Pathways

INDIGENOUS REVIEW 2022

The Athabasca Watershed

Stories from those who know it best and work to protect it.

| 02

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

AND MUCH MORE

Suncor acknowledges the many territories and homelands on which we operate from coast to coast.

Welcome. As Canadians, we have a tremendous opportunity to learn and work alongside Indigenous Peoples to strengthen our country. As part of reconciliation, Suncor continues to understand how Indigenous communities and authentic meaningful relationships are foundational to our business.

And our journey continues. In 2021, we assumed operatorship of the Syncrude joint venture project, which has many years of demonstrated engagement with local communities in northeastern Alberta. Together, we remain committed to bring to life the perspectives and issues essential to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

In the pages that follow, you will find inspiring Indigenous stories and achievements. From entrepreneurs to artists, from youth to Elders, the people featured here are building confidence in a strong and inclusive future and demonstrating the many diverse pathways to success.

Your thoughts

Through *Pathways*, we hope these stories capture the heart, spirit and success of Indigenous Peoples and communities. We invite you to share your opinion and tell us how we're doing.

Email us at info@suncor.com

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FRONT: The aurora borealis dance over the Athabasca River.
BACK: A moment between a father and son at the Fort McKay Pow Wow.

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The Athabasca River and its watershed passes through several Indigenous communities in northeastern Alberta. But it is more than a just a river. For many years, it served as the lone transportation corridor for the region—more than 200 winding kilometres linking Fort McMurray with Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan by dog team in the winter and boats or barges in the summer months. It provides fresh water to sustain those communities as well as the boreal plants and animals crucial to Indigenous people and their culture. These are some of their stories.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH THEM

MAIN PHOTO:

The Athabasca River at Fort McMurray.

BOTTOM L to R:

Canoeing on the Athabasca River, Alberta.

Moving camp along the Athabasca River, Alberta.

Paddle steamer on the Athabasca River at Fort McKay.

Photos from the Provincial Archives of Alberta. L to R: A2338, A5504, A5509

Did you know?

The Athabasca River watershed is the ancestral and traditional lands for many Indigenous groups including: the Dane-zaa, Sekani, Secwepemc (Shuswap), Salish, Ktunaxa, Nakoda/Stoney, Woodland Cree, Chipewyan (Dënesułine), and Métis.

The Athabasca River Basin stretches 1,500 kilometres from Jasper National Park to the northeastern corner of Alberta. The headwaters originate from melting snow and ice of the Athabasca Glacier on the Columbia Icefield in the Rocky Mountains. The river flows northeast until it arrives at the Peace-Athabasca Delta and Lake Athabasca.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world—a huge, complex and dynamic ecosystem. Located at the western end of Lake Athabasca, it covers 3,900 kilometres of which 80 per cent is located within Wood Buffalo National Park.

The Anglers – Bill and Betty Woodward, *Fort McMurray 468 First Nation*

Neither Bill nor Betty Woodward will say exactly how long ago it happened, but both Fort McMurray 468 First Nation Elders can still vividly recount their first time fishing on the open water and the excitement of feeling a tug on the line as children.

"My parents took me out or I would go out with my dad and Uncle Peter—I probably started going when I was just five but I loved it," says Betty. "We fished with nets on, what we now call, Willow Lake as well as with rods and lines."

Both Betty and Bill have passed along a lot of their knowledge—and love—of fishing to their three daughters and nine grandchildren. And the Woodwards and other families still maintain some traditions, such as the annual "sucker head feast" in the late spring, where dozens of sucker heads are removed from the fish, put into a giant pot over an open fire and eaten after being boiled.

"In the spring, suckers start coming the same time the flying ants come in, usually around mid-May," Betty says. "It's a ritual to get a bunch of them and put them into a big cauldron. There's not a lot of meat on the head, but they are delicious. It's also a time to gather and share stories that were told to us. That's something we hope will continue."

PHOTOS - CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:

Standup paddleboarding on the Snye River.

Fishing boats on the delta.

The confluence of the MacKay and Athabasca rivers.

The Athabasca flows into the Peace-Athabasca Delta in northern Alberta.

The Keeper of the Water – Jean L'Hommecourt, *Fort McKay First Nation*

Raised on the banks of the Athabasca River near Poplar Point, Jean L'Hommecourt began to recognize its importance in her life when she was separated from it and her family while attending Holy Angels Residential School in Fort Chipewyan for six long years.

"This river was my lifesaver and my strength. Through all the traumas I endured during my years at residential school, I knew where I belonged on my homelands and I knew the river fed my roots," says Jean.

Jean has returned to make her family home along the banks of the Athabasca in Fort McKay. She continues to live off the river and the lands that surround it, harvesting moose in the fall and winter as well as gathering plants for traditional medicines and remedies. But the river is more than a supermarket or pharmacy for her. "There's a great spiritual significance to the Athabasca for me. It is the giver of life, from providing the water needed by the plants that we use for traditional purposes to the forests and muskegs used by the animals we harvest," she says.

Women play a special role in protecting the water and the lands surrounding them. "Women are the givers of life so it's in our nature to protect water because we need it for life. We need it to nurture our bodies and for our children," she says. "This river has been the backbone of our family. It's something I'm always connected to so I will continue to protect and advocate for it. The Athabasca and its tributaries ensured the survival of our people and is the reason we are here today."

The Trapper - Frank Lacaille, *McMurray Métis 1935*

Born and raised in the sprawling boreal expanse of Wood Buffalo National Park where his parents operated a trapline during his infancy and youth, Frank Lacaille learned the lessons of life in the bush from an early age.

"I started going out on the line with my father when I was six or seven, not very old at all," says Frank, a McMurray Métis 1935 Elder. "You learned by watching the old-timer—see what he's doing. I learned from my mother too. She came from a trapping family and knew her way around the bush."

All traplines started with rivers. In the case of the Athabasca River, traplines started every five miles. As Frank got older, he began to understand the connection between the river and the animals he trapped on his own line at Mile 104 of the river, just south of where he grew up. "You see the connection when you are old enough to start to see everything needs water, whether it is animals or plants," he says.

Frank's line, acquired in 1974, stretches 30 miles west from the Athabasca, though he chuckles and admits "the miles have been getting shorter in the past few years." What hasn't changed is the importance of the Athabasca. "The river is the cradle of life for us," he says. "It supports the animals, the wetlands off the river, the forests. It's still the highway that Mother Nature gave us. The Athabasca is still the only way to get to my place. You can go by boat in the summer and by snowmobile in the winter."

The Storyteller - Harvey Rolland, *Fort McKay First Nation*

If you have an hour or so to sit down and pour a cup of coffee, Harvey Rolland would be delighted to share some of the "bush" wisdom gathered over more than 75 years of living in and around the Athabasca River.

Along the way, you'll hear stories about post-war life in Fort McKay, a world apart from how the community lives today.

"Life here has changed so much even though the community has always sat above the Athabasca," says Harvey. "We would set nets for the fish, which would get everything you wanted—jackfish, pickerel, whitefish, goldeye and suckers. Pickerel were my favourite—very tasty fish."

As a young boy, one of Harvey's chores would be to walk down to the banks with pails to gather water for drinking and washing. "In the winter, you'd need a chisel to gather the ice," he says. "Melted ice made a lot more water than melting snow. But the water was safe and tasted great." Today's Fort McKay has running water supplied from the Ells River and much of the community uses bottled water for drinking. Harvey appreciates the need to document that knowledge for future generations.

"The younger generation cannot live the way we lived before. There are changes all around us," he says. "They cannot live off the land like we could. It's easier to make a living off the reserve than living off the bush."

That's why Harvey is happy to pass along the wisdom and his adventures in the bush to willing young ears.

"I always enjoy the opportunity to share my adventures of life in the bush with young people so they know the way things once were."

> I learned if you are going somewhere, be an asset, not a burden. Ask yourself, 'How can I make this place better?' not 'What can it do for me?'"

FROM BUSH TO BOARDROOM

PETER POWDER

From growing up on the land with his grandmother to working across Syncrude's entire operation, Peter Powder's life has been shaped by traditional Cree knowledge and the importance of community. And those wide ranges of experience have influenced his work in the oil sands industry as well as within the Mikisew Cree First Nation.

Peter was born and raised by his grandmother in the bush outside of Fort Chipewyan, Alta. "My grandmother taught me so much about living off the land. She was a medicine lady—she would gather plants and herbs from the land and use them to treat people. She taught me how important the land was to us. I spoke fluent Cree with her."

The loss of his first language started at age seven, when he was taken to the Holy Angels residential school. He did not stay long.

"I ran away. I was a feisty little fellow and never went back," he says with a broad smile. "I wound up going to the Bishop Piche Catholic day school in Fort Chipewyan through Grade 9 where I had good relationships with my teachers.

"My grandmother sent me to Grandin College in Fort Smith, N.W.T., for high school. We went to mass a lot, but the atmosphere was different than at Holy Angels. Their program produced many future leaders for our community."

Other similarly profound lessons awaited Peter in the oil sands industry, where he started as a fourth-class power engineer at Syncrude in December 1984. When he retired 35 years later, he had earned his journeyman's ticket as a millwright and moved into leadership.

