

# eaglefeathernews

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## Revitalize & Preserve

Christmas music translated into Cree resonates with people, Baptiste says, and that it "hits the soul and spirit of a person."

Photo by Errol Sutherland



*By Creeden Martell  
for Eagle Feather News*

Revitalization and preservation of the Cree language is the focus and drive behind Falynn Baptiste's debut album, A Cree Christmas.

Baptiste is a teacher in Saskatoon by trade but has been dabbling in music for years, having previously recorded Christmas music which was then uploaded to YouTube and burned onto a CD for \$5 when there was demand.

"I want to honour our first language speakers because they held onto the language," Baptiste said of the music.

"Our grandparents ... went through everything that happened in our country with colonialism and residential schools but they still held onto the language for us, so it's our job to pick it up, learn it and carry it into the future."

Baptiste, a Cree/Métis woman from the Red Pheasant First Nation, was moved by the birth of her daughter and the death of an uncle in 2020 to pursue a label and a recording studio.

"I want (my daughter) to know the language and for her to speak the language," Baptiste said. "One of my uncles, who was like a dad to me, always wanted me to finish an album and take him a CD. I never did finish and he passed away this year."

Baptiste says it is her goal to eventually record another album but with hymns instead.

Christmas music translated into Cree resonates with people, Baptiste says, and that it "hits the soul and spirit of a person."

One song sticks out in Baptiste's mind as particularly beautiful - It Came Upon a Midnight Clear - because the song uses Cree language to speak of the original storytellers at the beginning of time.

*continued page 2*



Freddy Sasakamoose  
**The Last Interview**

In an interview, Dr. Sasakamoose was clearly moved by receiving the university's highest award and called it "the highest honour of my life," and "the finishing touch of my life."

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Chief Darcy Bear  
**News Makers of the Year**

Whitecap Dakota First Nation Chief was just one of our many news makers of 2020. Look inside to meet the Eagle Feather News top news maker of 2020.

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**Reconciliation Ally - Shelley MacNab  
Woman in Trades**

"I've always known that not everyone has that support, not everyone has that kind of friend, family, or colleague support, and I wanted to be that person for people, so that's what I did and continue to do, and it's very rewarding."

- page 23

December 2020 is our  
**News Makers Issue**

NEXT ISSUE: Looking forward to 2021

# Falynn Baptiste releases album of Christmas songs in Cree

... continued from page 1

"I really like that song, the way the translation came and how that reminds us as a Cree people, we come from a beginning, all from the same place," she added. "Our language is as old as our existence."

The process of translation was done with the help of Solomon Ratt in Regina, Baptiste said. Ratt is a Cree language instructor from Stanley Mission who teaches at the First Nations University of Canada.

Baptiste said the Cree had to be condensed to fit within the structure of the music at some points, as well. It was a bit of a challenge as an English word could be translated to Cree but it might then become an entire sentence, for example.

The complexity of the Cree language is what makes it beautiful and worth the effort, she said.

*"Our grandparents ... went through everything that happened in our country with colonialism and residential schools but they still held onto the language for us, so it's our job to pick it up, learn it and carry it into the future."*

Baptiste said she fit the lyrics to the music by writing them down on sheet music and fitting the words in with the musical notes.


"They almost don't quite fit but they can fit, it just takes a lot of work," Baptiste said of the translations.

A Cree Christmas includes four songs Baptiste recorded and uploaded to YouTube in years past: O Holy Night, What Child is This, Silent Night and O Come All Ye Faithful.

The album will be release December 11th on Baptiste's website [falynnebaptiste.com](http://falynnebaptiste.com).



Falynn Baptiste has taken some of her favourite Christmas tunes and recorded them in Cree and has made the album available for purchase this Christmas season. Image supplied




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## CUMFI strives to meet greater than usual need amid COVID Christmas

By *Andréa Ledding*  
for *Eagle Feather News*

This December CUMFI (Central Urban Métis Federation Inc.) is bringing Christmas cheer to Elders and families in a new way.

"Christmas is a huge event for CUMFI every year, we host about ten Christmas parties so everyone's able to access the Santa and the gifts, and we have this huge Elder's gathering which this year is not possible," said president Shirley Isbister.

"So with COVID we started March 13th contacting the Elders, trying to deliver anything they need, picking up groceries, dropping off hampers, that sort of thing. So we are dropping off Christmas hampers next week, we have the board of directors, volunteers, and staff doing that.

"We normally have huge children's Christmas parties so we will start the delivery of gifts and goodie bags next week also. It's a sad time for us because our community is really in need, so we have been giving food and refreshments at the door since we had to close."

They have given out over 16,000 individual food items at the door, and over 750 hampers so far.

"When people are in isolation or positive, we're supporting them through their isolation period too. CUMFI has had some positive cases and we've had to look after our homes," said Isbister.

There are more people than usual in need this year because of not being able to go in to work, or families who are caring for Elders, parents or children with special needs or immune-compromised, she said.

"So we're trying to look after those families too.

"I personally am getting calls from people steady and trying to make sure everyone at least has support through this Christmas period and through this heavy time of COVID. It's scary for families and for our staff.

"It's hitting the schools and we've had to isolate children already. Then we have staff that go in and stay 24 hours a day with that child or children or families until it's deemed safe to be out in the community. CUMFI's main thing is we have really dedicated staff.

"Christmas is a huge time of the year for us and I personally buy every Christmas gift. I'm a huge fan of Christmas. When you have staff that go out, if you say the limit is whatever, staff will not go over that limit, but when I go out, when I see something that's going to be great for kids that age then I'll buy it. So that's the difference. In all these years I have purchased every single Christmas gift, that's probably 600 gifts... staff comes along and volunteer and help load up, but I just think that Christmas is a time for kids to be awed and we try to give gifts that make that happen."

Along with giving out food at the door and delivering gifts and hampers, CUMFI provides toques and gloves for those in need who come to the door.

"Thanks to some of these people that have supported us so we're able to meet that need: SHIP (Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership), MN-S (Métis Nation-Saskatchewan), Western Region 2A, and Nutrien. Synergy 8 give us \$1000 a year to buy gloves, they do fabulous things in Saskatoon. We've had so much support and I really want to thank everyone that's supported CUMFI so we can manage to facilitate and look after our families our community our



**CUMFI President Shirley Isbister on left gifts Elder Marlene Conron as part of CUMFI's support for Elders and community during the holiday season. Photo by Errol Sutherland**

children and of course our Elders.

"We haven't had to say no to any Elder request. When we were calling to make sure we had the address, so many said you don't need to give us a gift you've been so good to us. But we're delivering a gift to all of CUMFI Elders, we appreciate all of the things that they've done over the years and how they come out and support CUMFI and support the communities."

Elder Marlene Conron says CUMFI is great.

"They help everyone and they've been doing that for years," said Conron. "They help the Elders and they help all the kids and it's just wonderful to have that establishment. If you ever need anything you just need to give them a call. Especially with this COVID, but they're always there for you all the time."



The holidays may look different this year, but the spirit of giving is more important than ever. Nutrien is proud to be the leading donor of the Food Banks of Saskatchewan's Home for the Holidays campaign.

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# All I want for Christmas...

Well, after a 2020 that will be impossible to forget, we can now turn to trying to make a memorable Christmas season in a good way. And really, the Christmas season is all about the kids isn't it? We were fortunate to get several letters through an honest mistake at the post office (darn Covid). They were from the George Gordon Education Centre grade 2 class and their teacher Kim Latoski. We took a quick peek before we realized they were actually addressed to Santa!

So, we stuck them back in the envelopes and made sure they were expressed to the North Pole in time for the jolly old elf to grant them their wishes. But really, we snuck a peak first. So, below are some of those kids requests for Christmas mixed in with some from the adults around here. We wonder if you can tell which are which. So, in no particular order, kids and adults (well, me really) are hoping for the following things this Christmas.

To Santa. I LOVE YOU Santa.  
A: dos Please SANTA.  
Please Santa STOP COVID.  
A: siu baillad please a Teddy Bear  
Can I get a Switch game?  
  
LOVE Jaliza

Please Santa.....

- Can you deliver vaccines to the elderly, the vulnerable and our health care workers semak! We know you have on-time guaranteed delivery.
- "I hope my brother feels good." "I want my grandma to feel better"
- I want some slime!
- We would like Premier Moe to have a sit-down tea

and hour-long conversation with Tristen Durocher to chat about how Tristen spent his summer vacation.

- Deliver a practical and immediate suicide prevention strategy implemented across the province.
- One giant hug and several days off with pay for every health care worker out there. The days off include being fed and catered to and free massages and no stress or worries. And a big bucket of gratitude delivered the next day.
- Same for the teachers! Do not forget the teachers!
- Sausage!
- I want a PS5 for my dad
- Deliver a great election for the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan in the spring. The registry is registering. The affiliates are rocking and rolling, and the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan is in the best shape ever financially and capacity wise. Going to be an interesting campaign. Lots at stake!
- Provide a great election for the FSIN in the fall. Always important and interesting.
- UNDRIP? How bout that?
- Mitts. Shoes. A water bottle. Notebook.
- Being able to play hockey, volleyball, and other sports so very soon. Kids and old farts miss their exercise, teammates and horsing around.
- I want a dog please.
- Portable ice fishing shack
- Long term dedicated funding for Prairie Harm Reduction, the province's only safe injection site. Jason Mercredi deserves a big box of Christmas cheer for all he has done there.
- I would like some bendy slashers.
- Books! Books in Dene. Books in Cree, Dakota, Michif. English even! Perhaps Stephen King.
- Powwow and festival season to come upon us and we are all healthy and have herd immunity. Some people need to dance.
- Back to Batoche thunderstorms!
- Roblox stuff. (Older folks will have to Google this)
- Empower our children. Hold close our Elders. Keep us safe.
- Teddy bears!
- A bannock slap of reason and chunk of coal for an-



- ti-maskers.
- Please Santa stop COVID

Wow. Here is hoping that all those wishes come through. You just know Santa is going to deliver a Christmas and then a 2021 that will be good for all of us.

