teens.

Kyle grew up on the family ranch near Smith, Alberta. It's a small town, maybe 150 people, depending on who is visiting. It's a place that appreciates community and hard work, so Kyle came by those values honestly.

Later, there was high school in Athabasca—two hours there and back on the bus each day—followed by a degree in Mining Engineering at the University of Alberta.

Summers were spent working in the oil sands, including one term driving a heavy hauler. Those assignments gave him an appreciation of the hard work that is involved in mining, especially the work his team does.

Kyle first joined Syncrude as a co-op student in 2007 and was recently promoted to a business team leader in the Lease Development area. “Almost every day has something different and new,” he says. “Though they all typically start with lots of coffee.”

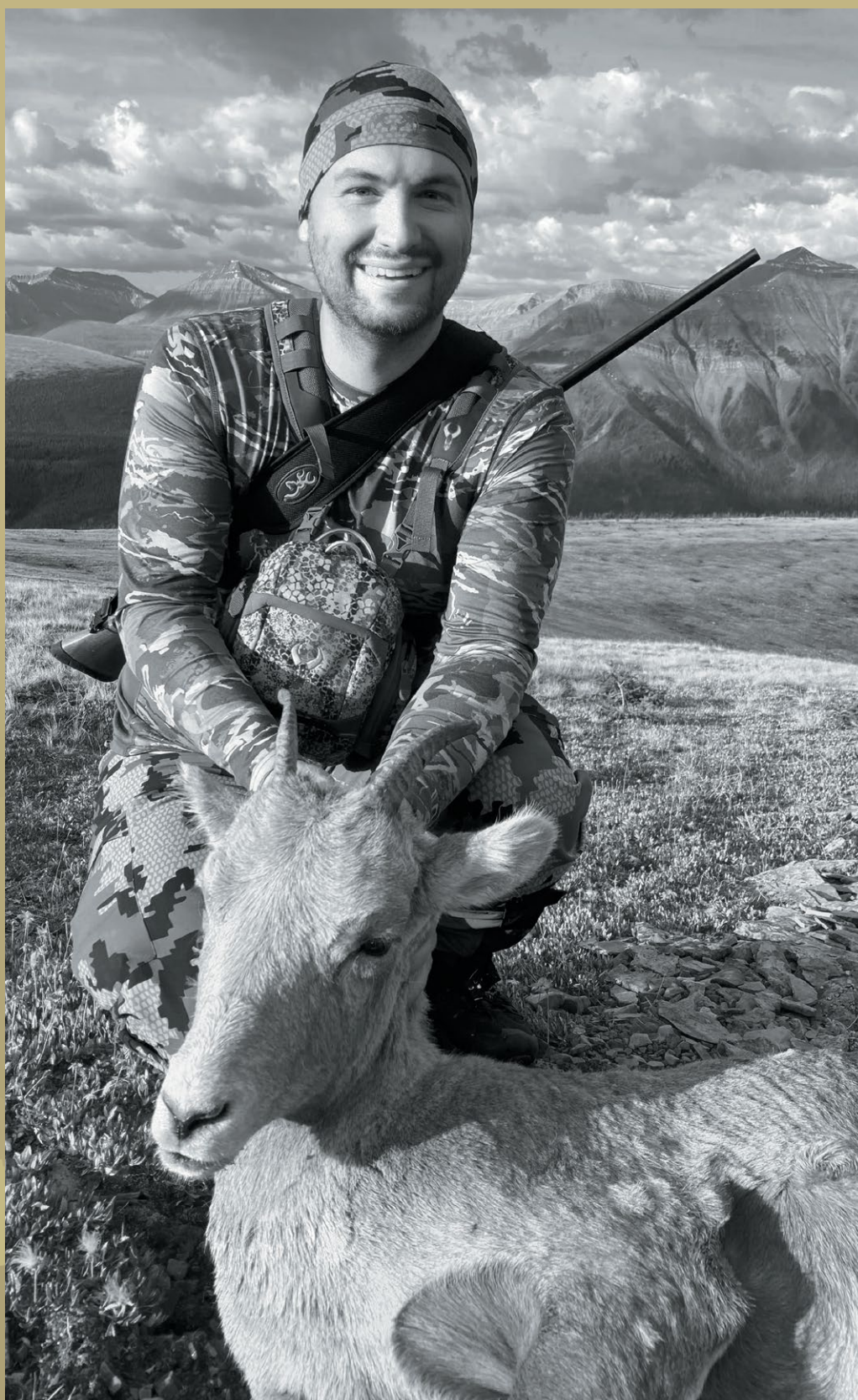
Growing up so connected to the land gives Kyle a keen perspective of his work. “Part of my responsibility covers environmental safety, which includes management of our clean water diversion system. At the end of the day, it's all about the land.”

Back on the ranch, his dad, now retired from the oilfield, runs a herd of bison and trains horses. Kyle's heart is still rooted in that life, and he goes back whenever he can.

And there is the music. Kyle was in a band while at university and he still has at least six guitars all over the house as well as a drum kit in the basement.

Highlights so far? “There seem to be no limits for opportunity at Syncrude. Because of my ranching background, during the 2016 wildfire, I was able to help out with the feeding and watering of the bison herd. That was pretty special.”

HUNTER ENGINEER



Music has always been important to Kyle and it could very well have become his life. While at university, Kyle played guitar in a metal band that showed some promise. After honing their skills in Edmonton, Dead Reckoning toured Western Canada one year and even brought out an EP, but the big contract and recording deal proved elusive, and thrash metal's loss was engineering's gain. The members of Dead Reckoning reluctantly decided it was best to shut down the band.

Or as Kyle describes it, "We felt we should grow up and get jobs."

ABOVE Kyle performing as a member of the metal band Dead Reckoning. **LEFT** A successful day hunting.

BIG MOCCASINS TO FILL

**Honouring the hard work
and community commitment
of Elsie Fabian**



ABOVE Recognized for her passion and tenacity, Elsie Fabian was a strong advocate for education throughout her life.