However, one of the highlights occurred in 2002 when he traded his coveralls and work boots for a computer to help Syncrude in its support for the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship project. "I was Syncrude's contribution," he laughs. "The government needed somebody to recruit apprentices in the Wood Buffalo region. I'd go to the communities and meet the Chiefs. I'd talk about the program and the opportunities available for Indigenous peoples in the trades and they were very helpful."

"We wound up sponsoring 30 apprentices in two years. Many of them have long and successful careers as journeymen, with some even running their own companies."

Peter has also volunteered for Big Brothers Big Sisters and the United Way, served as sports director on the 2004 Arctic Winter Games board and helped establish the Native Youth Hockey Club in Fort McMurray, Alta. "I learned if you are going somewhere, be an asset, not a burden. Ask yourself, 'How can I make this place better?' not 'What can it do for me?'"

All his experiences proved invaluable when Peter won the 2020 election as Chief for the Mikisew Cree First Nation. "I learned a lot during my time in industry about policies and practices that helped me as chief," he says. Peter stepped down in September 2022, citing concerns about his health and to spend more time with his family.

"I have three school-aged children and they all play hockey. I need to be there for them and my spouse Alyssa," Peter says. "But I'll always be a Mikisew Cree member. I'll always be an advocate for my Nation and to help make things better for the members and the community."

Strength in Ceremony

Veronica Big Plume (Sweetgrass Woman) holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Mount Royal University and has been an initiated member of both the Medicine Pipe Society and Beaver Pipe Society through the Siksika community since 2014. She and her brother have also twice sponsored the Tobacco Dance on the reserve that is just east of Calgary, Alta., but when asked if she's an Elder, Veronica hesitates to answer.

"When I think about a traditional Elder, I think about my holy grandmother," she says, though, according to protocol, she's earned her traditional Elder status through knowledge transfers. "People don't expect me to be a traditional Elder, but it's one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life."

"People don't expect me to be a traditional Elder, but it's one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life."

The distinction between traditional Elder and Elder is that the traditional Elder owns bundles (a collection of medicines—tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass—and other sacred artifacts that are used in ceremony) and has ceremonial rites to own those bundles as well as transfer them to others. Whereas an Elder is one who has age and wisdom but doesn't necessarily have the rights to bundles and transfers.

As an advisor with the Indigenous and Community Relations team at Suncor, Veronica provides guidance on culture and reconciliation. Though she is Cree from Sunchild First Nation, in Treaty 6 territory, Veronica follows Blackfoot protocol.

Traditional Elders like Veronica are important because Indigenous Peoples were historically banned from practising their traditional ways of life, including ceremonies. Today, Knowledge Keepers and Elders are vital to preserving and promoting Indigenous worldviews.

As a traditional Elder, Veronica has permission to facilitate protocol within the Sundance Lodge—a traditional Indigenous ceremony that promotes spiritual healing. During one of these ceremonies, Veronica was supported as a secondary grandmother. "Our holy grandmother is much older, and she's not as nimble as she once was," says Veronica. "Some things that she forgets, I help her remember, and some things that she cannot do, like get up and work with a bundle, I help with that." So far, Veronica has been a part of three Sundance Lodges on the Siksika reserve including one this past summer.

Before accepting her current role at Suncor, Veronica joined the company through its Indigenous Student Program and shared cultural teachings with company leaders. She feels like she's valued for not only her professionalism and expertise as an advisor, but also as an Indigenous person.

"There was a time in my life that I was mixed up. For a while, I was out here like a tumbleweed. But my brother swooped me up and got me back into shape. Coming back to ceremony totally helped me. I love it."

PHOTOS FROM TOP:

Veronica takes part in a water ceremony.

Veronica lives on Treaty 7 territory.

Veronica advises Suncor leaders on cultural practices.

Veronica is considered a Traditional Elder.

Petro-Canada,™ a Suncor business, has supported more than 3,000 aspiring Olympic and Paralympic Canadian athletes, coaches and their families through the FACE™ program since 1988. Program grants help to cover the costs of training, equipment, coach education, and travel to competitions.

PRIDE, PERSISTENCE & PAYOFF

APOLLO HESS EXPLODED OUT OF THE POOL IN HIS ROOKIE YEAR AS A UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE PRONGHORN, GRABBING THE ATTENTION OF THE SWIMMING COMMUNITY.

A member of Kainai Nation, part of the Blackfoot Confederacy in southern Alberta, Apollo is in his second year at the University of Lethbridge where he's working toward a Bachelor of Management degree and collecting medals as a member of the school's swim team, the Pronghorns.

During his rookie year, Apollo earned several gold and silver medals, while also setting the Canadian university record for fastest time in the 50 metre breaststroke during the U Sports Championships in Quebec City. This stunning performance, combined with his strong posted times throughout the year, led to Apollo being named both Men's Swimmer of the Year and Rookie of the Year in the Canada West conference. Apollo credits much of his success to the teachings of his grandfather: "My grandfather was the one who helped connect me to my Indigenous roots and set me on my journey. He was a professional boxer in his youth and would have me over to paint my face and tell me stories of his time on the boxing circuit."

Those stories stuck with Apollo and he uses his grandfather's teachings to handle pressure, train hard and never forget where he came from as he continues his journey as a competitive swimmer.

Earlier this year, Apollo was selected as a 2022 Petro-Canada™ Fuelling Athlete and Coaching Excellence (FACE)™ recipient.

PHOTOS: Austin Knibb, University of Lethbridge.

Through the FACE program, Apollo receives funding that allows him to focus on his training and to purchase healthy food and recovery equipment so he can get back in the pool faster. Key to being selected for the FACE program is the relationship with his coach, Peter Schori.

"My coach is like a father figure to me," says Apollo. "He is always predicting the next award, the next milestone for me. I've been working with him for almost 10 years, and he hasn't missed a prediction yet."

Apollo's fast laps have earned him a lot of attention in 2022. He promises to be an exciting force to watch this season as he continues to work on his swimming goals, which include making it to the Olympics one day.

"There's no way to pay my mom back for the sacrifices she made to fuel my career in swimming," says Apollo. "I see my success as the only way to pay her back for all the time, money and effort she put into my swimming as a kid.

"For me, I see my ultimate dream of qualifying for the Olympics as the way to repay her."

Apollo says if he could give one piece of advice to an Indigenous athlete on the rise, it's to always stand proud. "Keep your head held high," he says. "Your Indigenous heritage is what makes you strong. Never be ashamed of it and draw on that strength when you compete."

"Keep your head held high. Your Indigenous heritage is what makes you strong."

NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS

Robyn Villebrun and her team at MEDIKA NORTH provide mobile occupational health services in the Wood Buffalo region.

Growing up with her grandparents in Fort Smith, N.W.T., Robyn Villebrun saw the value of hard work while experiencing a very traditional lifestyle at a young age.

"My grandpa lived on the trapline for four to six months out of the year. And when he wasn't trapping and selling furs, he was chopping down trees, hauling in logs and selling it for firewood," says Robyn, a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, near Fort McMurray, Alta. "He never learned to read or write—he grew up so deep in the bush that even the residential schools couldn't get him—but he was one of the smartest men I knew."

Robyn inherited her grandparents' work ethic and entrepreneurial sense, which has helped her as the founder of Medika North, an occupational health and medical testing company based in Fort McMurray, Alta.

"I always had a business mind as well as a huge passion for Indigenous health care," says Robyn, who graduated from Fort McMurray's Keyano College nursing program with her degree in 2005. "It started when my uncle came to live with us when I was probably around seven. He had advanced lung cancer. Nurses would come in and bring in equipment and medications to help him. He believed in western medicine. In comparison, my grandpa was diabetic, but he treated his condition traditionally. He would pick rat root and brew tea with it. He didn't take medication but was able to control it."

After more than a decade of working in hospitals, communities and industrial sites as a nurse, Robyn decided to pursue her dream of starting her own company.

The Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association (NAABA) has provided invaluable support for Robyn and her company, which now employs 24 people.

> "I loved the idea of building something and the challenge."

"NAABA provides Indigenous businesses with a framework to succeed. They provide a path to connect with the right people so you can take advantage of the opportunities available in the region," she says.

Seeing Robyn's success with Medika North warms Dave Tuccaro's heart. As one of the founding members of NAABA in 1993, he's watched the organization grow to represent more than 230 businesses in the region.

"I'm so proud of what NAABA has grown into and this next generation of young Indigenous entrepreneurs," says Dave, a member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation and founder of the Tuccaro Group of Companies. "This is the best place we've ever been in the history of Canada and the opportunities are just going to keep getting better and better. As Indigenous people, we have a responsibility to be ready for that."

Empowering Voices

Kahenientha Cross sits in a downtown Calgary, Alta., boardroom as it fills with executives. She introduces herself to the group and asks one of the Elders in the room to light a smudge to ground everyone before their meeting begins.

For the future paramedic from Mohawk Territory in Quebec, Kahnawà:ke (gahna'wa:ge), which sits across the St. Lawrence River from Montréal, this isn't an everyday situation. But she is there with her Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (IYAC) "family" for their first in person meeting in two years.

> **"If you want to find out how a community is doing, look at its children."**

Initially formed in 2019, the council brings members from across the country to discuss issues, concerns and provide guidance to Suncor leaders and the Suncor Energy Foundation (SEF). IYAC meetings are held monthly by phone and twice a year in person.