Despite the immensely challenging year we have had, we are still here. That is frigging awesome. Give yourself a high five from me right now. Really. High five yourself right now.....Well done. That felt good didn't it? We got this.

Hug the family members you can safely hug this Christmas. Soon in 2021 we can hug the rest of them, and all will be better. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from our family to yours.



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PUBLISHER / EDITOR: John Lagimodiere, [john@eaglefeathernews.com](mailto:john@eaglefeathernews.com)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Betty Ann Adam, [bettyannadam@eaglefeathernews.com](mailto:bettyannadam@eaglefeathernews.com)

SOCIAL / DIGITAL MEDIA : Errol Sutherland, [errol@eaglefeathernews.com](mailto:errol@eaglefeathernews.com)

GENERAL INQUIRIES: [contact@eaglefeathernews.com](mailto:contact@eaglefeathernews.com)

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on our website

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CHECK OUT OUR LATEST TOP STORES



Awareness campaign broadens as family searches for loved one

"We haven't had confirmed contacts with her since the 19th of September. We're asking anybody who has any information about Megan to contact the Saskatoon City Police, or 975-8300, 975-7195.



Sasakamoose's amazing life to be retold in forthcoming book

The Ahsahkooop Cree Nation man, who was one of the first Indigenous hockey players to make it to the NHL, passed away from complications due to COVID-19 on Nov. 24.



Map making important for First Nations land technicians

SALE, an organization that brings together Indigenous land technicians, INAC land managers and academics to share resources on land management in Saskatchewan, recently opened its first physical office at Munding Lake Urban Reserve in Saskatoon.

## Indigenous economic justice on the rise

December 2020, welcome to the season finale of this crazy year. The theme for this month's column is change maker of the year. I believe, given the circumstances of this year, the change maker of the year is all of us. We have all had the unexpected thrown at us and with that come lessons from being pushed outside of our comfort zones. Hopefully it has enlightened us to see things from different perspectives. Covid-19 is not the story of the year, but all of our individual stories of perseverance, survival, adaptation and resilience are.

There is a shift happening right now in our society and I hope it is a shift from an individualistic society to a community-based society. This means that it is not just everyone for themselves, but we show compassion and understanding towards one another, creating an inclusive society based on respect for all.

I have witnessed more than ever this year people coming together to take care of one another and this is the type of civility that should be taken forward into next year. It is all coming full circle as we are reclaiming who we are as Indigenous people. This means revitalizing and implementing our traditional ways that governed and sustained our peoples for thousands of years prior to colonization.

This leads me to how I am seeing people rise up during these times, especially Indigenous people, taking back and reclaiming our identities and spaces within a colonial society. Spaces we once could not have access to due to the government imposing the pass system, and other gross segregation and assimilation tactics, outlawing our ceremonies, and barring us from taking part in the economy.

I wrote a paper titled, "Still We Rise: First Nations Economic Justice" in my First Nations Economic Development course in Law school. The paper speaks to

the fact that we still rise despite intentional policies and legislation enacted barring us as Indigenous people from taking our place in the economy. Economic justice is taking our rightful place in the economy.

The Indian Act, the pass system, and other impositions have created barriers in achieving prosperity and sustainability for our people. The old Indian agriculture permit system alone fined anyone who partook in business with Indigenous Nations without permission.

This permit system barred reserve farmers from participating in the commercial economy and the following will be example of this. Before 1892, the Oak River Dakota in Manitoba, along with other Indigenous farmers, had disposed of their crops as they saw fit, but in 1892, Indian Agents were instructed to see that no grain left the reserve without a permit from the Indian agent. Grain buyers, when presented with a permit, were told to pay a sum to the Indian Agent and the balance to the Indians.

In October 1893 the Dakota protested that they could not sell their grain without a permit and they resented the dictatorship of the Indian Agent who was keeping the proceeds. In this petition and other letters, the Dakota stated that the permit system discouraged their interest in farming, as they did not know what they got in return for their crops.

In December 1893, the Indian Agent discovered that the Dakota were defying regulations and marketing their grain without permits. Department officials took action against the grain buyers. William Chambers of Ogilvie Milling Co. and Alexander and William Forrest of Leitch Bros. at Oak Lake were found guilty of buying grain from Indians without permits and each was fined.

In January 1894, F. W. Thompson of Ogilvie Mill-

ing Co. of Winnipeg threatened to instruct his agents that they were no longer to buy wheat from Indians with or without permits as the best means of protecting the interests of his Company.

The irony in this is that Indigenous peoples have been stereotyped as unable to adjust to a different economic system whereas this is not the case; the reality is that Indigenous peoples have been legislated out the economic system.

The Oak River Dakota remained small-scale farmers and eventually ceased raising wheat altogether as it was unprofitable on such a small scale. The Dakota did not successfully enter the grain-centered cash economy like their white neighbours did.

There was no recognition of the fact that for more than ten years of successful farming, the Dakota had managed their own financial affairs and had been independent of government assistance.

Fast forward to 2020, you have the Dakota Dunes Resort now open just 20 minutes south of Saskatoon on Whitecap Dakota First Nation. The Mi'kmaq have now announced their billion-dollar deal to partner with Clearwater Seafoods. There are now countless Indigenous artists, rappers, designers, academics, entrepreneurs, teachers, lawyers, doctors, all on the rise and we love to see it! This is the type of economic justice that our children and the future needs.




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# Sasakamoose awarded honorary degree

By Errol Sutherland  
of Eagle Feather News

We lost Fred Sasakamoose to Covid symptoms in late November. Just before he entered the hospital, our writer Errol Sutherland interviewed Fred about receiving an Honorary Doctorate. We thought his words and reflections in his last media interview were important to share. We send our prayers to Fred and his family.

Residential School survivor, NHL Alumnus, and fiercely proud Cree, Fred Sasakamoose, recently received an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Saskatchewan.

In an interview, Dr. Sasakamoose was clearly moved by receiving the university's highest award and called it "the highest honour of my life," and "the finishing touch of my life."

He laughed when asked what he'll do with his diploma.

"I don't know what the hell to do with it, but it looks great on my wall," he said. It is now displayed beside his Order of Canada in his living room at Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation.

"I've had many accomplishments in my life time and many hardships, but to be seen and recognized by the university and the rest of Canada, is really a great honour. I feel proud of everything I've been through," he said.

"I never had no education, it was against the policy of Indian Affairs to educate the Indian people in 1948, '49... A lot of that was, 'don't use your language, your culture.'

Everything was taken away; the way you worship God, it was taken away from you. You go in there, the Catholic Church, that was the only way, that's what they said.

"I practice my own life right now, sweetgrass and the smudge, I still do that. It made a better man out of me."

Frederick George Sasakamoose, was born in 1933, at Whitefish Lake, which is now called Big River First Nation. He moved to Ahtahkakoop after marrying Loretta Isbister.

When he was small boy, his grandfather taught him how to skate wearing double runner skates tied over moccasins. His hockey stick was a willow branch shaped for play and a frozen horse "apple" was his puck.

He was six when he and his older brother, Frank, were taken to St. Michael's Indian Residential School at Duck Lake. Nuns at the school cut off their braids and banned speaking Cree. Sasakamoose suffered emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the school, but two things helped him – thoughts of home and skating.

The school priest, Father Georges Roussel, worked with Sasakamoose to develop his hockey skills. He even learned to shoot with his left-hand, giving him the benefit of being ambidextrous.

He recalled being at home in the summer of 1949, when he received a life-changing visit.

"George Vogan, the manager for Moose Jaw (Canucks of the Western Canada Junior Hockey League) took three days to find me. We had no phone and no way to be contacted. We seen a vehicle three miles out, coming closer and closer to our place, so my brother and I hid, until I recognized George (Roussel)," he said.

"After watching them talk to my parents, my mom asked me to come towards her. I thought she meant my brother Frank, to be honest, I was really hoping she meant my brother... but (she) told me I had to leave again, this time 600 miles south to play hockey."

Sasakamoose played for five years with Moose Jaw, which was a farm team for the Chicago Black Hawks. After a Moose Jaw game in early 1954, Vogan read a telegram to the team that called Sasakamoose up to the National Hockey League.

"That night, I was on the train to Toronto," he recalled.

Sasakamoose would go on to play 11 games for the Black Hawks in the 1953–54 NHL season. He retired from the sport in 1961.

Sasakamoose says he loved the team logo on his Black Hawks jersey and was proud to be an Indian wearing a jersey with an Indian on it.

While many people feel it's disrespectful or insulting for sports teams to use Indigenous names and likenesses, Sasakamoose takes it as a compliment, as in the case of the Washington Red Skins football team, which has bowed to pressure to change its name.

"I don't know why they're complaining... What's the matter with that? There's nothing wrong with being a redskin," Sasakamoose said.

"Be proud that's who you are, be proud that the team is called the Red Skins."

After hockey, Sasakamoose went on to be a role model and sports booster. He served as chief and as a long-time counselor at Ahtahkakoop.



**Fred Sasakamoose was bestowed with an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree by the University of Saskatchewan. He called the award "the highest honour of my life," and "the finishing touch of my life." He passed two weeks later. Photo courtesy University of Saskatchewan**

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### Cancellation of January 2021 Application Intake for NP 200s

The January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Dakota Dunes Community Development Corporation intake for NP200 recipients has been cancelled. Due to COVID 19 and the mandatory closure and public health restrictions on the Dakota Dunes Casino, there has been a direct impact on available grant funds at this time.

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You can also join our groups on Facebook and LinkedIn.

# Schools need more awareness of mental health issues teen advisor says

*By Brendan Mayer  
for Eagle Feather News*

A Dakota/Cree student at Leask Community School is one of 12 teens advising the education minister about school from a student's perspective.

Dahnis Duquette represents the Prairie Spirit School Division on the 2020-21 provincial youth council, which gives feedback to Education Minister Dustin Duncan and other government officials.