“

**My mom believed
in having a happy
community and
having a good
education for
our children.”**

Rebecca Fabian

Elsie Fabian was no stranger to hard work. And hard work proved no obstacle. In fact, when it came to serving her community, the late Fort McKay Elder forged ahead with a determination and strength of character that continues to impact the First Nation today.

Elsie was the Chairperson of the Fort McKay Local School Board Committee and a member of the Northland School Division (NSD) No. 61 Board of Trustees for more than 25 years. She took pride in her work, both professionally and as a community member.

She was also an outspoken advocate for the children of Fort McKay. She participated in trustee and committee meetings and attended numerous meetings with Alberta Education—it didn't matter who she was up against, she stood strong with her words and actions.

The Fort McKay First Nation recently recognized her passion for education by naming the community's new learning facility, now under construction, the Elsie Fabian School.

Elsie was born December 15, 1942, in Moose Lake, Alberta—about five hours south of Fort McKay. She was one of the eldest girls in a family of 13 children, and when her older brother and father went hunting, Elsie would take on a traditional male role around the house—hauling wood and water. She was also very good at cleaning and drying fish.

"She worked hard growing up," says Rebecca Fabian, Elsie's daughter. "She loved living off the land, hunting, trapping and picking berries."

When former Chief Jim Boucher told Rebecca they were naming the school after her mother, she cried.

"My mom worked really hard for the community and the education of our people," she says. "To have that honour placed upon her was very emotional."

It was the same experience for Elsie's oldest daughter. "I was truly honoured and felt that it was fitting," says Elissa Whiteknife. "My mom was a pillar of education for many years, not only for the Fort McKay School but also in regard to going back to school herself, and for her family."

Rebecca recalls her mom's tenacity to get things done. For example, when the heater broke at the school, months went by without any action to fix it. With temperatures dropping below minus 30 degrees Celsius in the winter, it was hard for students and staff to manage without heat.

"Elsie demanded having the next board meeting at the school," says Rebecca. "The agenda usually took them three days to get through, and for the first time in many years, it only took them a day because the board of directors were freezing."

"That invitation was a success as the heating problem got fixed."

Elsie travelled often for work, and her children accompanied her to several board meetings and school openings throughout Alberta. Rebecca remembers the excitement of those events.

"They were awesome," she says. "It was really nice to be a part of those things—these grand openings and celebrating the fact that all their hard work was for a good reason."

Rebecca also remembers her mom preparing for meetings and the care she took in representing the school district.

"She dressed casually unless she was going to meetings—she'd wear her navy or black slacks, a floral top and her blazer, and then she'd fix her hair and put a small amount of makeup on," says Rebecca. "That showed me how much pride she took in her position."

Elsie practiced what she preached, and at 44 years old, she earned her diploma in Business Administration from Keyano College.

Elsie was proudly involved in both Christmas concerts and year-end award ceremonies. She welcomed and thanked people for attending, and she loved being involved in the feasts and watching the children play.

"My mom believed in having a happy community and having a good education for our children," says Rebecca.

She worked until her health permitted—Elsie was diagnosed with dementia in her mid-sixties. It was heartbreaking for both the Fort McKay First Nation and the Fabian family.

"We'd known this woman all our lives and to see her that way was really hard for the community," says Rebecca. "She was a very vocal woman—she attended school functions and round dances. She was at feasts and meetings, and she always had something good to say about the community."

Rebecca hopes to follow in her mom's footsteps by serving on the Fort McKay Local School Board Committee, just like Elsie did.

"Those are pretty big moccasins to fill," says Rebecca. "She was very independent and strong."

WHERE MODERN TECHNOLOGY MEETS TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS

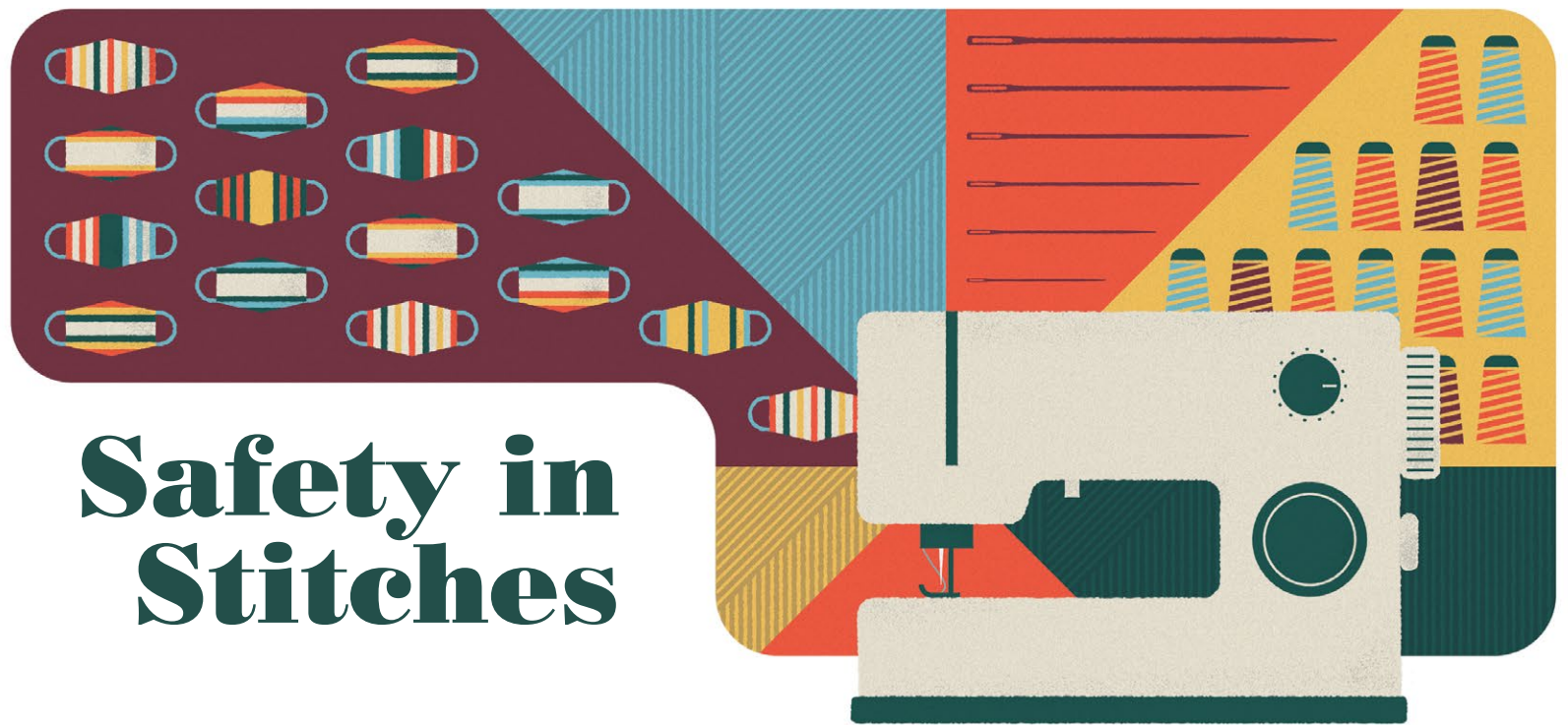
With a budget of \$30 million, the new Elsie Fabian School will be 5,000 square metres, have a full-size gymnasium with a running track, and house a Careers and Technology Foundations facility.