With the pandemic halting the council's ability to gather face-to-face, one of the reasons for their gathering this past September was to hold a recommitment pipe ceremony, led by Blackfoot Elder Casey Eagle Speaker. The ceremony helped bring the group together in commitment after so much time apart and provided a working space for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Kahenientha (gah-hen-yunn-tuh) admits it was an extremely difficult decision when initially asked to join the council. "No Indigenous person wants to 'Indigenize oil' and I questioned Suncor's intentions. But on the way to the airport my father reassured me that I would be able to use my strong voice to speak the truth and have the ability to find middle ground others may not be comfortable searching for."

The idea for IYAC started percolating in 2014 when Michael Lickers, a specialist with Indigenous and Community Relations at Suncor, was developing a youth engagement strategy.

"My dad used to say, 'if you want to find out how a community is doing, look at its children,'" explains Michael, who hails from Six Nations of the Grand River. "If the children are doing well, chances are the community is doing well. In Indigenous culture, children and youth are engaged and their voices are encouraged. We want to hear from the younger voices and to see what perspective they can bring to Suncor."

Kahenientha believes she is seeing change. "When Suncor leaders talk about sharing our stories with their families and how they bring them places, like to tipi transfer ceremonies, that's how I know it's not all just talk. There is action behind their words."

PHOTOS FROM TOP:

The Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (IYAC) held a pipe ceremony in Alberta earlier this year.

Members of IYAC made stops within Treaty 7 territory during their in-person meeting.

Kahenientha Cross, a member of IYAC, met with members of Suncor's leadership team.

Kahenientha and Arlene Strom, Suncor's CSO and General Counsel.

All In The Family

ABOVE The Reclamation Engagement Focus Group visits reclaimed land at Syncrude.

BELOW L to R Tayden Shott with his mom, Lolita, and their family.

At 14, Tayden is an expert at fishing and harvesting.

Lolita and her son, Grayson.

A fifth-generation certified trapper, Tayden Shott could probably teach classes on traditional land management. He knows what berries to pick, how to use traditional medicine, is a skilled hunter, trapper, and an expert at fishing and harvesting. He understands to take only what he needs and to do so respectfully, honouring the land and his Elders.

Tayden's also only 14.

Guided by his family—grandparents, mother and father, aunts and uncles—Tayden has skills and knowledge beyond his years. He shot to the top of his age group in archery at the 2022 Alberta Indigenous Games, resulting in a Spirit of Belonging Award and an invitation to represent the province at the 2023 North American games. Last year, he was also one of 12 students in the province to be recognized with an Honouring Spirit Indigenous Student Award from the Alberta School Boards Association.

Staying true to his culture comes naturally to Tayden and he contributes his perspectives as a member of the Reclamation Engagement Focus Group (REFG) at the Syncrude operation. Comprised of local First Nations and Métis residents, the REFG helps guide and provide input on reclamation practices.

"I love going out to the land, drinking tea with the Elders from different communities. And it's nice to see animals on the reclaimed land."

Tayden and his mom, Lolita Ladouceur, both live on the nearby Fort McKay First Nation. Together with another youth, trapper and Elder, they share traditional knowledge and insight to site management, vegetation specialists, scientists and land planners.

Tayden, who spends time on the land with his younger brother Grayson whenever possible, enjoys his visits to Syncrude. "I love going out to the land, drinking tea with the Elders from different communities. And it's nice to see animals on the reclaimed land."

Lolita says that the focus group has value. "Syncrude has made an effort to engage with the community's youth. This was a request by the Elders, and they listened. They also listen when we talk to them about the reclaimed land, in what way it's similar to trapline land and where it differs. They try to use our input to make changes in reclamation in a meaningful way."

Lolita supports Syncrude's initiative of being more inclusive in reclamation. "When I see the growth in our children's understanding of the importance of engagement in the reclamation process, I know what we are doing is meaningful."

As for Tayden, he has two hopes for the future of the REFG: "I'd like to go out to the Syncrude lands more often than once a month, and I'd like to see more of the youth from my community involved."

Inset: Tayden Shott
Right: REFG members on Syncrude reclaimed land.

Wearing Red For MMEIP

The following story contains details that may be disturbing for some. If you or anyone you know is struggling with issues related to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, please call the toll-free, national crisis line at 1-844-413-6649.

On a bitterly cold winter night in 1981, Debbie Green's sister, Laney Ewenin, died alone, with no shoes or jacket, in a frozen field outside the city limits of Calgary, Alta. She was 23.

Who left Laney in that remote field, near where a Costco now stands, was never confirmed. A police report on her death was never found and the autopsy report wasn't shared with her family until 35 years later.

Tragically, Debbie's sister's story is not an isolated case. Indigenous groups such as the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) that track the number of Missing, Murdered and Exploited Indigenous Peoples (MMEIP), estimate there are 4,000 documented cases. The oldest case in NWAC's database dates back to 1944, but there are likely cases even older. "It needs to stop," says Debbie, a senior advisor for Indigenous Workforce Development at Suncor. "My sisters and I share our story whenever we can so that we can work toward a day when Indigenous People aren't targeted and killed."

Despite making up a fraction of the Canadian population (about three per cent), Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than all other women in Canada combined.

In 2019, the final report from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) was released, and within it there are 231 Calls for Justice.

Red dresses have become synonymous with MMEIP in Canada and the United States and can be seen hanging in windows, yards and even along highways to raise awareness of MMEIP on May 5 (Red Dress Day).

"Red is the colour the spirits can see," explains Debbie. "Wearing red is a way of sending our loved ones home to the spirit world if they're still lingering."

The National Inquiry into MMIWG, which was launched by the Government of Canada in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action, took two years and 2,400 people to complete. Seeing an end to this crisis will take much more than that, but Debbie thinks it's achievable. Although she doesn't believe she'll see a drastic reduction in MMEIP numbers in her lifetime.

"The inquiry tells Canadians what needs to be done," says Debbie. "So far, efforts feel like doing work to the 48th floor of a building when you really need to be making structural changes to the basement."

As hard as it is to hear Debbie's story, she finds it healing to talk about Laney: "I always share my sister's story to make it real. It's one thing to read about in the media, but when you know someone that has been touched by MMEIP, it makes it relatable."

Every Tipi Tells a Story

It's a Sunday morning and the lobby of the Suncor Energy Centre in Calgary, Alta., is quiet and serene. Jody Funk, her mom, Gisele, both wearing Métis sashes across their bodies, and Debbie Green in a beautiful ribbon skirt, walk across the lobby floor. Their footsteps echo in the silence as they wait for the arrival of a tipi (teepee) from the Starlight family of Tsuut'ina First Nation.

Debbie, co-chair of Suncor's Indigenous employee inclusion network, Journeys, and Jody, an executive assistant with Digital and Information Technology, worked closely with the Starlight family for months leading up to this day. Elders Bruce and Deanna Starlight, along with their family, have created the tipi that has been gifted to Journeys through a tipi transfer ceremony.

"The tipi serves as a monument to help us remember and honour Indigenous history and culture, but also speaks to the significance of Indigenous Awareness Week and the commitment Suncor has to reconciliation," says Jody.

The tipi arrives and Debbie and Jody greet the men who carry the tall tipi poles and canvas into the building. The poles are stood, fastened and the canvas unwrapped. Elder Bruce performs a smudge and explains how the transfer ceremony grants the rights and responsibilities of caring for and protecting the tipi to the receivers.

It's a dream come true for Debbie, who is also a senior advisor with Indigenous Workforce Development at Suncor. "Having a tipi in the lobby of a corporate building like the Suncor Energy Centre provides a place for all who visit this building to be reminded we are on the lands of the Treaty 7 Peoples. There is a history here that goes back long before this building existed."

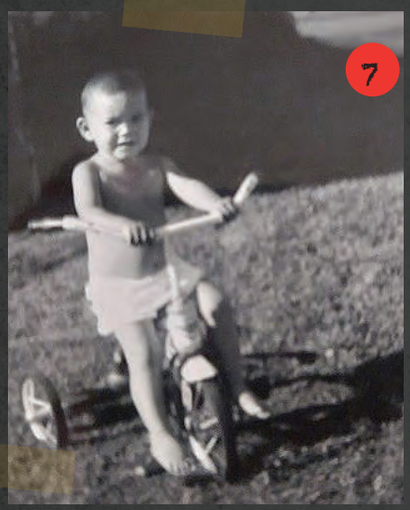
Across Suncor, tipis have been raised at various locations including the Edmonton Refinery, Base Plant and Fort Hills. Suncor has also donated tipis to schools in the Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo region.