"I think it's important to get more Indigenous people in positions of power," Duquette said. "I like to live life as a leader."

Duquette says there could be more awareness for mental health and marginalized groups. Her goals are to improve the education system for the next generation and make it more welcoming for all people.

"Our responsibilities are to provide input on how our schools are doing and how our school divisions are doing and come up with ideas on how we can make changes to the education system," she said.

Dahnis is a role model who does well academically and volunteers in school, said Leask Community School vice-principal Lisa Kuchler.

"She is a fitting person to be able to speak out about going to a school that is predominantly Aboriginal. She fosters others to think outside the box,"



**Dahnis Duquette is the Prairie Spirit School Division representative on the provincial youth council. Photo submitted**

Kuchler said.

The council is also discussing safe learning environments, skills for participation in society and relationships between systems and structures.

"We are in the planning stage. We are focusing on diversity, inclusivity and mental health awareness. We are trying to figure out what we're going to do."

Duquette is hoping to take Indigenous health studies at the University of Regina after finishing high school.

"I have a real passion for Indigenous issues because it's something that really affects me, my people and my family," she said.

"Dahnis is quite knowledgeable about Indigenous people in her community," Kuchler said. "She has witnessed and experienced many of the things that impact Indigenous youth today."

Duquette was born in Glasgow, Montana and has lived in Leask since she was a toddler.

"Everyone knows everyone in Leask," she said. "We are all pretty connected. I think that really helps me. It gives me a support system of people that I've known all my life. Maintaining healthy relationships is a good skill I've learned here."

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# McCallum takes positive view of 2020

By Nathan Raine  
for Eagle Feather News

In a year that might be described as turbulent, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S) President Glen McCallum is decidedly focused on the positive.

But for McCallum, in a year marked by a pandemic affecting so many Métis citizens in the province, 2020 was a display of his government's resourcefulness.

"The Métis response (to COVID-19) went very well," said McCallum. "The numbers (were) not as high (in early 2020) as they are now, but we did very well. We were able to develop good relationships with the First Nations out at Meadow Lake Tribal Council as well as the federal government, who responded very positively towards our working partnerships."

Those relationships were the biggest successes during COVID, said McCallum, in which, together with the provincial and federal governments, they were able to support people in small communities during a crucial time. The MN-S provided more than \$1 million in May to northern communities to address food security, PPE, and other essential materials during the pandemic.

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Theresa Tam, recently praised the efforts to contain the COVID-19 outbreak in the north, citing among other efforts, the MN-S' support for healthcare workers and at-risk citizens.

"I don't want to paint it as a good picture but we tried to do the best job we can at delivering and supporting people across Saskatchewan," McCallum said.

When asked about the more challenging aspects of the pandemic, including lessons learned from his own very public experience contracting the virus, McCallum said, "there wasn't a biggest problem."

"It might sound as if I'm trying just to sound good... There was nothing in my mind in regards to being a big issue," said McCallum.

"It's not a lesson but a wakening call, so to speak, in how we can move together as a province."

Among the most significant non-COVID occurrences of the last year, McCallum cited the Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement signed with the Government of Canada that affirm the rights to self government, as well as citing the MOU signed with the University of Saskatchewan to improve education and remove barriers for Métis people (Both were signed in 2019.) McCallum said the partnership with the University will lead to research projects surrounding Métis people, such as diabetes in Métis communities.

"As much as I can, I always try to bring in other players, be it universities, industry, provincial government, or federal government," he said.

"We'll continue to work with the University... When people talk about Reconciliation, that's what it means. How we can get together, how we can plan together, taking into account being inclusive to Indigenous people, be it First Nations, Métis, or Inuit."

McCallum also referenced the 461 Métis students funded for post-secondary education last year, as well as the Metis citizenship registry, which is now processing 3,000 citizenship applications and has registered 13,244 members in the last three and a half years.

One of many celebrations that had to be altered this year was the 50th anniversary of Back to Batoche, which was held virtually in July. The event still included dances, education, and music, with participants uploading videos online rather than the usual celebration at the historic Batoche grounds.

"It was disappointing... but we have to balance this with the best interests of the people. I don't get angry. I just do things that are necessary, fair, and good for our citizens," McCallum said.

Looking to 2021, McCallum has the spring MN-S election on his mind. He said there will be challenges in holding the election during a pandemic, but has learned from the provincial and municipal elections held in Saskatchewan this year.

"We've never walked away from a ballot-box election, which is fair so everyone can participate,"



Métis Nation-Saskatchewan President Glen McCallum. Photo by Julia Burns

he said.

"I watched the provincial and municipal elections, they went really well. I don't think any COVID cases resulted from the elections here, so we're watching that and reviewing that (system)."

Other priorities for the upcoming year include resuming negotiations with the federal government for self-government, and negotiations with the provincial government on harvesting rights. The MN-S launched a lawsuit against the province this year, claiming they are not doing enough to consult about issues like trapping and fishing.

With the pandemic still very much at hand, McCallum said his top priority for the next year is ensuring everyone in the province is safe and cared for.

"I look forward to the next year, hopefully we can slow down COVID-19. I'm hearing good things about medicines being developed," he said.

"I just want everyone to know we're in this together and I hope we can work together. And to our Elders, Veterans, and everyone out there, on the behalf of the Métis Nation and their citizens, we hope everyone has a very Merry Christmas."

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neighbours this Holiday Season.**

**Happy Holidays and all the best throughout the New Year.**



[metisnationsk.com](http://metisnationsk.com)

## Pandemic dominated FSIN work for 2020: Watson

By Nathan Raine  
for Eagle Feather News

"Safe to say, back in March, we never expected the year to look like this. It's, hopefully, one in a hundred years," said Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (FSIN) Vice-Chief Morley Watson.

Dealing with the unforeseen and the urgent comes with the territory of representing 74 First Nations across Saskatchewan. But with outbreaks in isolated communities, demands for more personal protective equipment (PPE), objections that public health restrictions were 'discriminatory' to northern residents, and calls for priority access to vaccines, COVID-19 dominated priorities, and headlines, for the FSIN in 2020.

"It certainly hit our communities hard, but credit to how quickly they reacted. Communities shut down borders and minimized travel, so as a result they were able to get through that first wave pretty much unscathed, for the most part," said Watson in an interview reviewing 2020.

When COVID-19 hit Canada in early March, FSIN Chief Bobby Cameron declared a state of emergency and called for immediate financial assistance, testing, and PPE for First Nations. The federal government issued \$37 million for Saskatchewan First Nations.

Despite the funding, Watson said the biggest challenge for the FSIN and Chiefs this year was still financial.

"The biggest challenge is always lack of adequate funding. When (First Nations) closed their borders down, that was a 24-hour job. We needed so many things, like PPE, to do the job properly. As always, (the First Nations) stretched out the dollar to make it work."

"Our federation is 70-some years old, and this has never happened, so for us to continue business, we had to do things very differently," said Watson.

Funerals and wakes were severely impacted by the pandemic.

"When we lose someone, we as a community and as First Nations people, like to be there to assist the family and the community during the mourning period. Because of COVID, we weren't able to do that, which was disheartening," he said.

FSIN governance had to adjust too. Normal operations like assemblies and commission and task force meetings had to be done virtually or cancelled altogether, he said.

The fall chiefs assembly, which usually takes place in October, was cancelled, and there is no plan currently to hold a spring assembly.

"The lack of face to face meetings, the things we usually do in order to work with our First Nations communities on issues they want us to work on, we had to transition to a new way of doing things," he said.

But transitioning to virtual meetings and learning also relates to the FSIN's biggest success of the year, said Watson – the ability to keep people safe.

"We were able to continue having our children learning, we were able to have our staff online. I think the safety of our people and the continuation of learning, as well as keeping our elders and community members safe, were things we had success with."

As a positive way to end each year, the FSIN donates wild meat to food banks around Saskatchewan, an annual initiative they've been doing since 2014.