The school will combine modern technologies with traditional teachings. It will teach Kindergarten through Grade 9, and school programming will include core programs, such as math, sciences and language arts, along with culture and land-based education. Academic programs will incorporate both Cree and Dene languages, giving students a true immersion experience.

The school will also have a full-size theatre, cultural area, commercial kitchen and gathering space.

Syncrude provided \$3.5 million towards construction and groundbreaking ceremonies that occurred in September 2020. The grand opening is planned for fall 2022.





Safety in Stitches

To be a major supplier of masks for the energy sector during the pandemic makes business sense for a garment manufacturing company that has Syncrude ties.

Goodfish Lake's journey in mask making started as a measure to protect employees, Elders and members of its community. It then morphed into a business opportunity to supply materials needed to strengthen workplace pandemic protocols.



While the company reaps great rewards for jump-starting that new venture, it has also opened doors to industry accolades such as Alberta's Best of Business award, given at the Alberta Business Awards of Distinction for 2020.

Tom Jackson, CEO of Goodfish Lake Business Corporation, says that back in spring when the restrictions began, the company decided to take a proactive step. The company made masks for its employees to protect each other from the spread of COVID-19.

"We were looking at all our protocols around the pandemic. We decided, just to get ahead of the curve a bit, that we would make masks for our employees. At the same time, we thought we should give them to the Elders here in the community. We wound up giving some to the community as well." From making them for in-house and community use, Goodfish Lake staff got ample practice and training on making masks. So, when Syncrude came calling, the company was able to quickly send samples, which led to an order for nearly 50,000 masks.

"It just exploded after Syncrude ordered masks. There's a great need in the industry and we're glad we're able to supply the need," says Tom. As of last September, Goodfish Lake had sold more than 250,000 masks to oil and gas companies in Alberta.

The corporation began business by running an industrial dry cleaning and laundry facility. It has expanded over the years and now runs six businesses, including a cattle ranch operation and a seasonal company that provides firefighting personnel. Goodfish Lake Business Corporation also runs a sewing and garment company.

Tom says the corporation was recognized with a provincial award in large part because of the efforts of this business, which has been a major supplier of masks during the pandemic. In late-April, Syncrude transitioned to mandatory mask use and personal barrier use following a directive issued by Alberta Health Services that wearing a non-medical mask may help prevent the spread of the virus. However, wearing one does not relieve workers of the responsibility to stay at home if they are ill, nor from practicing the required physical distancing of six feet from each other. It simply serves as an additional measure to help protect from direct person-to-person transmission and possible work surface contamination.

Since the pandemic began and more Syncrude employees headed back to the workplace, the company's mask protocol has evolved: When you're moving, you're masked. That's the rule of thumb all workers at Syncrude sites follow.

The blue masks in use at Syncrude are made of Ultrasoft Hazard Risk Category 2, which is a fire-retardant (FR) material that's suitable for all areas requiring FR materials. In other areas of Syncrude, workers can choose to use those or any other approved personal barrier that covers their noses and mouths.

Stage Bright

Dylan Thomas-Bouchier is graduating from the National Theatre School (NTS) in Montreal, but he doesn't tell people he's an actor. Rather, he says, "I'm an Indigenous storyteller."

The audition process at NTS is rigorous. Each year, only 12 to 14 students are admitted out of nearly 400 nation-wide applicants. A member of the Fort McKay First Nation, Dylan was accepted into the program in 2018.

"I understand the value of my voice now like never before," he says, but reveals he wasn't always so sure about acting. His dad, who was heavily involved in the arts community in Fort McMurray, pushed him to audition for theatre. Dylan got a job as a stagehand instead.

"Having that sense of community was something I'd never experienced before," he says. "I was just one of the people involved in putting together a show and I was valuable for that—I don't think I'd ever seen myself as valuable before."

The following year, Dylan auditioned and got the part of a young revolutionary in *Les Misérables* at the Keyano Theatre Company in Fort McMurray.

"I remember my audition was awful," he says. "But the director was a family friend, so he threw a young kid a bone."

Since then, Dylan has acted on *The Road Behind*, *The Good Survivor*, and *Nerdvana: The Web Series*. He also performed at the Syncrude-sponsored Nextfest emerging arts festival.