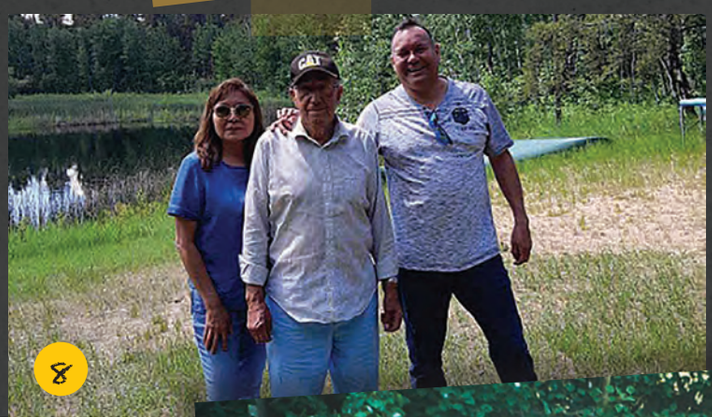
RIGHT: *The Starlight family of Tsuut'ina First Nation gifted a tipi to Suncor's Indigenous employee network.*

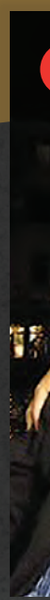
INSET PHOTO: *Debbie Green and Jody Funk admire the tipi that sits in the lobby of the Suncor Energy Centre.*

From Mexico to Inuvik

A 60s SCOOP SURVIVOR'S STORY







PHOTOS BY NUMBER:

1 Don and his adoptive brother, Mark.
2 Don and his adoptive brother shared a close bond growing up.
3 Don and his adoptive brother were only three months apart in age.
4 A young Don.
5 Don grew up on a farm in Drayton Valley, Alta.
6 In his youth, Don played in a band.
7 Don as a toddler.
8 Don, his wife and his dad, Ewald, who supported Don's journey to find his biological family.
9 Don, a heavy equipment technician for Suncor, and his stepmother.
10 Don and his wife, Jeannie, in Venice.
11 Don with his adoptive father and brother.
12 Don met his biological siblings for the first time in 2005.
13 Don at work in Suncor's maintenance truck shop.

When Don Wanagas, a heavy equipment technician at Suncor's Base Plant, was 18, he took his first trip to Mexico. When he got off the plane, he saw people who looked like him for the first time in his life and concluded with joy, "Oh, I'm Mexican!"

Growing up in Drayton Valley, Alta., the son of German immigrants, Don knew he was adopted but he didn't know where he was from. Then, one day, while walking through a mall in Edmonton, Don was approached by two women, who asked "what band he was from." Thinking they meant the music band he once played in, he replied with astonishment: "KGB. You remember me?!"

Between giggles, the women clarified that they meant a "native band." Naturally, Don was confused and stated firmly, "I'm not native. I'm Mexican." This response was met with more laughter.

They laughed because they were Indigenous and knew Don was too, even if he didn't. They held up a picture for him to look at; it was a picture of their cousin. Don's biological cousin. And Don thought he was looking in a mirror. This chance encounter took him on a seven-year journey to learn he was from Inuvik, N.W.T., and to find his biological family.

Don is a Sixties Scoop survivor. He was taken from his birth parents when he was born and placed with a white family. This was done to thousands of Indigenous children in Canada from the 1960s through to the 1980s. "I read about the Sixties Scoop, and it's hard for me to comprehend that I'm actually one of them," he says.

Through research, Don found his nine biological siblings, all but one were also taken at birth and adopted by non-Indigenous families. "I was kidnapped when I was a baby," says Don. "My adoptive parents later told me that their doctor had given me to them after my mother miscarried to help them recover from the loss. When my mom became pregnant again, the hospital asked them when they were going to 'give the native baby back?' My adoptive parents obviously didn't give me back and they never dreamed of giving me back. I know they were hesitant to tell me this story."

Years later, Don and his father drove to Whitehorse, Yukon, to meet Don's biological siblings. On the way, his dad said that if it didn't work out, they would just keep driving and make a road trip out of it.

"When we got to the house, my Dad locked me out of the car so I couldn't turn back," tells Don. "When I rang the doorbell, the door flew open and I met people who looked like me—all good looking, so it's genetic—with the same sense of humour as me."

Don's story has a happy ending. He has a rewarding career and was raised in a loving home. While his biological parents passed on before Don could meet them, he has built a relationship with his siblings, which has answered many questions he had about his background, including his Indigenous heritage.

DEGREES OF ACHIEVEMENT

For Kaylee Welsh, receiving a Belcourt Brosseau Métis Award (BBMA) was more than just financial support for university—it was a key step on her journey to discover her family's culture and history.

Kaylee, who is pursuing a dual degree in chemistry and business management at Concordia University in Edmonton, Alta., was selected as a recipient of the scholarship award in 2019. The BBMAs, which have been supported by Syncrude since 2007, were created in 2001 by Orval Belcourt, Dr. Herb Belcourt and Georges Brosseau to help Métis Albertans realize self-sufficiency through post-secondary education and skills development.

So far, the BBMAs have provided over $11 million in funding to over 1,500 Métis students, making it the largest non-government source of funding for Métis students in Canada.

"My connection to my local Métis community is very important to me," says Kaylee. "Being able to receive this award and attend the ceremony where I received a sash and blessings from an Elder were really powerful. It helped connect me to my roots even more and embrace my culture as a Métis person."

"I found learning about the history of Métis people in Canada one of the most interesting aspects of my work placement."

In addition to receiving a BBMA, Kaylee also secured a work placement with the Métis Nation of Alberta, which gave her hands-on experience with Métis heritage. "I found learning about the history of Métis people in Canada one of the most interesting aspects of my work placement," explains Kaylee. "Learning about Métis traditional land claims and why we have them was eye-opening."

While Kaylee's connection to her Métis roots may be new, it was present in her creative expression for some time. Growing up, she spent many hours beading with her grandmother in Fort McMurray, Alta. After several years of receiving compliments on her beadwork, she launched her own business, Connections Beadwork, selling traditional Métis beadwork with a modern twist.

Creating accessories from sparkling earrings to pop sockets for cell phones and various other crafts, Kaylee's beading highlights the beauty of this traditional artwork. And the response has been overwhelmingly positive, allowing her to attend her first craft market as a small business owner.

Kaylee says balancing her time between school and the business has been tough; however, seeing the positive response makes it all worth it.

The Art of RECONCILIATION

"This mural talks specifically about the moment we're experiencing as a country in relation to residential schools and the discoveries of Indigenous children that attended these institutions."

Jessey Pacho *Collaborative artist for the Toronto mural.*

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then Petro-Canada's™ commissioning of Indigenous artwork to acknowledge the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation has sparked meaningful conversations about history and healing.

That was the experience for those involved in creating six murals that decorate the sides of Petro-Canada™ stations in Kamloops, B.C., Calgary, Alta., Winnipeg, Man., Ottawa and Toronto, Ont. and Montréal, Que. The murals were officially unveiled in June.

Marcel Mowat, an artist who grew up in Pikogan, a reserve located in Témiscamingue, Que., had a specific intention in mind for the mural he painted in Ottawa.

"It's for the people of the future," he says. "That's why I painted a big chief and a little boy. It signifies that we can make peace between our two cultures. Sometimes we get it right. Sometimes it doesn't work out. Reconciliation takes time."

The Toronto mural, *Our Children*, was created through an innovative collaboration between Black artist Jessey Pacho, aka Phade, and an Indigenous artist (who has chosen to remain anonymous out of respect for their family).

"On this project I partnered with an Indigenous artist who is a second-generation residential school survivor," says Jessey. "This mural talks specifically about the moment we're experiencing as a country in relation to residential schools and the discoveries of Indigenous children that attended these institutions." The *Our Children* mural also features an Afro-Indigenous person, a group that is largely left out of the conversation.

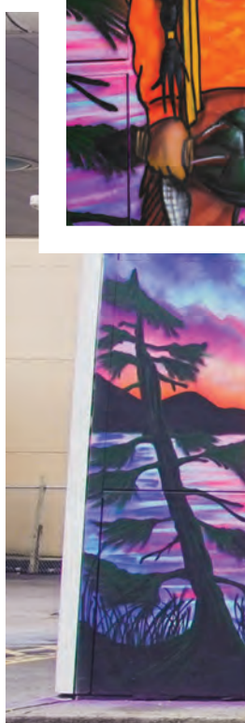
Petro-Canada™ also commissioned nine Indigenous artists to each design their own version of a beaded Petro-Canada™ logo, including Shantel Nawash, who works in supply chain at Suncor and hails from the Siksika Nation in Alberta.

"Beadwork is so intricate, so time-consuming. There is authenticity in something that is made with your own hands," says Shantel, who also serves as a lead for Journeys, the Indigenous employee inclusion network at Suncor. "It's a very sacred thing. It's a piece of me."

Ultimately, the design created by artist Chenoa Plain from Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia, Ont., was selected to be digitalized and appears on Petro-Canada's™ websites and social media channels. The digitalization was done by Indigenous graphic designer Katie Wilhelm from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation.

Chenoa believes projects like this can be good for reconciliation but cautions against a "one-size-fits-all" approach. "Reconciliation means that we all continue to work together in a positive way. While it is important to acknowledge our shared history, it is equally important to understand that each Indigenous person is affected differently."

Petro-Canada™ would like to thank all the artists for their contributions, and we are honoured to share their stories. Get to know the artist and story behind each mural and beaded logo at www.petro-canada.ca.