"We've lived through tough times in our own lives and communities, so

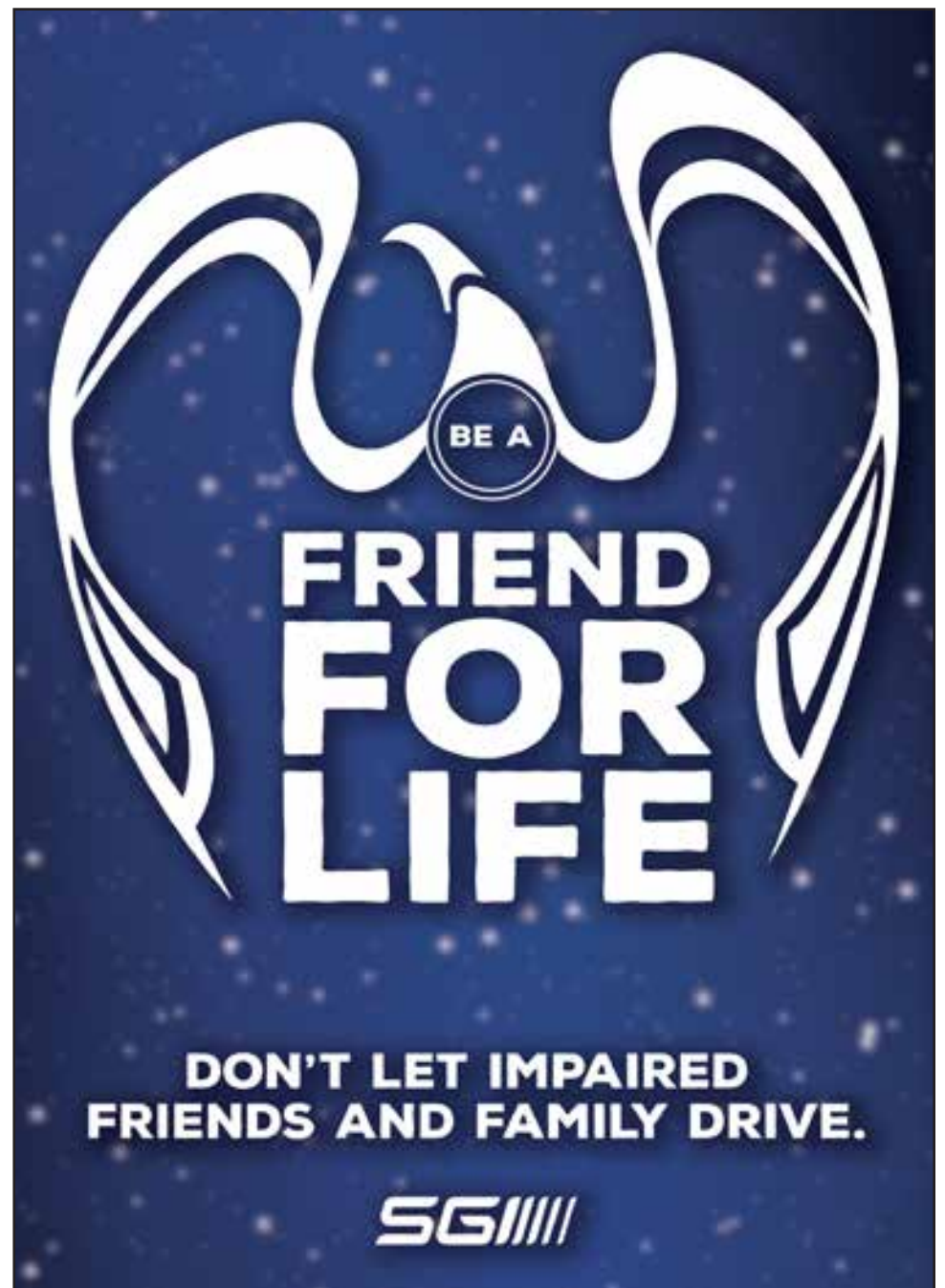


Morley Watson, First Vice-Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations. Photo by Francine Merasty

we try to give back as much as we can. Christmas is a time for that. There are so many homeless and mental health issues, and less fortunate people out there, so this is a way of helping with those who live in poverty," said Watson.

As the year has been consumed with health risks and safety uncertainties, Watson said his Christmas wish this year is for everyone to be safe for now and the betterment of future generations.

"We face a lot of challenges with diabetes and cancer, which are compounded by housing and water issues. I think we need people to be as healthy as possible, because when you're healthy you can provide for your family. That's important for our children to see, so they can provide when they get into their adult life."



## James Smith Cree Nation MRI clinic about to come to life

By John Lagimodiere  
of Eagle Feather News

James Smith Cree Nation Chief Wally Burns thinks that his First Nations namesake would be pleased with the opening of his Nation's MRI and education clinic in Saskatoon.

"Oh, James Smith would be very happy. Especially with the seventh generation," said Chief Burns. "Looking at the whole perspective of reality and the generations that have come and gone and look where we are now. We have to make sure that economic development is there and working with our people to benefit our community. This is a first of its kind for First Nations and I'm very happy it has come to this."

The project includes a myriad of partners, without which, Chief Burns said, the project wouldn't have been feasible. "We are pleased that our workings and collaboration with the Government of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Health Authority is bringing benefits to the people of all nations in the Province of Saskatchewan," said Chief Wally Burns. "This is a truly different prospective and partnership which ensures, together with the many partners involved, we can all move forward in the trust and reconciliation process."

The National Medical Imaging Clinic and Education and Research Centre, located in Market Mall in Saskatoon, will provide MRI services for patients as well as Computer Tomography (CT), X-rays, and ultrasound. The Education and Research Centre, operating out of the same facility, will pioneer research into medical imaging techniques in partnership with

Canada-wide educational institutions and Siemens Healthineers. The clinic will employ around 15 full time and 20 part time staff. Orientation starts next week and the clinic opens in December.

Priscilla McLean is going to be one of those employees. The James Smith member has spent the last few years of her 30-year career nursing in Pukatawagan. Now she is trading her two-week shifts including an eight-hour drive and flight for an easy commute across town.

"This is a much-needed facility. We are going to have specialists and great service," said McLean. "I'm so happy to not travel now. And I'm really proud of our community."

Dragan Racic is the President and CEO at National Medical Imaging Clinic and Education and Research Centre and he stressed the importance of the training to be done at the clinic. "This collaboration also involves a major educational component to use the newly purchased diagnostic imaging systems to train and educate current and future users in the area of medical imaging, providing continuing education and professional development programs for practitioners," said Racic of his education partners the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and Mitchener Institute in Toronto.

"We hope we can inspire youth from the James Smith Cree Nation and other Indigenous partners in Saskatchewan and Canada-wide to pursue post-secondary education and choose jobs in the health sciences fields, focusing on medical imaging," he said.

The clinic isn't the only good news for the people of James Smith Cree Nation. In the last year, sev-



**James Smith Cree Nation Chief Wally Burns at his community's National Medical Imaging Clinic and Education and Research Centre. Photo by John Lagimodiere**

eral of their land claims have been accepted and the future looks bright. But to Chief Burns, it is more than just settlement money.

"I look at what we can build with the settlements. I look at the benefits for our members and the community. They got me here and I work hard to make sure they benefit. The elders, the youth and mothers and fathers," said Chief Burns. "But from the bottom of my heart I thank the people of Saskatchewan our First Nations people as we see the future working together. This is the first MRI clinic. We want to add more."



Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation

### SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, **SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN EQUITY FOUNDATION INC.** through assistance provided by the Government of Canada, is taking action to ensure that Indigenous business owners impacted by Covid-19 have access to support. The emergency loan program is a component of the Indigenous Business Stabilization program.

The Emergency Loan Program (ELP) is designed as an emergency measure to support small business owners in meeting their immediate operating cash flow needs. These funds are not intended to replace or duplicate government or other bank/lender emergency financing/funds that are available to businesses in Canada.

**Maximum assistance is \$40,000 comprised of a 75% loan and 25% non-repayable contribution.**

**If you are an Indigenous-owned business and have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis,** contact SIEF for more information by phone 306-955-4550 or email [info@sief.sk.ca](mailto:info@sief.sk.ca).

Visit our website for the emergency loan program application at [www.sief.sk.ca](http://www.sief.sk.ca)

# Newsmakers of 2020 inspired

By John Lagimodiere  
of Eagle Feather News

Even though the world has been in the grip of a pandemic and it is all we talk and hear and complain about, we did not make Covid-19 the Newsmaker of the Year. The right choice is a young man who was appalled that 44 members of the Saskatchewan government voted against a suicide prevention bill. Tristen Durocher, frustrated, decided to walk the approximately 600 kilometres from Air Ronge to Regina to raise awareness of the issue. Walking with our Angels and his subsequent 44-day vigil and fast on the lawn of the provincial legislature generated news. From Radio Canada to the Catholic Register to having his protest brought up in the leaders' debate during the election, Tristen Durocher made news and has been named the Eagle Feather News, Newsmaker of the Year.



**Tristen Durocher is the EFN News Maker of 2020. Photo supplied**

Tristen had allies in his cause. Women helped him keep camp and stay healthy. Hundreds of people came to support him and tell stories of the loss of their loved ones. Pictures of those lost to suicide surrounded his tipi. Political leaders from around the province came to visit him. Even the judge that heard the case to remove his camp from the legislative grounds came to the site and met him. Unfortunately, the person he wanted to appeal to the most, Premier Scott Moe, did not come. Tristen's story was compelling. A humble, young, culturally connected and articulate man, his demeanor, message and fortitude drew people into his story and cause. A recent Google search showed over 1500 stories on Tristen. That is impressive. Thanks, Tristen, for your sacrifice.

Coming in a strong second in our polls was Chief Matthew Todd Peigan of the Pasqua First Nation. Chief Peigan was months ahead of most governments in Saskatchewan when he started to prepare his community for the impact of Covid-19 in early 2020. Watching what was happening in China and Singapore, Chief Peigan and Council and staff took inventory of what they had in case the pandemic hit and they created a must have list. Soon the deliveries began - cots, groceries, hand sanitizer, surgical masks, N95 masks, face shields, gloves, gowns and even two breathing apparatus for, "if worse came to worse," Peigan said in an interview with Eagle Feather News this summer.



**Pasqua First Nation Chief Matthew Todd Peigan was very prepared for the pandemic. Photo supplied**

As soon as the pandemic was called in March, the community leaped into action. The school was closed, roadblocks went up reducing access to their community and care packages and cash cards were sent to members. No government in Canada was as prepared for the pandemic as Pasqua First Nation was. To top it off, one of their businesses, Pro Metal Industries, pivoted to secure and then manufacture personal protective equipment. Their new business arm Sage Pro Protect, is now a leading manufacturer and distributor of PPE, sanitation stations, mobile hospitals and plexiglass cubicles for schools and workplaces. In the summer they worked with the FSIN

to provide PPE to First Nations across Saskatchewan. That is leadership. Way to make news in a good way, Chief Peigan and Pasqua First Nation.

Staying with politics and Covid-19, a few political leaders have caught it. FSIN Vice Chief David Pratt, MLA Buckley Belanger, and MN-S President Glen McCallum have all tested positive and happily all have recovered. President McCallum and the Métis Nation executive and regional directors have



**Whitecap Dakota First Nation Chief Darcy Bear was named to the Order of Canada this year. He was acclaimed as Chief in October for his ninth term and his community also opened the Dakota Dunes Resort hotel. Photo by John Lagimodiere**

also done a bang-up job of securing resources for Métis responses to the pandemic. Another good outcome of the pandemic has been bringing together First Nation and Métis governments in the north to work together more. Nice to see.

The Covid response was also strong in Saskatoon where the Saskatoon Tribal Council Chief Mark Arcand partnered with Mayor Charlie Clark and other community leaders to provide resources and food door to door to those in need in Saskatoon's inner city. This helped hundreds of families of all nationalities to cope with the pandemic.