Dylan has built on his success and become a leader in conversations about Indigenous and disabled storytelling. As a child, he had major leg surgery to help with mobility issues caused by high-functioning cerebral palsy. Now, he hopes to own an Indigenous disabled arts theatre company where the two parts of his identity are put centre stage. He understands that providing a physical space isn't enough.

"Simply saying we encourage Indigenous people to audition for a role isn't going to get Indigenous people to audition for a role," he says. "You have to write engaging parts for them."

When asked how he does it all, Dylan says that he often thinks of life like playing a game of cards.

"I wasn't dealt the best hand, and I can't just mulligan my hand away and get a new hand—I have to play the hand I was dealt. If you got a tough hand, play it out, because you never know what's going to happen."

ABOVE: Dylan Thomas-Bouchier performs in the National Theatre School Production of *Indecent* by Paula Vogel.



I understand the value of my voice now like never before."



Creating Connections



The best part of growing up in a small town like Fort McMurray was the sense of community and belonging, according to Dylan Alexander.

“Everyone knew everyone, and in a way, it was like we had our own family because we were always there for each other,” he says. “Having my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all living in the community was special. Nowadays, living in a bigger city, I miss that connection of knowing my neighbours.”

Another place he has always felt that strong sense of belonging is on the ice.

“Without a question, hockey has been a huge socializing factor in my life. It allowed me to really connect with my community and interact with other members, and where my closest friends have been made.”

His interest in communities and social connection has followed Dylan into his post-secondary pursuits. Today, he is in his fourth year of studies at MacEwan University, majoring in Biological Sciences and minoring in Sociology.

“I hope to develop a career in the medical field,” says Dylan. “It was important for me to minor in sociological sciences to further understand the social aspects of human life as it undoubtedly correlates to health, not simply biological factors alone. Putting these two disciplines together is not only beneficial for my future career but helps me to interact more effectively with others.”

Dylan, whose father was a heavy-equipment operator at Syncrude for more than 20 years, is the 2020 recipient of Syncrude’s Rod Hyde Indigenous Education Award for academic achievements. The award honours Rod Hyde, a former Fort McKay School principal.

“Through researching this program, I’ve gained a strong appreciation for Rod Hyde and his work with Indigenous communities,” says Dylan, whose grandparents are founding members of the Qalipu First Nation. “One day I wish to follow in his footsteps and give back through the knowledge and expertise I acquire through my studies.”

Everyone knew everyone, and in a way, it was like we had our own family because we were always there for each other.”

ABOVE
Dylan Alexander
is the recipient of Syncrude’s Rod Hyde Indigenous Education Award for academic achievement.

Walking in Two Worlds

Nestled in the heart of Janvier, the Sekweha Youth Centre has been a popular gathering spot for children aged eight to 17 since 2009. Sekweha, meaning “for the youth” in the Dene language, is a place for youth to come together, form friendships and learn lifelong skills.

The Centre’s vision is to create a healthy, safe and sustainable community. Its goal is to help children and youth gain the knowledge, confidence and skills they need to be successful in life, and to be a positive presence in their community.

Kerri Ceretzke, executive director of the Centre, and her team are ramping up their programming after a quiet year due to the pandemic. Though things look different now, the staff and board of directors are determined to see Sekweha continue to be a resource for the more than hundred youth they see annually.

Board chair Dustin Nokohoo has held the Centre close to his heart for many years. “Before I joined the board three years ago, my wife was a youth worker there. My kids have grown up at the Centre and it’s always been a big part of our lives,” he says. “Programming is focused on getting back to the land, infusing culture into all of our events and outings.

“Our youth often feel like they’re part of two worlds: the western society and their Indigenous culture. We want to equip them with the skills they need to be successful anywhere. Our

overarching message is walking in two worlds.”

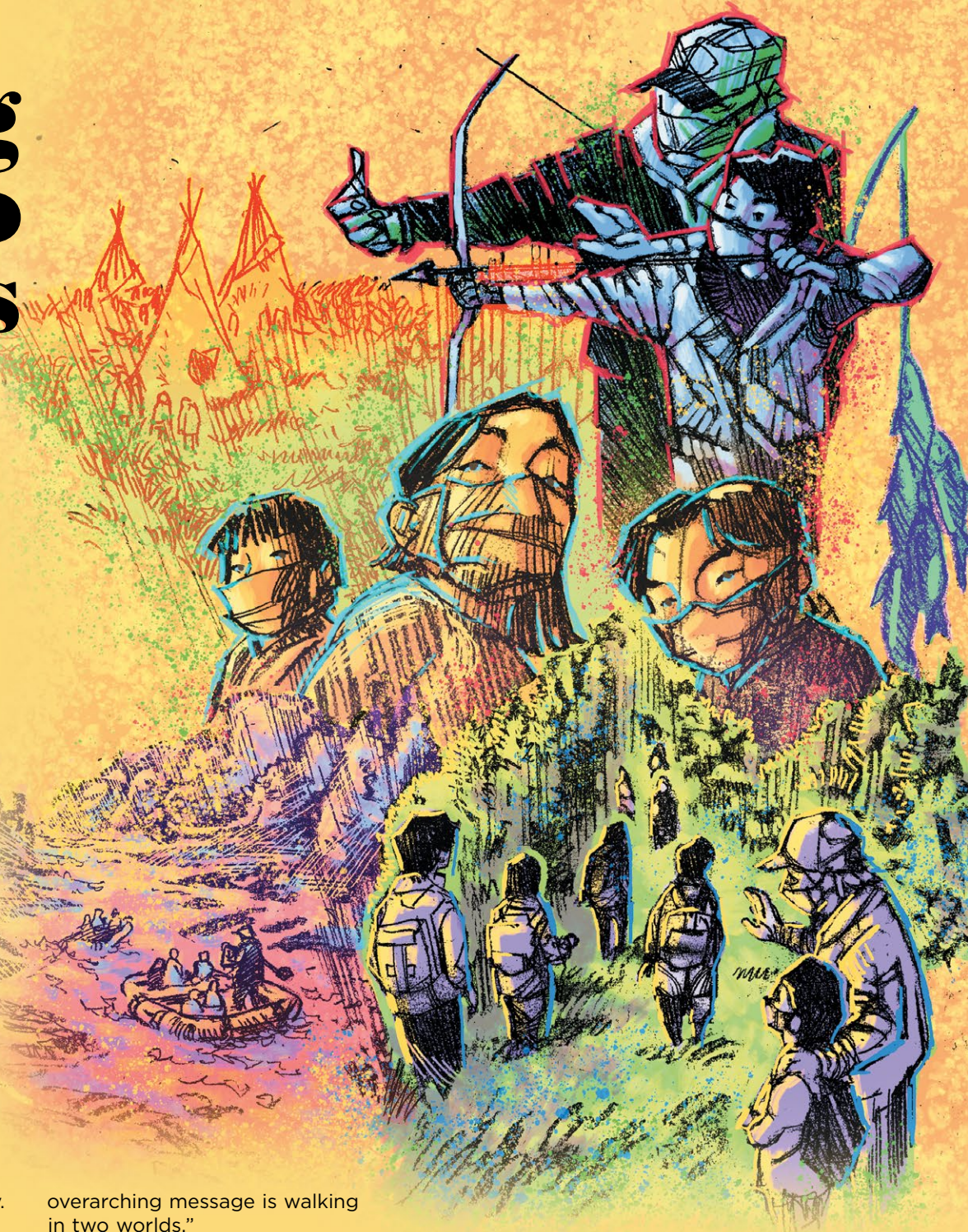
Although the Sekweha Youth Centre isn’t able to return to its regular hours, there’s a lot of exciting things happening. The cultural programmer is always looking for opportunities to bring meaningful experiences to the participants, such as a trip to Winefred Lake, to teach skills in hunting, fishing and camping, during the summer in 2020.