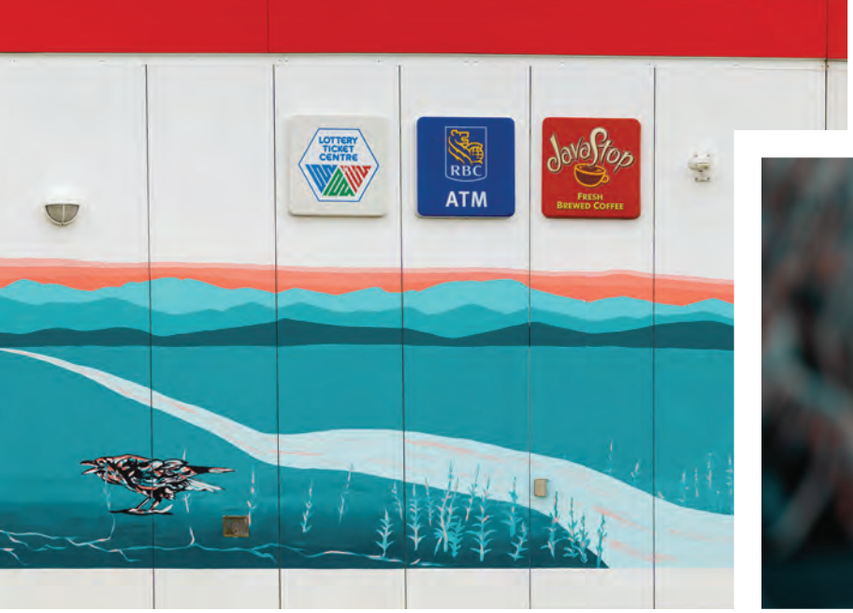
PHOTOS:

TOP
Calgary mural, *Connected*, by Keegan Starlight (right).

MIDDLE LEFT
Beaded Petro-Canada™ logo by Shantel Nawash.

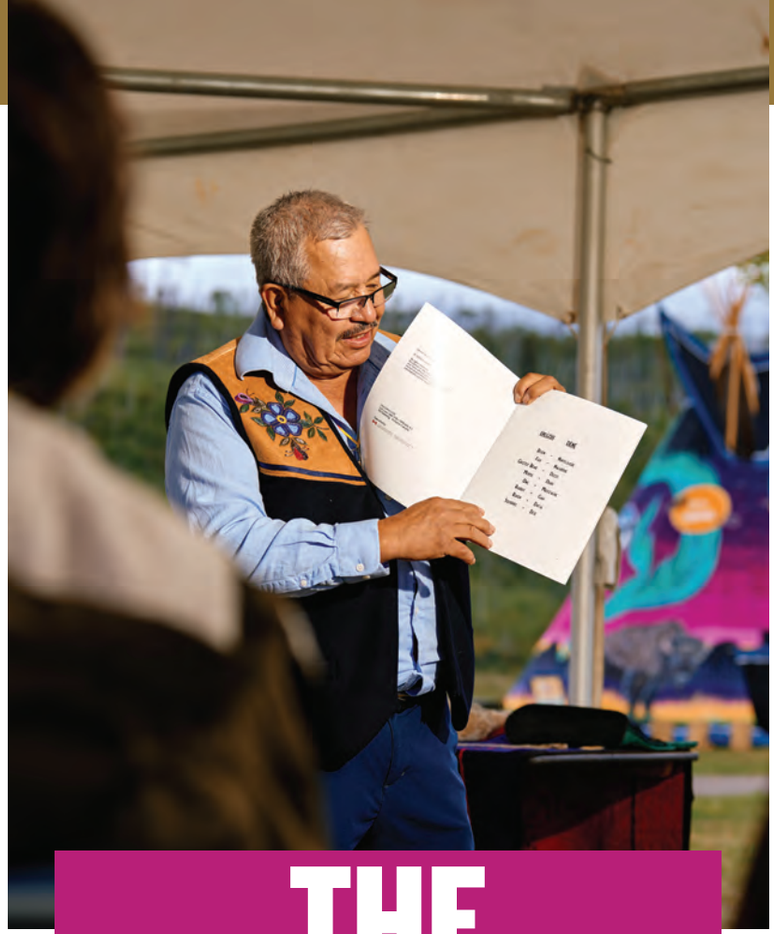
MIDDLE RIGHT
Poïgan chesakewin (Scared Pipe Ceremony) by artist Marcel Mowatt.

BOTTOM
Toronto artist Jessey Pacho next to the mural, *Our Children*.


LOTTERY TICKET CENTRE
RBC
ATM
JavaStop
FRESH BREWED COFFEE


GAKHAWÁ'KSHO'


GAKHAWÁ'KSHO'
Our Children



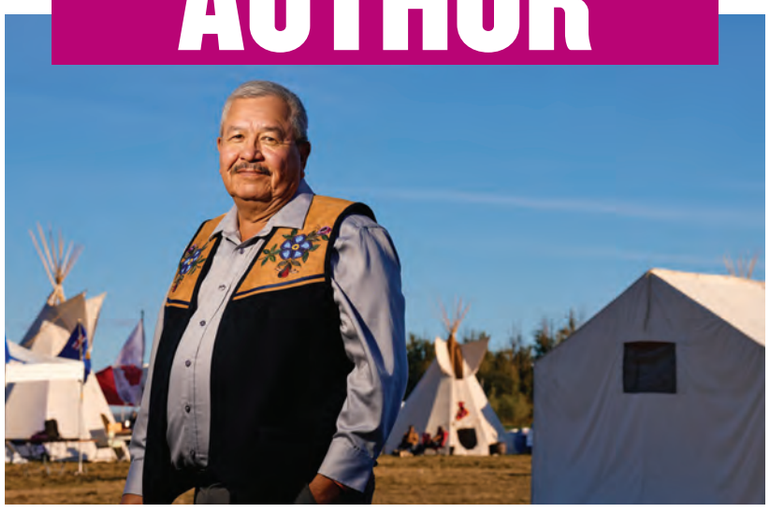
THE ACCIDENTAL AUTHOR

A welder by vocation, Ron Janvier was always more comfortable working with metal than words.

"As my career progressed, I began to take on new roles in planning, business analysis and reliability that required me to write more reports, which was a challenge for me," says Ron, who worked for Syncrude for 33 years before retiring in 2012. "But I had several good mentors and one of them, Colleen Kearney, encouraged me with writing. She told me, 'Use words to your advantage and paint a picture. That's how you will get results.' Those were wise words."

Ron has continued to follow that advice in retirement, though his focus now is on retelling the stories of his childhood rather than building business cases. The Chipewyan Prairie First Nation Elder published his first children's book, *Sakisak and the Squirrel*, last year. It was something of an accident as Ron didn't start out wanting to author a book.

"My wife, Shelly, was developing curriculum for Head Start, a program to help children living on First Nations get ready for school, in the Treaty 8 territory. She had found many Cree children's stories, and stories from other regions, but nothing from the Dene in the Wood Buffalo region," says Ron. "So, she asked me to write down some of the tales that I learned growing up. Stories were very important for us as youngsters—it's a big part of how we learned. These stories were shared from generation to generation by knowledge keepers, who always told us to carry the stories down."



"Stories were very important for us as youngsters—it's a big part of how we learned."

Ron wrote down 10 of his favourite stories from childhood, which involved Sakisak, a mythical character who created animals and would change their colours to protect them.

"An archeologist who has studied the history of the Prairie Chipewyan First Nation really liked the stories and suggested I turn them into the book," he says. "It was the right time for me to take something like that on. I started writing during the pandemic when I was stuck at home and could concentrate without any distractions."

Working with illustrator Terresa Dersch, Ron finished the story. Calgary-based publisher Joey Podlubny released the book in April 2021.

"I've done a lot of public readings, including the recent Athabasca Tribal Council festival in Fort McMurray," he says. "I've decided I'm going to write another book about Sakisak and a weasel. I've learned so much from this experience. My son Ryan, who is a graphic artist, will illustrate the next book, so it is a real family affair."

And Ron hopes the books, with their lessons about animals and their behaviours, will help children of all ages better understand the natural world as well as Dene storytelling.

"It's important to preserve these stories and the wisdom within them for future generations."

AT A GLANCE:

Fort McKay First Nation

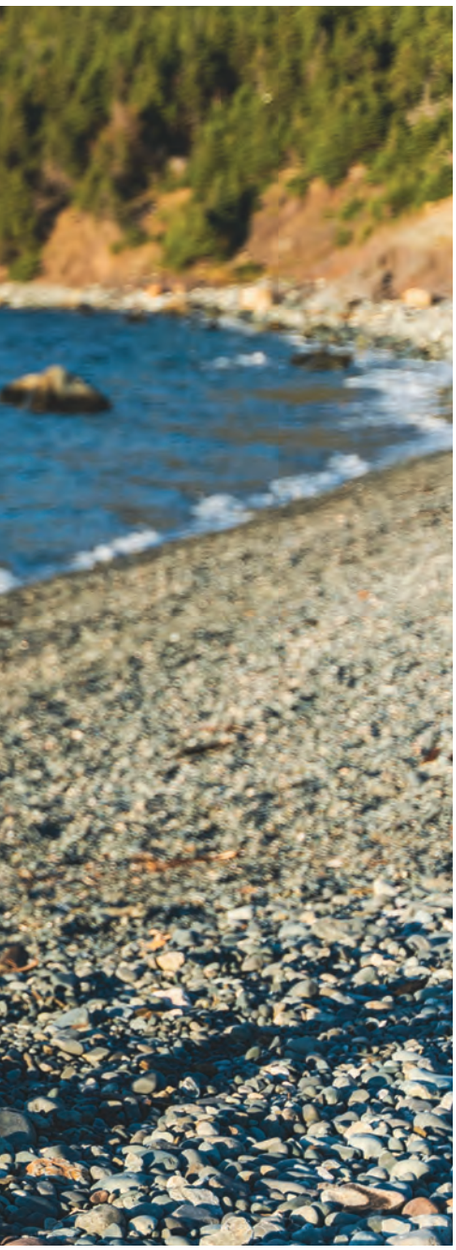
The Fort McKay First Nation hosted its fourth annual Pow Wow this past September. The event provides an opportunity for the Nation to showcase its commitment to important cultural and traditional events.