Also making news again was Whitecap Dakota First Nation Chief Darcy Bear. He was recently acclaimed for Chief and began his ninth term leading at Whitecap.

... continued on Page 13

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... continued from page 12

It was a good year out there despite Covid as they celebrated the opening of the Dakota Dunes Resort hotel in October.

Then to top it off, Chief Bear was appointed to the Order of Canada in December, a much-deserved recognition for his vision and leadership.

While on politics, the retirement of a couple of amazing women will leave a leadership void. Chief Marie-Anne Day Walker-Pelletier retired after a forty-year run as Chief of Okanese First Nation. The longest serving Chief in Canada! And we also lost a strong voice in the Canadian Senate when Senator Lillian Dyck retired from her post representing us in Ottawa. Thanks for your service Chief Marie-Anne and Senator Lillian.

This part of our newsmakers would have been talking about the Riders winning the Grey Cup this year and of Team Saskatchewan cleaning up at NAIG in Toronto, and powwows and the 50th anniversary of Back to Ba-

toche celebrations...but the darn pandemic has thrown a wrench into all things sport and culture unfortunately. That being said, the pandemic did not stop a couple of our artists from being held up. Esteemed poet and Elder, Louise Halfe, was recognized for her literary work with the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild (SWG) 2020 Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence. This major award is one of the most lucrative in our country.

Also getting awards was filmmaker Tasha



Poet Louise Halfe was honoured with the Sask Writers Guild 2020 Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence. Photo supplied



On left Reggie Leach stands with two Indigenous hockey legends we lost this year. New York Rangers defenceman Jim Neilsen and Chicago Blackhawks forward Fred Sasakamoose. Photo by Ted Whitecalf

Hubbard. On May 25, the 2020 Canadian Screen Awards named the film nîpawistamâsowin: We Will Stand Up the Ted Rogers Best Feature Length Documentary. She can add this reward to her mantle that already holds eight other awards for her compelling documentary about the murder of Colton Boushie.

Sadly, 2020 has been full of loss. Loss of freedoms, jobs, health, and beloved family members. In November we lost two Saskatchewan hockey legends: Stay at home defenceman for the New York Rangers, Jim Neilsen, at the age of 78 and the legendary Fred Sasakamoose at the age of 86. Both men left a legacy. And news of Freddie's passing played out on every major media outlet in Canada as words of respect and admiration poured in from NHL and Indigenous hockey players and fans from around North America.

We can use the inspiration of our newsmakers to lead us into 2021, and the teachings and examples of those who have left us to guide and motivate us into the future.

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# Belanger longest serving MLA in legislature

By Betty Ann Adam  
of Eagle Feather News

When Buckley Belanger was sworn in after winning the October 26 provincial election, he became the most senior MLA in the current sitting of the Saskatchewan legislature.

A Métis from Ile-a-la-Crosse, Belanger became the Liberal MLA for Athabasca in 1995, after three terms as mayor of the village 725 kilometres northeast of Regina.

After winning the seat eight times, Belanger is entering his 26th year in the legislature, where for the next four years, he is proud to say, "an Indigenous person will be the longest serving member in the assembly."

"It's always been white people longest serving there... It's an accomplishment for the Indigenous people, not me," Belanger said in a recent interview.

He could break the record for longest serving Saskatchewan MLA ever, if he goes for another term after this one, but Belanger says he will gladly forego the record if a younger Indigenous person wants to fill his shoes as the NDP candidate.

"What's important to us is we keep the fight going (against) some of the injustices that our northern people in particular have had to endure.

"If there's some young, smart crackerjack kid, he or she, looking for an opportunity, I'll gladly step aside and help them, because that's where our future is. I don't want titles, I want a good transition," he said.

Belanger wants to pay forward the support he has received from his family and community.

He was five when his mother, Lena, died, leaving his father, Leo, with seven children, 13 to six months old.

His extended family, "are the ones that really saved us," he said.

"Sometimes kids can survive trauma if they have a good support system that will support them through the tough times. Where a lot of kids fail is when they don't have that.

"So I was unlucky losing my mom at a young age but I was sure lucky in having a good, solid group of aunts, particularly aunts and uncles and cousins that kind of backed us up."

Leo eventually remarried and his wife, Molly, was good to the children, Belanger said.

"The old man, he was pretty good.... He had all these kids and yet he never waived once to give support. He gave us a lot of s\*\*t too, when we done wrong," he said with a laugh.

"He used to say, 'life is tough but I'm tougher.'"

In his eight years as mayor, Belanger learned to respect the women, whom he saw were equal leaders with the men.

"They had the power and the ability to change things. Not diminishing the men's role, but the women were really focused. You get seven or eight of them on your side and you let them do the things they want to do in the community, they'll end up protecting you... They're very loyal," he said.

As mayor he saw how important a role the province played in the fortunes of local communities and accepted the Liberal nomination to run against the popular NDP incumbent, Fred Thomson.

"I fought like a son of a gun. It's a good thing I come from a big family. I called in every favour and every family member."

He beat Thomson "by a whisker" of 300 votes.

In Regina, he was elected chair of the Liberal caucus but was caught off-guard when conservative-leaning members within the caucus turned against Linda Haverstock, resulting in her resignation.

After that, he was treated like an outsider by other caucus members, who sometimes voted on decisions when he was out of the room. He arrived at work one day to discover another member had taken over his office and moved his belongings out.

He decided to leave, but instead of simply crossing the floor to join the NDP, he resigned, so those who had elected a Liberal could decide whether to keep him.

In that 1998 by-election, Belanger won by a landslide that probably has never been matched: he garnered 94 per cent of the vote, while the Conservative and Liberal candidates shared the remainder.

He is proud of the work the NDP did with First Nations and Métis communities in the north and is critical of the Saskatchewan Party, who he says have shown they don't care about Indigenous people.

He still resents the Sask Party decision to give northeast Saskatchewan timber rights to a British Columbia company that has since bought the Big River sawmill. Few if any of the employees there are Indigenous, he said.

Looking back, Belanger says perseverance and appreciation for oneself and others are necessary in working for the people.

"I've made lot of mistakes. You gotta pick yourself up again. Sometimes we're a little bit too tough on ourselves... We don't have to eat one of our own if mistakes are made. Other people beyond the Indigenous community make a lot of mistakes.

A sense of humour will also serve one well, he says.

"You'd use humour to diffuse situations... Humour is so very necessary but understand sometimes you have to park the humour to deal with very serious issues as well."



With his swearing in as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for Athabasca in November, Buckley Belanger became the most senior MLA in the current sitting of the Saskatchewan Legislature. Photo supplied

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## Looking after tomorrow

SAGE PRO Protect is the outcome of a smart business pivot by Pro Metal Industries, a 100% owned Pasqua First Nation Company. It is always difficult building a business in any economic climate, but in 2020, Covid-19 hit the economy hard. To survive in a pandemic, a business needs to be nimble and in the right market.

"In the beginning of this pandemic, we were having weekly updates with the government, and many First Nations were requesting personal protective equipment (PPE). The government said they had lots, but it was not getting to our front-line people, NADAP workers, community health nurses and home care staff on reserve. There was no PPE," said Pasqua First Nation Chief Peigan. "Our staff at Pro Metal Industries reached out and bought PPE from ten different suppliers around the world to distribute to Saskatchewan First Nations in partnership with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations."

Through expertise already available through Pro Metal industries, PFN leveraged these skills to cre-

ate another company, SAGE PRO Protect which was able to access and innovate PPE solutions for the First Nations within Saskatchewan. SAGE PRO designs and manufactures PPE solutions including masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, touchless hand sanitizer stands, portable field sinks, UV/HEPA Filter Air Purifiers, and desk barriers, also known as Sugar Cubes. They also supply drive thru testing stations to First Nations.

"I'm glad our people could get PPE to do their jobs safely, effectively and efficiently. Our community had lots of supplies and were well prepared. My heart went out to our Indigenous brothers and sisters because they did not have any. It wasn't a money-making process, just getting equipment. And that's when we asked why Pro Metal can't do this not just for Indigenous people but for schools and offices, for everybody," added Chief Peigan.

PFN Group of Companies CEO, Dr. Richard Missens oversees the Pasqua First Nations seven businesses and joint ventures and says

the pivot to make SAGE PRO Protect has driven their sales this year, and he says one important product line is the BLU-MED shelter systems.

"These BLU-MED structures are field hospitals. We have deployed forty-one of them to First Nations across Canada that need places to isolate and treat Covid-19 patients," said Missens. The BLU-MED hospitals are erected by a trained crew and come fully equipped with tables, beds and everything you need in a hospital. They are also winterized.

Chief Peigan knows they must be patient building their business arm for future for the Nation, but the rewards will be well worth it. "The Elders say if you spend your money today its gone. What about tomorrow? That's what we look at," said Chief Peigan. "One day I'm going to be an old man and I would like to go to our gathering place on our First Nation and listen to the Chief and Council of the day. I hope I will hear and see the benefits of our businesses when I am that old man. We always have to look after tomorrow."



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# Indigenous books to put under the tree

By Julia Peterson  
for Eagle Feather News

2020 has been a year for the books and this holiday season Saskatchewan authors, publishers and librarians are sharing their thoughts on the perfect books to gift to the readers in your life.

There is no shortage of exciting new works to choose from.

Kam Teo, executive director of the Saskatchewan Book Awards, says Indigenous works published in the province this year “run the gamut from popular fiction to academic genres.”

For the academically-minded, Teo recommended *Loss of Indigenous Eden and the Fall of Spirituality*, written by Blair Stonechild, an Indigenous Studies professor at First Nations University. This book explores the relevance of Indigenous spiritual teachings in today’s world. It follows Stonechild’s award-winning book *The Knowledge Seeker*.

For the sports fan, Teo’s top pick is Janice Forsyth’s *Reclaiming Tom Longboat*, which focuses on Indigenous self-determination in Canadian sport. In the book, Forsyth chronicles the history of Indigenous sport in Canada, with its pitfalls and its possibilities, through the lens of the prestigious Tom Longboat awards for Indigenous athletes.