Another recent outing was focused on teaching youth to prepare, cut and dry meat. Winter activities include snowshoeing, crafting slingshots and ice-fishing.

“The positive impact this Centre has on our youth is the reason the staff and board work so hard,” says Dustin. “With all that’s going on in the world around us, these kids need the support and positive focus more than ever.”

Syncrude has been a proud supporter of the Sekweha Youth Centre since 2011—donating over \$80,000 to support the Centre in achieving its goals.

For more information about the Centre or details on upcoming programming, visit Janvier Sekweha-Youth on Facebook or contact Kerri at 780-999-7649.



“We are Stronger Together.”

Melanie Antoine continues her quest to grow her business and support her community.



As community-minded entrepreneurs, Melanie and her husband Lloyd look for opportunities to give back, and are generous supporters of the Wood Buffalo Food Bank.

After 12 years of operating everything from crushers to bucketwheels at Syncrude's Mildred Lake mine, Melanie Antoine was ready to take on new challenges.

"My husband Lloyd and I had saved a lot of money from our jobs at Syncrude," says Melanie, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. "I decided to concentrate on raising my son Tanner, and be a full-time mom. Then, lo and behold, I became pregnant again with my daughter Sadie, whom I call my 'miracle baby', and things changed for me. I decided I wanted something more."

Twelve years later, Melanie sits at the helm of Antoine's Pump and Equipment (A.P.E.) Maintenance, a thriving company that provides services to several oil sands operations, and has more than 100 employees. The Alberta Chamber of Resources recognized Melanie's contributions to the industry and the wider community with the 2019 Resource Leadership Award.

"It means a lot to me. It shows we are trusted, we are reliable, people believe in us," she says. "It was hard for Lloyd and me to get people to believe in what we could do. We had zero investors, zero credit, zero angel funders. We started A.P.E. with our savings."

While pregnant, Melanie decided she wasn't going to stay at home and instead completed the Aboriginal Entrepreneurship program offered at Keyano College, graduating with an A average. After giving birth to Sadie, Melanie started applying lessons learned on the course in starting her own company. Her past experience at Syncrude also provided some valuable lessons, too.



"Syncrude played a big role in helping us start the company because we used the money we saved from our jobs and didn't see any profit for two years," says Melanie. "Just as important was being exposed to site—it can be a very intimidating place if you have never been there. We also learned about the safety culture required in industry and what industry needed from contractors to be successful."

A.P.E. has opened a new 20,000-square-foot facility near the Fort McMurray International Airport and started a barging service to transport goods up to Fort Chipewyan from Fort McMurray. Melanie is also active in the wider community as a volunteer for several non-profit organizations,

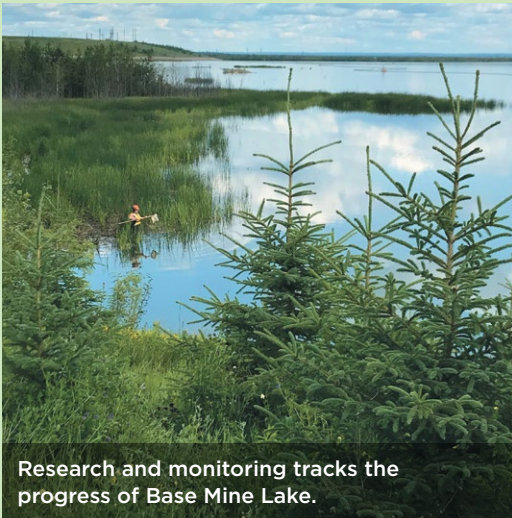
including serving as the board chair for the Northern Lights Health Foundation for four years. Community development and health is just as important as growing her business. "Growing up in Fort Chipewyan, I understand the importance of institutions and health care for the entire region, not just Fort McMurray. For outlying communities, having services in the region is very important," she says. "My parents were always involved in community events and that was instilled in me."

Melanie wants to pass down those values to her children and also encourages her employees to get involved in the community.