"Preserving and honouring our past is a cornerstone for building a strong and sustainable future," says Chief Mel Grandjamb. "Through celebrations like the Fort McKay Pow Wow, we bring our rich history to life."

Suncor was a proud sponsor of the three-day Pow Wow, which attracted hundreds of dancers, drummers and visitors from the community and across the region. "This gathering of our people, family, and friends, is a celebration of our traditions, our dance, our food, and our music." says Chief Grandjamb. "It honours both our past and our future."

Reconnecting

"The colonial perception that Indigenous culture was not accepted, was very present. This caused people to hide their Indigenous identity."



ABOVE: Kelly Young was 15 when she learned of her Mi'kmaq heritage.

BELOW L to R: Tobacco ties; feather for smudging; cleansing hands to begin a smudge.

Kelly Young was 15 years old when her parents entered her bedroom and announced, "You are Mi'kmaw and a member of the Qalipu (ha-lee-boo) Mi'kmaq First Nation. We are going to a pow wow. Would you like to come with us?"

Taken aback by both the parental invasion and the news of her Indigenous lineage, Kelly declined and went back to being a teenager growing up in Stephenville, Nfld., on the Gulf of the St. Lawrence.

Once she left home to study biology and environmental science at Memorial University (MUN) in St. John's, the province's capital, Kelly's interest in learning about her Mi'kmaq (mig-mah) heritage deepened.

"I'm reconnecting," explains Kelly. "My family wasn't fortunate enough to have had language and culture passed down."

"I'm reconnecting," explains Kelly. "My family wasn't fortunate enough to have had language and culture passed down. While I am privileged that my family wasn't directly affected by residential schools, the colonial perception that Indigenous culture was not accepted, was very present. This caused people to hide their Indigenous identity."

Kelly now works as an environmental, health and safety advisor for Suncor at its East Coast location. The hazard assessments and safety policies she develops are unique as they focus on a worksite that is constantly moving—the Terra Nova Floating Production Storage and Offloading vessel that is anchored about 350 kilometres off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

In 2018, Kelly joined Suncor through its Indigenous Student Program, but working for an energy company hadn't been on her radar.

"It was the opposite of what I wanted to do," explains Kelly. "I had no idea what I was hoping to do after graduation, but I didn't think it would be in oil and gas and I knew it had to be something to do with the environment."

To Kelly's surprise, working in the health and safety field has shown her the value that Indigenous students can bring to an organization.

"The people I work with, they really do care," says Kelly. "I see firsthand that people are speaking up for the environment. I also see the work taking place with Indigenous awareness and realize I don't have to work specifically in Indigenous relations to make a difference—that showing up and having authentic conversations in the office, makes a difference. It's rewarding."

As a reconnecting, mixed Indigenous person, Kelly says she sometimes feels alone and nervous about taking part in ceremonies and other Indigenous events. But she feels supported by many people.

"I have people in my life who 'get it' and understand what it means to be an ally," says Kelly. "To me, it's about people feeling like they can ask questions that help them better understand Indigenous issues. It's people being open and vulnerable in these spaces, which takes practice—you have to keep asking the awkward questions, with respect and genuine curiosity. I see glimmers of this happening."

Some of the glimmers Kelly sees are in the eyes of the students at MUN, where she guest lectures on the effects of the first European explorer (William Cormack) to travel through Newfoundland and highlighting that Indigenous people made his trip possible. She also sees curiosity in her fellow students in the Mi'kmaw language lessons she takes through the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation.

Kelly may be a reconnecting Mi'kmaw, but her commitment to honouring the culture and the first people of Newfoundland and Labrador, which also includes the Beothuk, Innu and Inuit, is fierce and strong enough to carry anyone who wants to join her on the journey.

Happy STEM Camper

At the age of 10, with three science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) summer camps under his belt, some might say Reid Williams is a professional camper.

While he admits he's still trying to decide what he wants to do when he's older, Reid, a member of Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia, Ont., says he'll most likely stick with something in the STEM realm.

"I got a good grade in science class at school," says Reid. "I built a volcano using baking soda, vinegar, food colouring and soap—the soap helps make it foamy. It exploded on the carpet in my classroom, but I cleaned it up."

With guidance from University of Waterloo engineering graduate Sam Idziak, the camp's program development team lead, and two other co-op students, Reid and his fellow campers explored biology and engineering, learned about chemistry and helping the environment, and created stop motion videos to explore coding and art.

Sam says her favourite part of the annual camp is leading kids through activities they don't get to do in school like building small robots called jitterbugs.

Throughout the summer, camps like the one at Aamjiwnaang, are offered in partnership with Actua—Canada's leading STEM youth outreach network—and its network member Engineering Outreach at the University of Waterloo. They are held in various Indigenous communities across the country as part of Actua's Indigenous Youth in STEM (InSTEM) programming, which is supported by the Suncor Energy Foundation.

The day camps also include local Elders and community members who can talk about the relationships between traditional knowledge and the STEM activities being practised by the budding scientists, engineers, coders and artists.

Doug Dokis, Actua's director for the National InSTEM Program, says the hope is that youth like Reid will advance through Actua's programs, into university, and bring their knowledge and skills back to their communities.

"We provide training and support to our network member instructors to identify potential students that we can move along through our system and create next-step opportunities such as internships and camp facilitator positions."

As for happy camper Reid, he's hoping to return next year and has some advice for others wanting to join the camp: "Try to practise coding in school or try to create your own robot and work circuits and different wires, because there's a lot of wires in the world."

Campers built small robotic bugs that vibrate, hence the name jitterbug, during the science and technology camp at Aamjiwnaang First Nation.

LEFT PHOTO:
Happy campers at Aamjiwnaang First Nation Science and Technology Camp.

A Benchmark Achievement

> **"My passion is for helping children have a voice in child welfare proceedings and ensuring the child's best interests are met."**

Madam Justice Cheryl Arcand-Kootenay made history when she became the first Treaty person in Alberta to be appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta (now Court of King's Bench of Alberta) in 2021. The judge is also the first Cree woman from Treaty 6 to be appointed to the Provincial Court of Alberta and she wants to see more Indigenous representation within the judicial court system.

"It's important that when Indigenous People come into the courtroom, they see their faces reflected on the bench," Cheryl says.

Indigenous People are disproportionately overrepresented in federal prisons. While Indigenous People make up only four per cent of the population in Canada, reports estimate that Indigenous women account for half the incarcerated population and Indigenous men make up over one-third. As a judge and member of Alexander First Nation, Cheryl often has conversations with Indigenous offenders after sentencing.

"They're a captive audience in that moment," she says. "I have conversations about role modelling. Because even if they're going to be in jail, at some point they'll return to community, and what will that look like?"

As a result of colonialization, many Indigenous Peoples are displaced from their cultural identities. Incorporating culture into those conversations is important for Cheryl.

"I'm hoping that by looking at me, they know that I'm reflected in them as an Indigenous judge," she says, adding that she's incorporated healing circles in the court room.

In addition to supporting Indigenous People going through the justice system, Cheryl is also committed to those who represent them. That's why she makes herself available to Indigenous law students, especially before they're called to the bar, and will personally call students beforehand.

"I typically let them know that they can call me if they ever have questions," she says, adding that she will often share her personal phone number as well as numbers of Indigenous lawyers for mentorship opportunities.

Before becoming a judge, Cheryl started her own child welfare and Indigenous justice law practice knowing that Indigenous children make up more than half of children in federal care. She also implemented a child welfare management pilot project to help parents and children work towards resolutions.

"My passion is for helping children have a voice in child welfare proceedings and ensuring the child's best interests are met," she says. Her end goal is to keep the child connected to community in a good way.

Earlier this year, Cheryl was one of 12 laureates from across the country recognized at the annual Indspire Awards, supported in part by Suncor and Syncrude. She also recently completed her Master of Law at Osgoode Hall Law School.


Nancy Desjarlais

PROJECT MÂMAWI MAKES A STATEMENT ON AND OFF SITE

Turnarounds are large, complex events at the Mildred Lake upgrading complex, so much so that they get their own name.

During a turnaround, thousands of skilled trades from across Canada work around the clock to safely bring down several plants at the site, about 40 kilometres north of Fort McMurray, Alta. Workers inspect equipment, perform repairs, replace parts, upgrade technologies and restart plants sometimes in less than two months.

"We've always named our projects to build a sense of ownership with the workforce that comes here. We've alternated between using mountains, including Denali and Olympus, and boreal animals—falcon and timber wolf are recent examples—to brand these events," says Mike Wheeler, turnaround event manager. "We decided to step out of that cycle this year and find a name that reflects our direction as an organization.

Mâmawi, which is Cree for together, speaks directly to our approach of one team—one goal for turnarounds.

"Our Indigenous and Community Relations team recommended Mâmawi. They also made themselves available to speak to our workforce and answer questions," says Mike. "I've learned so much that's helped my understanding of Indigenous issues. It's helped my own journey of reconciliation."