Teo says young readers may particularly enjoy Cort Dogniez’ *Road to La Prairie Ronde*, a historical fiction about an ancestor’s journey from Batoche to the Métis settlement of La Prairie Ronde.

“It is an illustrated work, complemented with a nice glossary and a teacher’s guide so this is a great educational work,” he said.

For feminists and feminist allies, Teo recommended Carol Rose GoldenEagle’s newest book, *The Narrows of Fear*.

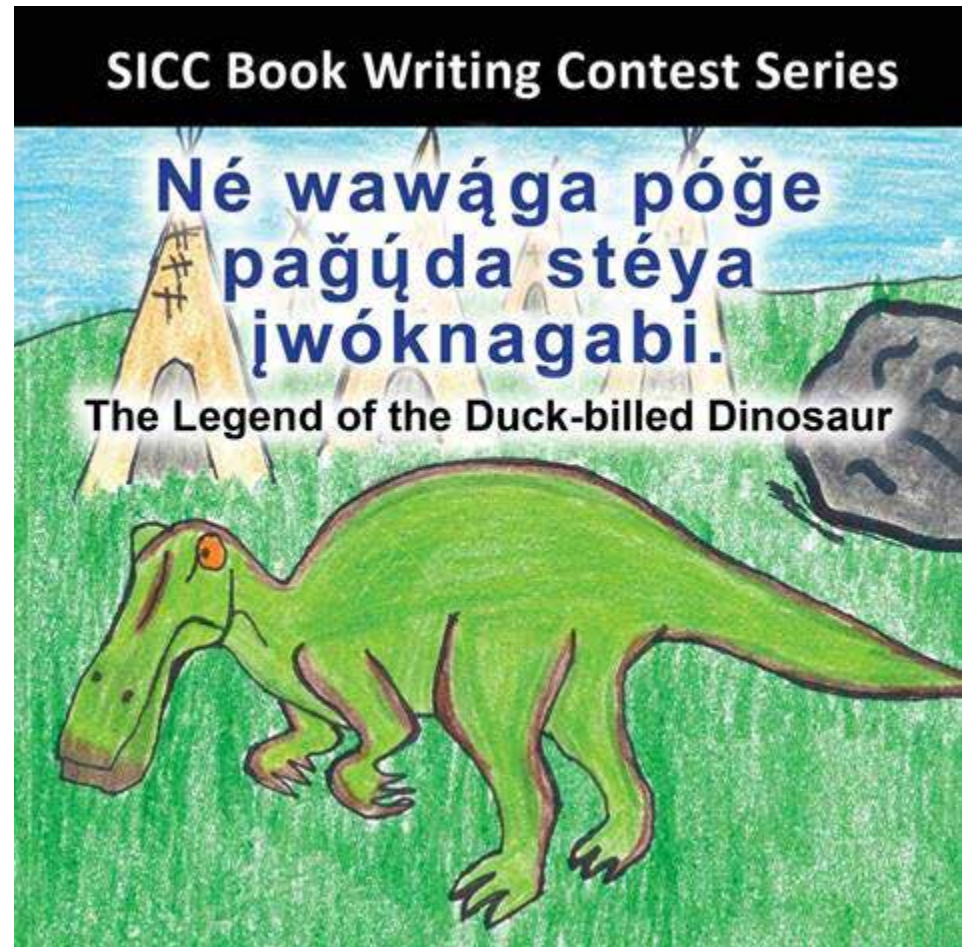
GoldenEagle says she wrote the book to celebrate Indigenous feminism and tell the stories of women who are committed to helping one another and fully participating in community life.

“In terms of Indigenous women, we’re always told ‘You’re not allowed to do this,’ whatever it is,” she said. “And I find it really hard to believe that Creator has said ‘Oh, you’re not allowed to do that because of your gender.’ It just doesn’t make sense to me,” she said.

From her own reading list, GoldenEagle recommends Randy Lundy’s “beautiful book of poetry” focused on male relationships, *Field Notes for the Self*.

She also had high praise for Paul Seesequasis’ *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun*, which presents portraits of everyday life in eight Indigenous communities. It won two Saskatchewan Book Awards this year.

“This is just a beautiful compilation of celebration, culture, fiction and photos,” she said. “It’s a beautiful piece of art.”



**SICC Librarian Jessica Generoux says that receiving Indigenous language books can have a life time impact on young readers. Grab some books for the kids for Christmas and spend some time reading together.**

For children, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (SICC) librarian Jessica Generoux says receiving Indigenous-language books can have a lifetime impact.

“You can give the gift of our Indigenous languages,” she said. “We can be empowering our children and families.”

For the past two years, the SICC has organized a contest for children to write books in Indigenous languages and has made the winning stories available for purchase. Generoux believes these books can be a powerful way for young readers to connect with their culture.

“These books have come from the hearts of little kids,” she said. “For example, we have two books about dinosaurs written in Nakota - this little boy won two years in a row, and he combined his love for Nakota language with dinosaurs and creation stories.”

Bronte BigEagle’s *The Legend of the T-Rex’s Short Arms* and *The Legend of the Duck-billed Dinosaur*, along with a variety of contest-winning children’s books in Plains Cree, Dene, Saukteaux and Nakota can be found on the SICC website.

And whether you are shopping for a dinosaur enthusiast, a history buff, a poetry lover or a contemporary-minded reader, GoldenEagle hopes you will help support Saskatchewan authors and businesses this season by keeping your purchases local.

“If you have an independent bookstore in your community, shop there, rather than at the big-box corporate bookstore,” she said.

Treat yourself this holiday season, by supporting businesses here at home.

Visit [TogetherWeStandSK.ca](http://TogetherWeStandSK.ca) for more information on how you can help.

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Season's Greetings

These are challenging times. Its times like this that lets us appreciate the ones we love and care about. We wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas.

CUMFI continues to support our community and couldn't do it without community organizations: The Métis Nation – Sask, Western Region II A, Saskatoon Community Foundation, United Way, Nutrien and Saskatoon Housing Initiatives Partnership. And all of the other community organizations that made tremendous impact with food and goods.

May 2021 bring you prosperity!

CUMFI President, Board of Directors and Staff



# A La Ronge Christmas so very long ago

**By John Cuthand  
for Eagle Feather News**

Despite the years I can well remember a northern Christmas from long ago. It's been over sixty years ago when I lived in a magical time best reserved for children. My patchwork quilt of memory recalls our Christmas tree, fresh from the bush, brought into our home, erected then decorated. We placed with some precision, colored balls, tinsel and bubbling lights, topped with a Christmas star. We had a cat named Bimbo who at times threatened to topple the tree by insistent curiosity, resulting in her attempt to climb it. I used to carefully examine the gifts. The soft ones were clothing knitted with love by my mother. Some clunked around and their contents remained a mystery. A larger gift with weight meant some type of toy.

Back in 1957 there was no plastic. Most everything came in cardboard and most toys were made of wood or tin held together with tabs and slots. They were probably covered with led paint now that I think of it.

There were no snowmobiles, only sputtering Bombardiers crossing the lake linking La Ronge to Stanley Mission. At Christmastime the trappers came in from the bush by dog team. They glowed with good health. Travel was by a dusty road ending in Prince Albert. Travel was also by air, dog team in winter and canoe in summer. Most homes were heated with wood and Cree was the language most spoken.

I was very wary of the wolf who lived in the toilet pit and the moose in the basement. I can't remember being cold despite crispy weather, dropping to 20 below and more. Scampering around in the snow making snow angels, sliding down hills, making snowmen and whatever imagination brought is a wonderful memory.

A special time was Christmas Eve. I wasn't one for going to church, but Christmas Eve services were different. It was singing carols I so enjoyed. My favorite was "Joy To The World" which I sang loud with enthusiasm although I may have sang in a distant key forgetting verses as I went. It was no matter. My father was an Anglican minister; my mother a devout Anglican who couldn't sing so well. We may have stood out some but side by side we sang with considerable gusto. Carols held a deeper meaning I don't find in current fluff songs. "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"; "Oh Holy Night"; "Hark the Herald" definitely enhanced the Christmas spirit. Kids away from church sang about how the wise men smoked a rubber cigar, which subsequently exploded. Funny how insignificant memories surface. When the service ended everyone shook hands. It was a wonderful way to end the day.

Christmas morning was the exciting start to a full day. Gifts were quickly opened and time was joyously spent playing with the toys. My sister Ruth and I received identical sweaters hand knitted by my mother. She called us the twins and would dress us up the same on occasion. Most gifts were ordered from the T Eaton Christmas catalogue. I received truly ugly black snow pants made from scratchy wool with leather patches at the knees. At age five I wasn't one for fashion, besides most everyone else wore ugly snow pants. Our stockings were stuffed with a desirable Christmas orange on top, lots of nuts of different kinds and candy. I think ribbon candy quietly died out sometime in the sixties. It was a good thing too as it tasted like cinnamon, took forever to dissolve and bits of it stuck to clothes, blankets and furniture.

Among our gifts was a six-foot wooden toboggan. There is a rocky hill leading from the Anglican church to



**John Cuthand remembers Christmas. Photo submitted**

the lake below. It was barely the height of a person but it seemed much higher to us then. We piled on the toboggan as many as could fit and more. The toboggan was definitely a significant upgrade from a piece of cardboard. This went on for hours until exhaustion and the cold drove us home.

When suppertime rolled around, we feasted on roast turkey, stuffing, cranberries, potatoes and I can't remember what else. I was full almost wobbling when I left the kitchen table. Having been well fed I slipped into a sleepy mellow mood. My mother in due time called us to bed. I remember her reading to us as she so often did. We drifted off to sleep lulled by story time. I slept deep and I don't remember if I hugged a girly Teddy Bear or not. All was quiet except the sound of the Xmas tree toppling over. Bimbo again.