"Fort McMurray is now our home and we want to build a better community as well as a company. We want our children to be proud of where they come from, just as we are," says Melanie, who was named Citizen of the Year by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo in early-November for her contributions to the region. "We've experienced a lot of trials in this region in recent years, from the wildfire to floods to downturns, but we've stayed positive and look ahead. We are stronger together."

Growing up in Fort Chipewyan, I understand the importance of institutions and health care for the entire region."

ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATES



Research and monitoring tracks the progress of Base Mine Lake.

BASE MINE LAKE

Thanks to collaboration with universities across Canada, Syncrude's Base Mine Lake (BML)—a demonstration of water capped tailings technology—is already showing great results.

The lake occupies what was once a pit in Syncrude's original Base Mine. The empty pit was filled with fluid tailings (a mixture of clay, fine solids, water and trace bitumen) and capped with a mixture of process and fresh water to form a lake. It is expected that over time, the fluid tailings will remain isolated at the bottom of the lake, and water quality will improve.

An extensive research and monitoring program tracks progress, and results to date indicate the tailings are consolidating, and water quality is improving. A variety of biological communities are also developing, including algae, shoreline plants, zooplankton and insects.

"It's exciting to be part of such a collaborative R&D program involving top scientists working on a project that is so important to Syncrude and the industry," says Carla Wytrykush, Syncrude reclamation and closure research ecologist.

A number of university scientists and students have also been contributing to the research program, including the University of Toronto, McMaster University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of British Columbia and University of Saskatchewan. While the field research involving those institutions was put on hold due to COVID-19 safety concerns in 2020, monitoring continued and was moved in-house to collect data.



Syncrude planted over one million trees and shrubs in 2020.

EAST MINE RECLAMATION

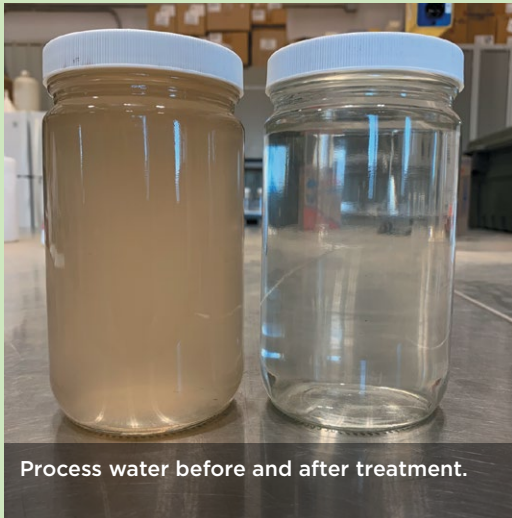
Planting more than one million trees and shrubs is a giant task. When done during a pandemic, it can be extra challenging.

Syncrude's vegetation specialist Eric Girard is proud the program continued despite the various challenges of 2020. "To continue reclamation work is the right thing to do," he says. "Safety has always been a top priority at Syncrude and we had the protocols in place to ensure everyone's protection."

More than 400 hectares were planted during the year, bringing Syncrude's cumulative total to more than 11 million trees and shrubs across the company's reclamation sites. Among the tree species planted were balsam poplar, trembling aspen, white birch, jack pine and white spruce. Shrubs consisted of green alder, river alder, red osier dogwood, rat root, Saskatoon, buffalo berry, honeysuckle, willows, roses, Labrador tea, bog birch, snowberry, pin cherries, lingonberry, twinflowers, crowberries, sedges, low-bush cranberries, blueberry and hazelnuts.

To grow the trees and shrubs successfully, Eric emphasizes the importance of understanding the various local ecosites. Every species grows in a specific moisture and nutrient environment that planters need to understand.

"Before we can even grow seedlings, it is essential to decode each species' sequence of events that will lead the seed to wake up from its dormant state," says Eric. "Seeds are really sophisticated and are equipped with various temperature, light and other sensors, as well as some coatings that have to be triggered in the right sequence to allow the embryo to initiate growth," says Eric. "It makes sense—when you only have one chance in life, you want to make sure you are germinating where you have a chance to grow!"



Process water before and after treatment.

WATER TREATMENT

Syncrude's water treatment project aims to change how tailings are managed in the region. And it's using one of the world's largest carbon-based filtration systems to get the job done.

With 14 years of research behind it, the pilot project uses a process similar to home water filters. In Syncrude's case, petroleum coke is sourced from the company's cokers to treat process water from tailings facilities. In doing so, suspended solids such as clay, hydrocarbons and dissolved organic compounds, including naphthenic acids, are removed.

Syncrude contracted one of the region's leading Indigenous businesses, The Bouchier Group, to complete civil work. Construction was completed in 2019 and now the project—as big as approximately five football fields—is in the commissioning and testing phase.

Field programs completed to date demonstrate the treated water will support aquatic life. Current closed-circuit testing will provide additional insight on whether water quality is suitable for release to the Athabasca River and if it is a viable long-term solution. Regulatory approval would also be required for the safe release of treated water into the environment.

"It takes a lot of outside-the-box thinking to create something that's never been done before," says Warren Zubot, the Syncrude senior engineering associate who has led the research on the technology. "It is even more impressive to see solutions found for every challenge faced while we've scaled up this project. It took a lot of collaboration across Syncrude teams, along with the skills of The Bouchier Group, to make it possible.

"I'm excited to see the full potential of this project and the difference it will make."



Welcoming Mamawi

Weighing up to an imposing 2,600 pounds, wood bison are North America's heaviest animals, but they still stand together in herds to face danger, whether it is a winter storm or a pack of wolves.

That rugged resilience and unity inspired Hector Tierney when the Beaver Creek Wood Bison Ranch decided to name a calf last spring. "I wanted to come up with something to commemorate the planet standing together, all at one time, to face the COVID-19 pandemic head on," says Hector, a safety administrator for the Fort McKay Group of Companies, which manages the ranch on behalf of Syncrude and the Fort McKay First Nation. "I wanted to find a name that honoured the importance of the bison in Indigenous culture as well as the situation we currently face."