But Project Mâmawi also brings benefits to the wider region with 24 Indigenous-owned vendors supplying goods and services to the turnaround. "These local, Indigenous–owned suppliers do a lot of work with us outside of turnarounds," says Mike. "They understand the expectations about working safely and reliably and are people who live in our town and region. They care and are committed to Project Mâmawi's success. This is reflected in our strong record on safety."

While the project encouraged firms to hire local workers, turnarounds often attract skilled labour from across Canada and can often last up to 60 days. Project Mâmawi built on work done by previous turnarounds to showcase the region to the visiting workforce. "This year, we included the opportunity for contractors to attend the Athabasca Tribal Council Cultural Festival during their days off by providing a coach bus to take them from camp to the event."

Welcome cards were also distributed to all workers, which spoke to the importance of inclusion and respect. They acknowledged the turnaround was taking place on Treaty 8 territory and the traditional lands of several First Nations and Métis communities. The front of the card included custom artwork from local Indigenous artist Nancy Desjarlais *(see sidebar)*.

"We want to continue to operate Mildred Lake safely, reliably and responsibly throughout the year," says Mike, "and provide opportunities for Indigenous communities to benefit from our operation."

Having spent her childhood on Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, Nancy Desjarlais developed a close connection with the natural beauty of the boreal forest that she considers a touchstone in her journey as an artist.

"We are part of the earth and the universe. There is so much more than can be revealed through our senses," she says. "This is what compels and intrigues me."

With Nancy's roots in the region and her Cree-Métis ancestry, creating the artwork for Project Mâmawi was a natural commission. Nancy's painting prominently displays a boreal landscape while the inclusion of bison reflects the return of the bison herd to the Mildred Lake site.

"The water, trees and sun all relate to Fort McMurray's scenery and are also representative of returning the land to its original state," says Nancy, who earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Alberta in 1994. "The bison were included because of the efforts by Syncrude to repopulate the bison herd. Bison are a great source of livelihood for Indigenous people, providing meat, clothing and bones for ceremonial weapons. The bison are positioned here as these two perspectives 'coming together.'"

The painting is the latest in Nancy's award-winning portfolio. Her journey as an artist started when she tried to reconnect to her culture through arts and crafts after being removed from her family home at the age of six and growing up in a convent and foster homes.

"Finding peace with my past, practising daily gratitude, loving the earth, communicating a personal vision and travelling with a light heart are my main objectives right now, and art is my vehicle."

Nancy Desjarlais is represented by the Bearclaw Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta. Our thanks to the gallery for sharing her words and biographical information.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Willow Lake Métis Nation makes a historic land purchase through partnership.

Along Highway 881, about 30 kilometres south of Fort McMurray, Alta., a newly installed sign that reads, "Welcome to Willow Lake Métis Nation," points to a 205-acre swath of land. This land, affectionately known as "the farm" by locals, has just become more than a mere field near a beautiful, expansive lake. To the people of the Willow Lake Métis Nation (WLMN), this parcel of land holds promise for the future. Part of an initiative called *"Sohkastwâwin,"* a Cree word meaning the act of being resilient, the land will be a place to gather, a place that will allow WLMN to reignite and celebrate their culture, grow and harvest food, create jobs and even generate their own power.

As much as members of WLMN have lived off the land by harvesting and trapping, until now it was a community without any actual land to call its own.

"This historic land purchase is foundational," says WLMN CEO Justin Bourque. "We now have the ability to build a home for the community. It's a resilient view and all part of a bigger plan to be recognized as a modern-day settlement on our own lands."

In 2021, WLMN and seven other Indigenous communities in the Wood Buffalo region and Suncor entered the Astisiy Limited Partnership, which acquired TC Energy's 15 per cent equity interest in the Northern Courier Pipeline—a 90 kilometre dual pipeline that carries hot or diluted bitumen and diluent between Suncor's Fort Hills site to its East Tank Farm facility. The partnership means revenue from the line will be used to support communities and people while also ensuring Indigenous involvement in a major energy project. WLMN, in less than a year of Astisiy becoming final, had earned enough revenue from that partnership to purchase its own land.

"It's astronomical the opportunity this land purchase provides to us—to retain culture and community, a place to gather and opportunities to combat climate change," Justin says. "Part of our story is reflective of us as a community because of our resilience."

The community gathered for the first time on its newly acquired land in early June, during National Indigenous History Month, to announce and celebrate this historic moment. The sounds of traditional Métis music filled the air, while children wearing ribbons skirts and sashes danced and performed the Red River jig in front of the stage.

As the formal portion of the day came to an end, Justin took to the microphone to address the crowd one last time:

"You are all standing here today to celebrate the WLMN land acquisition, but more importantly you are standing here today as proof in our belief, as proof that mâmawi —a Cree word for 'together'—we can achieve the impossible."

There is a resurgence of Indigenous language speakers happening across the country. Over the last 10 years, the number of people who can speak an Indigenous language has grown by three per cent or about 260,500 people.

SIGNS OF RESURGENCE

Recognizing the importance of Indigenous languages, signs at Suncor's sites in the Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo region have been updated to include greetings in English (Welcome), French (Bienvenue), Cree (Tân'si) and Dene (Edlânet'é).

Not far from those operating sites, at Gateway Hill, new signs featuring the artwork of Fred MacDonald of the Fort McKay First Nation were installed. The 12 new signs depict the various seasons and months throughout the year and include the name of the month in the Cree and Dene languages.

Lake of Listening

“I want my children to be proud of what I’m doing, but it is Indigenous traditional land users who will be using the land for generations to come.”

Carla Wytrykush has always found inspiration from her three daughters for her work on Base Mine Lake, to leave a better world for them. More recently her perspective has changed.

“I want my children to be proud of what I’m doing, but it is Indigenous traditional land users who will be using the land for generations to come,” says Carla, an ecologist who’s worked on the reclamation project since 2012 and led the research work for the last five years.

Base Mine Lake is a pit lake located on the original site of Syncrude’s Mildred Lake mine. The pit lake was developed by filling the mine pit with fluid tailings, and then capping it with water. Pit lakes are a global mining best practice, and several are found in Alberta on former coal mine sites.

The team is using an adaptive management approach by setting goals, monitoring the progress and adapting along the way to keep Base Mine Lake on track. Engaging with Indigenous communities plays an important part. Carla and the other scientists on the project regularly “get out of the boardroom and into the bush” to walk and talk with traditional land users around the lake.

“When I’m with community members, it’s about using the five senses,” she says. “How does it feel? How does it smell? How does it look? How might they use the lake? When we’re on the shores of the lake with them, we get lots of valuable feedback.”

The goal for the project is to create a lake that supports small-bodied fish and is similar to other lakes in the region. It will also be integrated with the rest of the reclaimed landscape to create a mosaic of wetlands, lakes and forests.

The first step is to make sure the tailings remain under the water cap and the water quality gets better over time, both of which have been confirmed through an extensive monitoring program. Already, there are a variety of algae, aquatic plants, insects and other tiny animals making Base Mine Lake home. The next step is to make sure the lake continues to develop into a functioning ecosystem. This will take time and, as Carla puts it, a village of scientists and community members working together.

“I’d like my kids to be proud of the work that I do,” Carla says. “But ensuring Indigenous community members have the information they need to decide how they might use the land is most important. Having a traditional land user choose to use the lake in the future would be the greatest reward.”

The community of Fort McKay on the shore of the Athabasca River.

EDUCATING RODNEY

> **“It might be smell, it might be taste, it might be the location where they get the water from. So, you sit and you listen to their stories, their knowledge.”**

With a Ph.D. in Environmental Engineering Science, Rodney Guest is well-educated by most measures. As Suncor’s director of Closure Environmental Integrity, he’s also an accomplished scientist with many years of experience working on water issues, including over a decade in the oil sands.

Even so, Rodney’s numerous interactions with members of Indigenous communities living near the Athabasca River have been an education in what those rivers mean to them. The things they’ve learned are invaluable for Rodney and his team as they work to ensure Suncor is managing water safely and sustainably. And sometimes the key to understanding is pretty simple.

“It really is listening to the things that they talk about that are important when it comes to the water,” he says. “It might be smell, it might be taste, it might be the location where they get the water from. So, you sit and you listen to their stories, their knowledge.”

Rodney recalls the first time he visited the region in 2011 as part of monitoring work for the Athabasca River. He and a colleague travelled to Fort Chipewyan to speak with the community. He remembers how concerned they were about the potential effects of the oil sands industry on the water.

Rodney has heard similar concerns over the years from his time working on drinking water systems for many of the Indigenous communities across Alberta. He notes most North Americans simply turn on the tap and trust that the water that streams out is safe. Communities that have lost trust in their water supply don’t feel the same way.

“For communities that have oral traditions, these stories continue on and on and are passed down from generation to generation. So, the road to regaining trust in the water supply can be a long one.”

He notes the cultural significance the Athabasca watershed has for the region’s Indigenous people as well. For example, he recalls community members saying how people used to know how to find safe water as they wandered the land. Such cultural knowledge is passed down from Elders to the next generations.

Rodney also acknowledges the spiritual importance that water holds for community members and the idea that the health of the river and the landscape are connected. While Western scientists tend to separate the technical from the spiritual, he’s learned that Indigenous people make no distinction. “For Indigenous communities, there are no boundaries between these aspects of the water: for them, it’s the lifeblood of the earth.”