**Share Métis culture and history from the Gabriel Dumont Institute this holiday season!**

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

**Best Wishes from the Students, Staff, and Board of the Gabriel Dumont Institute**

# Barb and Frank Badger prepare for sad anniversary

By Warren Goulding  
for Eagle Feather News

Barb Badger recalls a disconcerting experience like it was yesterday. She was working in her kitchen when a strange sensation overcame her.

"It was about 6:15. I remember it so clearly. For a few seconds I got so lonesome. I felt like crying," she says, speaking softly. "It only lasted a few seconds, then it was over."

Not long after this unnerving episode, husband Frank arrived home and the couple prepared to go for supper at the home of Al and Vi Burton in Codelte.

It had been a pleasant evening with close friends until the phone rang, just as Frank and Barb were getting their coats on to leave.

"Vi got off the phone and she seemed a bit jittery," Barb says.

The Badgers agreed to stay for one more cup of coffee. Less than five minutes later the doorbell rang. Two RCMP officers, faces drawn tight, politely asked to come in.

"I recognized Brian from the hospital in Nipawin where I worked. An uncomfortable chill came over me and I thought of Mom and Dad," Barb remembers, as she attempted to put unpleasant thoughts out of her mind.

"What did I do this time?" Maybe it was that unpaid parking ticket.

The Mountie took a deep breath.

"Mrs. Badger, there has been a car accident. It was a little red Hyundai. The three occupants didn't survive. They are all deceased."

At that moment, life as they had known it, the one with three beautiful, happy children, thriving in a healthy home, ended.

"I fell against the wall. I couldn't cry because I was in so much denial," Barb explains.

"I needed to get some air," Frank remembers, heading for the door. "The officer didn't want me to, but I wanted to be alone."

The officers presented the shocked parents with a wallet, belonging to their son, Earl, who at 17 was the eldest and had been the driver. A student card belonging to Leora, 15, was also found in the wreckage.

The car had hit black ice, spun and was struck by an oncoming truck. The three children, Earl, Leora and the youngest, Frank Jr., 14 had died instantly.

The accident occurred at about 6:15 on the highway not far from Prince Albert where the kids were headed to visit their aunt Linda.

It was Dec. 21 and the next days were a blur, as Frank and Barb prepared for a service to be held at Beardy's and Okemasis, near Duck Lake.

The grieving couple endured a nightmare that no parents could ever prepare for, beginning with a visit to the hospital in Prince Albert to confirm the identities of the bodies – a task that Sam Badger undertook.

"I remember (Sam) saying, 'It's okay, I can do this,' and I remember him carrying sweetgrass. I never prayed so hard; don't let it be my kids."

When Sam Badger returned to the family, gathered in a waiting room, he simply nodded his head. Frank fell to the floor. Barb went into shock. The tears began. The nightmares.

So, too, began the remarkable healing process.

Supported by Barb's parents, Elder George Benson of Red Pheasant, and many friends from Saskatchewan and beyond, Barb and Frank began a chapter in their life that is truly inspiring.

It began at the funeral service at Beardy's and Okemasis, the community not far from One Arrow, where Barb grew up.

Unable to view the children in their open caskets, Barb struggled to contain her grief.

Speaking in Cree, her father, Edward Baldhead said: "Oh, my girl, you have to pay our respects to your son. Open your eyes," the respected Elder said softly.

"So, I did, and we placed letters to the children in each of their coffins."

Barb doesn't recall precisely what they wrote, but among the words was this striking message to the kids: thank you for choosing us to be your parents.

To be sure, there were difficult days, weeks and months ahead, but the couple persevered.

Acceptance and understanding began slowly, but it came.

"I was angry, what was there that I could take out of this that would be positive," Barb asked in the early days following the tragedy.

George Benson stepped forward with comforting words.

"The Creator doesn't give you something you can't handle," he told them. "You'll know what it is later on."

Frank and Barb first spoke at a workshop at the Pine Grove Women's Correctional Centre, sharing their wisdom and inspiring the audience. Other

invitations began to flow in and the Badgers accepted, certain they were doing "our kids work."

"We don't like calling it our story. It's our life. This is reality," Barb explains.

"It brings us closer to our kids. Your greatest gift from your Creator is your kids," she adds.

"I have no regrets the way I raised my kids. No alcohol, respect, good value system," Frank says.

Respect.



Frank and Barb Badger lost their children Earl, Leora and Frank jr. in a car accident around Christmas 25 years ago. They have turned that pain into healing and community service. Photo by Errol Sutherland

## Contract employment opportunity

### Cultural Advisor/Elder Services – Prince Albert Correctional Centre

Prince Albert Correctional Centre is looking for a motivated, energetic and flexible individual who can facilitate Cultural/Spiritual Counseling/Programming to adult offenders within the Centre.

Cultural Advisors/Elders selected will have a working knowledge and/or expertise in the delivery of the following areas: teaching in the area of traditional ceremonies including, but not limited to, the sweat lodge and pipe ceremonies, understanding the cultural practices of First Nations and Métis people, provide individual counseling and sharing circles to offenders. You will act as a resource to the Cultural/Community Co-ordinator and centre staff to increase understanding and sensitivity of First Nations' culture, traditions, spirituality, practices and beliefs.

Up to four (4) applicants will be selected to provide the services at a rate of \$33.00 per hour.

Cultural Advisors/Elders must obtain a Criminal Record Check (Vulnerable Sector) prior to being awarded this contract and adhere to all rules and regulations while at the centre.

Individuals who are interested in submitting an application for this opportunity can find more information on the SaskTenders website (sasktenders.ca) by searching for Request for Application (RFA) #7727-2 Cultural Advisor/Elder Services for the Prince Albert Correctional Centre. For assistance using the SaskTenders website, please call: 1-306-787-6871. Please see the SaskTenders website for future contract opportunities from the Prince Albert Correctional Centre.

The deadline for applications is: January 18, 2021, 2:00 p.m. local Saskatchewan time.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS APPLICATION MUST BE RECEIVED ON TIME.

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### Program Guidelines

- Minimum 18 years of age
- Must be full-time post-secondary student in the semester prior to and following work term
- Must self-declare as Indigenous (Metis, First Nation, or Inuit) descent
- Students must include a resume, a copy of most recent transcript, and fully complete the questionnaire found within the application process.
- Apply Online; applications will not be accepted in any other form and only applicants selected for next steps in the recruitment process will be contacted.

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If you have questions about the program or about applying please contact Earl Greyeyes, Mosaic Indigenous Engagement Coordinator at: [earl.greyeyes@mosaicco.com](mailto:earl.greyeyes@mosaicco.com) or our student recruitment team at: [mosaicstudentprograms@mosaicco.com](mailto:mosaicstudentprograms@mosaicco.com).

**Mosaic**  


## Grandparents' birch bark canoe found at university, returned to northern Sask

By **Judith Iron**  
for *Eagle Feather News*

The return of a handmade Birch bark canoe was a dream come true for sisters Isabelle Hardlotte and Martha Kilcup. Nearly fifty years ago their grandfather, Isaiah Roberts, was commissioned to build a traditional birch bark canoe from scratch. The final measurements of the canoe were about three feet wide by twelve feet long. Though the canoe was a Roberts' family hand-made original, technically it belonged to the organization who had commissioned it. Upon completion the canoe was shipped out to an unknown location. The sisters didn't know where it was. Until now.

In 1972, during a summer break from the Prince Albert Indian Student Residence, Hardlotte traveled with her family to Otter Lake. On the banks of Otter Lake, using materials found on the land, Hardlotte's grandparents Isaiah and Annie Roberts built a birch bark canoe by hand.

The process was captured by a film crew, who would use the footage as an educational tool for future generations. The documentary is entitled *The Last Canoe*.

In the film, a Cree-speaking Roberts shows the viewers how to build a birch bark canoe step-by-step. Roberts' wife Annie can be seen working diligently alongside him.

Hardlotte fondly recalls that summer as a young child. She remembers helping her grandmother Annie pick the roots of spruce saplings that would be used to bind the canoe together, but she hadn't seen

the documentary and they all wondered what happened to the canoe. Through a social media family chat they began their search.

When the family located the documentary, they were transported through time back to the banks of Otter Lake. Kilcup says the film brought feelings of melancholy when she watched it.

"I couldn't believe I could see and hear them walking around right in front of me. I was also happy to see my dad who has since passed away. I was so excited saying 'Look it's dad!' It was just amazing," she said.

When Hardlotte saw the documentary for the first time she had a similar experience.

"It was a good moment to see it, but it was also bittersweet in that my brother and I are actually the only two living people left that were in that video," she said.

They searched far and wide for answers about the location of the birch bark canoe. They were told it had been sent to the Western Development Museum. When they called the museum to ask about it, they were told that it may have been donated to Moose Jaw. Moose Jaw staff didn't know the location of the canoe. Their search finally led them to the University of Saskatchewan, where their other sister, Dr. Rose Roberts, was employed as an Education Development Specialist in the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning.

After a number of emails and inquiries about the canoe, Roberts learned that a birch bark canoe had been found in the basement of the Archaeology Building on campus, where it had been housed for at



**On left Dr. Rose Roberts and her sister Isabelle Hardlotte stand in front of their grandfathers birch bark canoe. Photo supplied**

least forty years. After confirming it was the same canoe their grandfather had crafted, arrangements were made to have it carefully packed and shipped back to the family.

As of early December, the birch bark canoe has almost made its way home. It is on display at Grandmother's Bay on Otter Lake. Due to the fragility of the somewhat dilapidated canoe, it will remain there until next summer when it can be safely transported home to Stanley Mission to be displayed at the Isaiah Roberts Memorial Cultural Centre.

The documentary *My Last Canoe in Cree* can now be accessed via YouTube.

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# Indigenous hockey culture inspires clothing line

By **Brendan Mayer**  
for *Eagle Feather News*

Cree syllabics and sayings that celebrate Indigenous hockey on clothing are attracting customers to an online business created by a Sturgeon Lake First Nation member.