Mamawi—Cree for "together, all at once"—summed up exactly what Hector was looking for. "I thought, 'Wow, what could be better than that?' It's perfect," says Hector.

Calves are rarely named at the ranch—they are usually assigned a letter and number in the fall, when they undergo their first checkup by the veterinarian. "When the first calf was born, I thought about what could we do that could bring a positive outlook or inspiration to our current situation," says Brad Ramstead, ranch manager. "After raising the idea, the Fort McKay Group of Companies started a naming campaign for the first 2020 addition to the Beaver Creek herd during the pandemic."

Given the circumstances, Jesse Hall, Syncrude's manager of Tailings and Lease Development, saw it as the right thing to do. "Calving season helps with perspective. We had

a very challenging period, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the flooding in Fort McMurray to trying to maintain our business during the period of low prices," he says. "And we have new calves born who are unaware of these storms. It puts life in perspective—life will go on."

"The bison will endure and there's something reassuring about that. And that's an example we can learn from as we go through these storms as an organization and as a community."



PATHWAYS:
OUR SIX
COMMITMENT
AREAS

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 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.



Our Indigenous Relations Policy

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.

This Indigenous Relations Policy applies to, and establishes Syncrude's expectations for, employees and those working on the company's behalf.

SHARING INDIGENOUS STORIES

Syncrude is proud to present radio programming that amplifies the success stories of Indigenous communities and businesses.

Indigenous Pathways on the CKUA Radio Network sheds light on individual stories of Indigenous work, perspectives, passions and achievements. Listen live several times weekly or stream episodes on-demand at www.ckua.com as well as on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and Spotify. Most episodes are two minutes long, and select stories are told in longer, feature-length formats.

Indigenous Business Profile on CFWE Radio features conversations with Indigenous entrepreneurs who share the challenges, successes and lessons learned while building their businesses. Tune in to this two-minute program several times weekly or get it on-demand and in text format at www.cfweradio.ca and www.windspeaker.com.



INDIGENOUS RELATIONS SCORECARD



SYNCRUDE DIRECT WORKFORCE

Total Indigenous Employees (#)
2020

482

2016	2017	2018	2019
470	481	481	484

INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION IN:

Permanent Syncrude Workforce (%)
2020

9.8

2016	2017	2018	2019
9.8	10.1	10.0	9.7

Leaders and Management (%)
2020

7.0

2016	2017	2018	2019
7.3	6.9	7.4	7.0

Administrative, Professional,
Technical (%) 2020

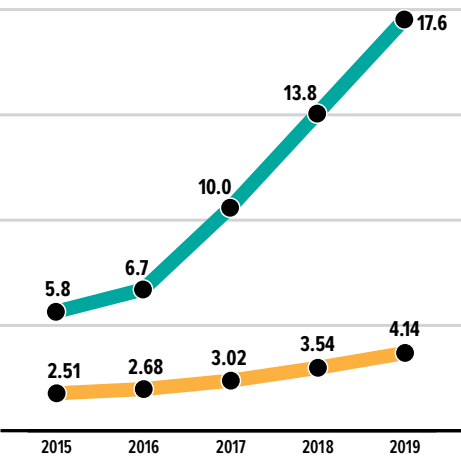
7.5

2016	2017	2018	2019
6.7	6.9	7.4	7.3

Business

Indigenous
Business Spend

■ (percentage of total annual procurement)
■ \$ billions cumulative

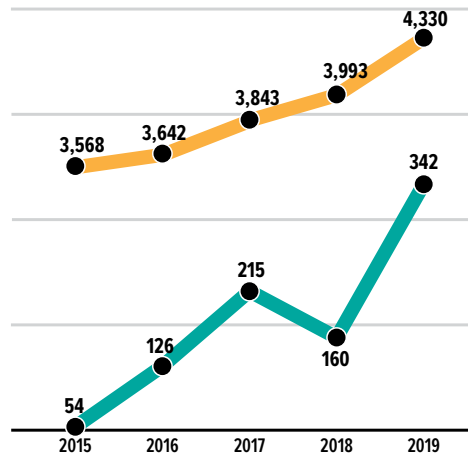


Total Indigenous business spending for 2019 was a record \$602 million, representing about 18 per cent of our total annual procurement. The cumulative total for Syncrude business with First Nations- and Métis-owned companies is over \$4.1 billion.

Environment

Permanent Land Reclaimed

■ hectares per year
■ hectares cumulative

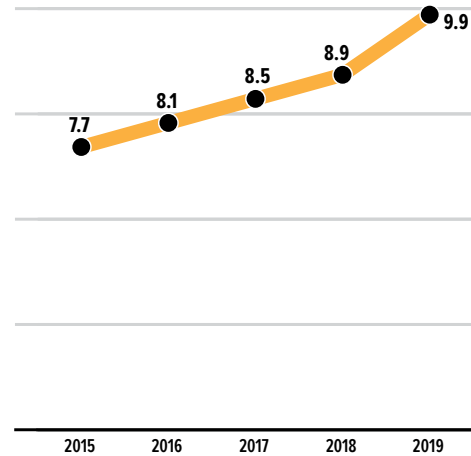


Syncrude has permanently reclaimed over 4,300 hectares to date. Around 1,000 additional hectares are ready for revegetation.

Environment

Trees and Shrubs Planted

millions, cumulative



In 2019, over 990,000 seedlings were planted, including six species of trees, 18 species of shrubs and two herbaceous species.



RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Trades and Operators (%)
2020

12.0

2016	2017	2018	2019
12.3	12.7	12.1	11.7

New Hires (% of all hires)
2020

7.5

2016	2017	2018	2019
19.1	10.6	6.8	6.5

Attrition Rate (%)
2020

4.1

2016	2017	2018	2019
6.0	4.0	4.0	5.0

Average Years of Service
(# of years) 2020

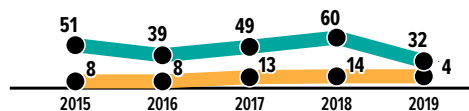
14.0

2016	2017	2018	2019
12.0	13.0	13.0	13.0

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.