Rodney reflects on these and other things he’s learned as an employee of Suncor. The company values water as a precious natural resource and recognizes it’s an essential part of its operations and, therefore, strives to reduce the effects on the rivers.

These efforts include minimizing the withdrawal of fresh water, reusing and recycling water, and storing it safely. They also extend to safely returning treated water to the Athabasca River, a necessary step toward closing and reclaiming a mine. And for Rodney, making sure this work is done right has become a personal mission.

“In sharing my personal water journey story with community members, I’ve found we do have shared values around water. We care about the water. We also have a responsibility and accountability,” he says. “And while it might not be the same in a spiritual way, as a professional, I’m personally invested in the work I do to make sure the water is safe to return to the environment.”

JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION OUR PROGRESS

Suncor's Journey of Reconciliation reflects our continued transformation within the company and in relationships with Indigenous Peoples. It represents our commitment to continue to learn about Indigenous culture and history with open hearts and minds, to stretch our perspectives, and build relationships with Indigenous Peoples based on mutual trust and respect. The Journey of Reconciliation is fundamental to our purpose and supports our strategy of becoming a leader in sustainability and the energy transition.

Reconciliation is critical to healing and deepening relationships with Indigenous Peoples, and we all have a role to play. As outlined in the performance summary here, we are taking an active and meaningful role toward delivering on the recommendations outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #92. We believe it is the right thing to do from a societal and business standpoint.

Including Indigenous perspectives brings about innovation and different ways of approaching our work. By building strong relationships with Indigenous communities, we earn the trust and respect of true partners that help propel our business and navigate the everchanging landscape.

Workforce and Inclusion

We want Suncor to be an inclusive and diverse work environment where everyone feels valued and respected. We believe this supports strong business performance, differentiates us in our communities and helps us to attract and retain Indigenous employees who want to build meaningful careers for the long term.

As of 2021, Suncor (including Syncrude) has 919* Indigenous employees, which equates to over five per cent Indigenous representation in our workforce.

**Based on voluntary self-identification.*

INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE REPRESENTATION (#) 2021

919 workers

TOTAL INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE (%) *Includes Suncor and Syncrude*

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
3.1%	3.1%	3.2%	3.4%	5.3%

The Syncrude operation has one of the highest workforce representations in Canada, with over 10 per cent of the employee base of self-declared Indigenous descent.

Procurement and Spending

Within our supply chain, our Indigenous Business Participation Strategy supports sourcing activity across the company. Working with local Indigenous businesses provides close and reliable talent and services. It also supports companies to invest revenues back into their communities.

In 2021, 16 per cent of Suncor's overall spend and 27 per cent of Syncrude's overall spend were with Indigenous suppliers. Combined, this totalled more than $2.4 billion in procured materials and services—a year-over-year increase of approximately 54 per cent.

Suncor's work with Indigenous communities also remains strong through our Petro-Canada™ business. As of 2021, we have 61 Petro-Canada™ branded retail stations and wholesale marketing arrangements with First Nation and Métis communities.

INDIGENOUS BUSINESS SPENDING 2021 *Includes Suncor and Syncrude*

$2.4 billion

TOTAL INDIGENOUS PROCUREMENT ($ Millions) *Includes Suncor and Syncrude*

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
863	1,221	1,438	1,583	2,444

Suncor and Syncrude together have spent more than $14 billion since the early 1990s with Indigenous businesses and suppliers across Canada.

Valuing Indigenous Worldviews

We continue to learn and understand Indigenous ways of knowing and being through training and experiential learning opportunities online and in-person. Our web-based Indigenous awareness training is available to our workforce and the public on the Journey of Reconciliation page at www.suncor.com. We're also working to integrate Indigenous perspectives and traditional knowledge in our operations where possible, supported through various advisory groups that include Indigenous Elders, youth and community members.

INDIGENOUS AWARENESS TRAINING *Percentage of total workforce completion (Suncor only)*

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
41%	45%	67%	83%	85%

85% of employees had completed web-based Indigenous awareness training as of 2021.

ACDEN and Three Feathers Wildlife Management contractors conduct a wildlife sweep at a Suncor site.

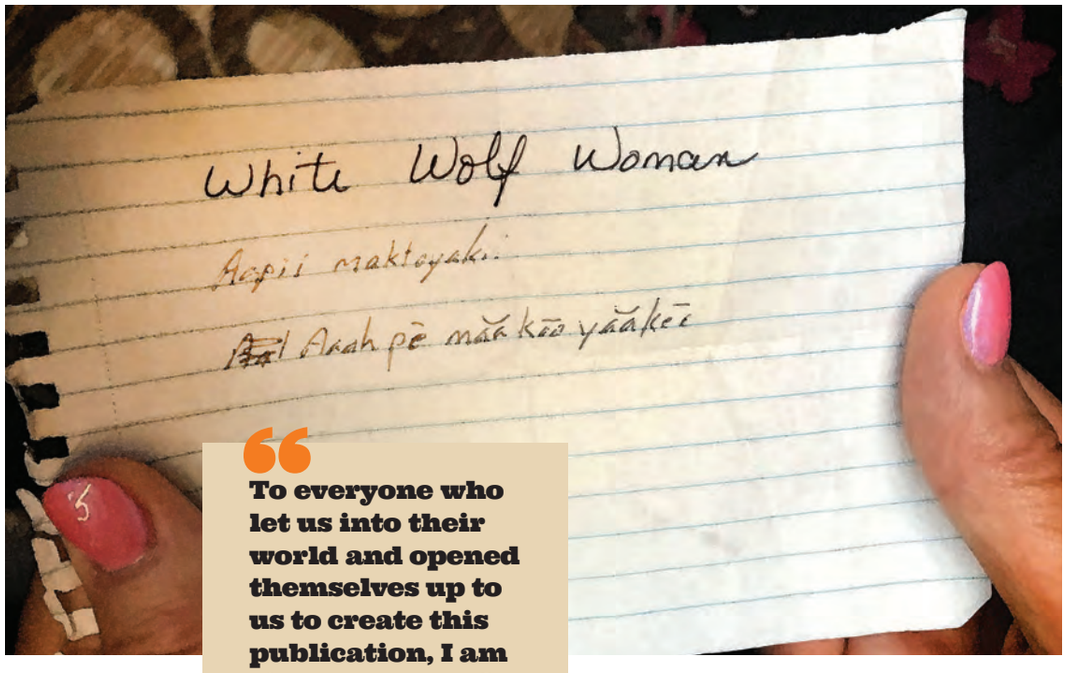
Both Suncor and Syncrude are certified at the highest level—Gold—with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR) program. PAR is Canada's only certification program focused on best practices in Indigenous relations.

A Message from Suncor's Chief Sustainability Officer

I am honoured to share this year's edition of *Pathways* magazine with you.

Since 2010, Syncrude has produced this wonderful publication, which is filled with inspiring stories from inspiring people and this year, as we became operator of Syncrude, we have the opportunity to share stories from across Suncor's operating areas and communities.

Each story brings something different to light, from the encouraging words of an author to entrepreneurs who take care of their community, to water protectors who dedicate their lives to rivers, lakes and oceans.



> **"To everyone who let us into their world and opened themselves up to us to create this publication, I am sincerely grateful for your openness and generosity."**

I was especially moved by the stories that highlight the challenges and societal issues still facing Indigenous Peoples today—stories of loss and adversity, but also of incredible determination and strength.

It is a privilege to be trusted with these stories and to carry on the tradition of sharing them through *Pathways* magazine.

Suncor is committed to mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous Peoples and we are doing this through the *Journey of Reconciliation*. This commitment is reflected in our work, our people and perhaps most importantly, how we show up in and alongside communities.

Earlier this fall, while meeting with the Indigenous Youth Advisory Council, which works with various teams within Suncor, I was gifted the name of *White Wolf Woman* (Aapii maktoyakii, pronounced Aah-pē māā-kōō-yāākēē) by Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) Elder Casey Eagle Speaker. I am still processing the enormity of this honour, but I am humbled and wholeheartedly committed to upholding the responsibilities that come with this name, which represents bringing together community.

To everyone who let us into their world and opened themselves up to us to create this publication, I am sincerely grateful for your openness and generosity.

I hope you enjoy reading this publication as much as we have enjoyed producing it.

Arlene Strom

Chief Sustainability Officer and General Counsel, Suncor

Be a part of the Journey of Reconciliation

Learn more

About this piece:
Designed by Katie Wilhelm, from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation at Neyaashiinigmiing, this artwork offers a visual path to reconciliation using themes of collaboration, storytelling, respecting each other and honouring the land.

Pathways magazine was produced in Treaty 7 territory using 30 per cent recycled content.

Suncor Energy is Canada's leading integrated energy company. Suncor's operations include oil sands development, production and upgrading, offshore oil and gas production, petroleum refining in Canada and the U.S. and the company's Petro-Canada™ retail and wholesale distribution networks, including Canada's Electric Highway. Suncor is developing petroleum resources while advancing the transition to a low-emissions future through investment in power, renewable fuels and hydrogen. The Syncrude Project is a joint venture among Suncor Energy Inc., Imperial Oil Resources Limited; Sinopec Oil Sands Partnership; and CNOOC Oil Sands Canada.

SUNCOR Syncrude