Community

SYNCRUDE INVESTED
AROUND

\$1.5
MILLION

in Indigenous
initiatives
and projects
during 2019.

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 www.syncrude.ca/community/scholarships-awards. Many of the awards available are prioritized for Indigenous and northern Alberta recipients.



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 2019 and December 2020.

5 YEARS

Paul Beland
Tara K. Best
Lanny Cardinal
Tony Cassell
Ryan Courtoreille
Tyrone E. Courtorielle
Tache Forbister
Iris McClure
Conor McEathron
Ootashkik Orban
Kent M. Strong

10 YEARS

Justin C. Beaudry
Blaine M. Bradley
Alexander Brushett
Cordell A. Cassell
Patrick Courtoreille
Jesse Dewolfe
Edward F. Dilney
Jinny Flamand
Dwight C. Flett
Annette Gladu
Michael Grandjambe
April Hinks
Martha Kasal
Mike King
Roy Lepine
Glen Louie
Amy Mackenzie
Brandon T. Roberts
Dylan Roberts
Conway Rumbolt
Kyle Sand
Naomi L. Shaw
Klint Taylor
Ryan Voyageur
Trudy Warren
Randy Wood

15 YEARS

David A. Balmer
Jason J. Bourassa
Conan J. Boyer
Michel Cote
Dustin Doucet
Brian B. Drew
Daniel C. Genereux
Lora M. Herman
Darryl S. John
Marc Judge
Clayton Kuncio
David F. Lyver
Jerry L. Marten
Quentin Mercredi
Richard Pelletier
Amanda Phibben
Christa Piercey
Kenneth E. Plamondon
John Renton
Tyler Richter

20 YEARS

John W. Blanchard
Tamara Gillard
Corey Gushue
Ryan McIver
Sherisse Mills
Jimmy Noskiye
Chris Tremblay
Keith Tuccaro

25 YEARS

Gloria G. Blanchard
Anne M. Boucher
Dwight Flett
Greg Gladue
Wayne Kosik
Gary Laprise
Jeffrey Massan
Gord Patterson
Anthony Punko
Joyce M. Walker

30 YEARS

Adam R. Gladue
Marty Quintal
Russell B. Voyageur

35 YEARS

Paul Fleming
Andrew Golosky
Lowen Hurford
Chris Mooney

40 YEARS

Dennis E. Mercer
Norma M. Waquan

Congratulations on your Retirement

Wayne Brake
George R. Brown
Fred Cardinal
Paul Cyprien
Art Forbister
Mathew Grant
Bella Marten
Gary Middlebrook
Peter Powder
Valdon Prodaniuk

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



Men and women dance at the third annual Fort McKay Pow Wow in 2019.





A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H

Meet Our Community Relations Team

Our Community Relations team stewards our Indigenous Relations Policy, as well as our commitments and agreements. As 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.

Cliff Dimm (A)
Community Relations Manager

Lana Hill (B)
Community Relations Team Leader

Mel Boostrom (C)
Community Relations Specialist

Nancy Bunch (D)
Community Investment Representative

Lisa Nelson (E)
Community Relations Coordinator

Tracey Stephen (F)
Community Relations Advisor

Jennifer Gagnon (G)
Manager, Talent and Development

Doug Webb (H)
Indigenous Business Liaison



Now, more than ever, we are all looking for the human connection and the uplifting uniqueness that shines a light into our lives.”

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



Message from Syncrude's Managing Director

In an age when technology and online media are often favoured, the question is pondered by historians about how we will maintain records of our society's history. It is recognized that in many Indigenous cultures around the world, history has survived through storytelling, art, song and dance. In this issue of *Pathways*, we hope the words on the pages will help to create a standalone moment in time to capture some of our region's most inspiring stories.

Gathering these heartfelt pieces has been a year in the making. Like all of us, the steps to create the magazine were impacted by the effects of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. It would be misleading to say that this edition came easy, but the result was worth it. Just as we implemented strong COVID protocols in our operations, Syncrude exhibited great care and concern with how we approached the magazine. Even the smallest of details were examined and in place to ensure all pieces were executed safely.

From arranging interviews, working with our vendors and photographers, to the exact locations of photo shoots, all effort was made to minimize unnecessary exposures. COVID safety plans were created and executed, interviews were completed over the phone or with Zoom, and photography was arranged with limited interactions involved. It's a true testament to the individuals featured throughout this issue of *Pathways*, and their ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment throughout 2020.

Many new relationships are formed while working on a magazine such as *Pathways*, and many existing ones are renewed or strengthened. Syncrude has a deep source of pride for the long-enduring relationships we have created and maintained with our Indigenous neighbours. That type of rapport doesn't just happen by chance; it stems from a mutual respect and collective perspective that is bigger and broader than all of us here today. It stems from collaborating together throughout our 56-year history, and the many years to come.

Syncrude believes strongly in championing inclusion and diversity in our workplace, but we won't pretend to have all the answers. In a year when human rights movements were seen across our country and the globe, we know there is much more work to do. Syncrude is committed to working alongside Indigenous partners and neighbours to do what is right, and to do our part to continue progress on equity, inclusion and diversity. For both those individuals who work for and with us, and within the region and beyond.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank each individual for allowing us to share their journey in this edition of *Pathways*. Now, more than ever, we are all looking for the human connection and the uplifting uniqueness that shines a light into our lives.

As Leonard Cohen famously stated: There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

Thank you for opening your hearts to capture and share this treasured history.

Doreen Cole



*PICTURED HERE: Mitch Mercredi in motion.
BACK COVER (clockwise from top left): Emma Redcrow,
Brielle Mercredi, Lexi Redcrow and Sawyer Mercredi.*

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.).



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