But Harlan Kingfisher's Smudge the Blades Apparel company does more than raise awareness of Indigenous hockey culture; it helps more young people play the sport. A portion of proceeds from sales goes towards hockey registration fees and equipment for Indigenous youth.

"I really wanted to give back to First Nations communities. That was the main inspiration for my company. I've been calling First Nation communities and letting them know that I'm here if they need help," Kingfisher said.

With hockey cancelled this year because of the pandemic, Kingfisher had time to launch his clothing line.

Smudge the Blades apparel includes T-shirts, sweaters and hats featuring sayings such as "ever sick dangles" and "First Nation hockey sensation" and Kingfisher said the response to the brand has been great.

"It's grown so quickly. People love it. First Nations hockey is huge in Canada. The support has been amazing."

Kingfisher has paid to register three pre-novice players at Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation.

"I played there when I was younger so I wanted to give back to the community," he said. "Whenever someone reaches out to me, I see what I can do to help. That's what this brand is all about. I want peo-

ple to reach out."

The company also bought hockey equipment for a young athlete on the Sturgeon Lake First Nation and purchased jerseys for the Indigenous Hockey Academy in Edmonton. Kingfisher is hoping to eventually help put together hockey programs in First Nations communities.

"I saw friends that didn't have the support system or the money to play hockey and it still happens," he said. "I want to avoid that for any First Nation kid. I want to help kids make it through the year."

Kingfisher also hopes the clothing with Cree syllabics will help keep the Cree language alive.

The apparel is being produced and shipped by Snipe and Celly Proshop on the Flying Dust First Nation.

"It's an Indigenous business helping another Indigenous business," Kingfisher added. "People come to the hockey rink there and buy gear. I really like what they're doing."

Kingfisher used to smudge the blades of his skates and hockey sticks which inspired the name of his brand. He played hockey for the Waywayseecappo Wolverines, Opaskwayak Cree Nation Blizzard and the Augustana Vikings in Camrose.

"It's like a family environment when you go to these hockey games and have the First Nation community support," Kingfisher said. "It's such a cultural celebration. The First Nations hockey tournament circuit is amazing. It's such a good feeling to see all these community members come out and support their own band."

Kingfisher plans to sell baseball-themed clothes in the future.

"Baseball is just as big as hockey for the First Na-

tion communities," Kingfisher said. "I would love to put out baseball-style shirts and designs."



**Harlan Kingfisher grew up playing hockey on the Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Photo submitted**



**Office of the Treaty Commissioner**

## Season's Greetings

### and all the best in 2021!

**Saskatchewan Treaty Commissioner Mary Culbertson, Elders and staff at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner**



**THANK YOU**  
essential service workers.  
Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

Please keep yourself and your loved ones safe this holiday season.

It's important to focus on the positive. Love people from a distance . Keep in touch by face time, phone calls, sharing videos, dropping off groceries, baking, homemade cards, school photos and crafts for kids and family to do during the holidays.

Help others. Give your extra winter clothing to local friendship centres. Clean out your cupboards and donate what you can to a food bank. It all makes a difference.

We are resilient. We will get through this. We are all in this together.

Wash your hands, wear a mask and follow the health guidelines.

Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 215-2553 Grasswood Rd East, Saskatoon SK ~ 306-244-2100 ~ receptionist@otc.ca ~ www.otc.ca

## Cote First Nation member brings Indigenous content to Disney

By **Brendan Mayer**  
for *Eagle Feather News*

A member of the Cote First Nation is using his recently launched production company to bring success stories of Indigenous youth to the Disney Channel.

Jacob Pratt started Skoden Entertainment in September and has produced episode for a series called Use Your Voice that features Indigenous youth who are making a difference in their communities.

"We hope that Indigenous youth get to see young people like themselves on Disney and are inspired by what they're doing," Pratt said. "I also hope that seeing them on Disney helps them realize that's possible for them as well."

Skoden Entertainment finished producing three pieces for the series in November. One episode features a group called the International Indigenous Youth Council and shows how they are promoting social justice. The second piece focuses on Noli Ortega, an Indigenous youth who helps perpetuate the California Bird singing style and its significance to Indigenous people. The final episode is about Akisa Peters, who uses social media to help preserve his Dakota language.

"We really loved being able to share the stories of some great Indigenous youth and seeing them being in the spotlight," Pratt said. "That is the absolute best part of the whole project. I want young people to see the content we create and have characters they can identify with."

All three episodes have aired on the Disney Channel.

"Disney wanted to hire an Indigenous company to produce these episodes for them," Pratt said. "I really enjoyed working with Disney because it was very different working with a company of that size. They liked working with us. They want to work with us more in the future, which we are obviously happy to do. Everybody that we worked with was kind and supportive."

Pratt hopes Skoden Entertainment will help change how Indigenous people are portrayed on television and in films.

"Proper representation is having characters that just happen to be Indigenous, just like we actually exist in today's society," Pratt added. "This is the future we hope to help influence. Why should we only exist in Indigenous stories?"

Pratt said that more Indigenous people should start working in the film industry.



**Jacob Pratt is the CEO of Skoden Entertainment. Photo submitted.**

"I would absolutely love to see a new generation of camera operators, directors, producers, actors and grips that make a difference within the industry," Pratt said. "I can't wait for the day that we see Indigenous people in films and on television just as much as I see them walking down the street."

Pratt was raised on the George Gordon First Nation and said his upbringing influences his work.

"Growing up in Saskatchewan was great in some ways because I loved being able to spend my time out in the fields as a kid.

"I also encountered many different examples of racism that is very prominent within the province. I was met with systematic barriers that limited my ability. My major influences and basis of who I am as a First Nations man was provided through growing up entrenched in my Indigenous culture. It gave me my strength and strong sense of identity."

## Young entrepreneurs to sell products by subscription

By **Nathan Raine**  
for *Eagle Feather News*

Young entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan are being given an opportunity to share their products through a new, safe avenue this Christmas.

Fireweed Artisan Boxes is bringing a distinct, Indigenous approach to the recent trend of subscription boxes – niche products delivered to your door on a recurring basis. A project developed by the Saskatoon Tribal Council's Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneur Program (AYEP), Fireweed Artisan Boxes offers products from young Indigenous entrepreneurs across the province, including handmade art, jewelry, leather goods, literature, and more.

"It's a way that people can actively and immediately participate in reconciliation and supporting young Indigenous artisans," said Jill Sauter, co-creator of Fireweed Artisan Boxes. "It's something we can do during the pandemic to support kids in (AYEP), which helps them learn business and being a good corporate citizen."

The project was developed to fill a void left by COVID-19, which took away many of the events, trade shows, and networking opportunities AYE had planned for their participants this year.

"We realized we needed to come up with a couple solutions to be able to market our kid's stuff. We didn't want to lose momentum, or for our kids to suffer more than they already were," said Joe Taylor, AYE Co-ordinator.

The Fireweed boxes, which retail for \$100 per box, pay full retail price for the youth-created products included in the box, allowing the youth to have guaranteed sales to support their business.

Two of the young entrepreneurs contributing to the box are Lee and Ruby Daniels, twin sisters from One Arrow First Nation. Lee and Ruby are collaborating on a children's book for the box, while Ruby is doing her own bead-work on jewelry and dream-catchers.

"I like seeing people's reactions to how you tell a story, and the way they see your artwork and interpret the narrative," said Ruby. "It takes a lot of creativity, and you have to figure out where you're going before you do it, so it takes a lot of brainpower."

The sisters got involved with Fireweed after watching the opportunities their

older sister had with AYE, and wanted to engage in something that would allow them to do something positive.

"Being in One Arrow, (during the pandemic), there's often nothing to do. So it's lots of motivation," said Ruby.

Subscriptions for the boxes will begin sometime next year, after the first box, which is a one-off, sold separately for Christmas – which is already 90 percent sold out.

The boxes are available at all three of Wanuskewin's gift shops, Fire Creek Gas and Grill on 20th Street in Saskatoon, and Habitat for Humanity in Saskatoon.

Sauter and Taylor said the contents of the box are intended to be a surprise, but 'may' contain things like art from the popular 3R Innovative Imaging, a group from Muskoday Youth Business Club who make art from old cabinet doors and other discarded items, and RedWaters Bagging, two young women also from Muskoday, who make bags to raise awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The boxes also come with a small magazine that tells the stories of the youth and the products they make. It's all about creating connections with these young entrepreneurs.

"It's really giving an opportunity for these kids to tell their stories," said Taylor. "If we can provide a little cultural awareness, understanding, and education through this process, I think it could go a long way in changing people's perspectives about youth and Indigenous people as a whole."



**Eagle Feather Boxes made by the Mistawasis Business Club**



# Reconciliation Ally: Shelley MacNab

## Supporting success in the trades



By **Andréa Ledding**  
for *Eagle Feather News*

Shelley MacNab works at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT) supporting Indigenous people, including women, to get the training and education to succeed in the trades.

She recently received the Saskatoon YWCA Women of Distinction Award for Leadership in the Trades for her dedication.

She began painting in 1984, when it was rare to see a woman on the jobsite.

MacNab's mother Barb pushed her to continue in the trades and get her Red Seal Certification, but her path to becoming a journey-person wasn't easy. She coped with construction site gender-based inequalities in the early years, but she toughed it out.

She once worked mainly with an Indigenous man, who later became an elder.

"We were different, so we took care of each other and bonded on that and became good friends," she said.

She moved between Saskatoon and Vancouver for 25 years.

"I thought there had to be an easier road," she said.

She took a position as a job coach at SIIT's career centre. After five years she was elevated to manager of the apprenticeship program, where she's been for 16 years.

"I was gung-ho about that and took a lead role and started to promote the idea for Indigenous women and from those programs we've had some success," she said noting that she generally sees a few women in each

class.

"Women in the trades still have challenges, maybe less than in the earlier years, but they're still there to some degree," she said.

MacNab loves changing peoples' lives by helping them get into the trade and moving forward through the apprenticeship system, with mentorship and the kind of support her mother gave her.

"I've always known that not everyone has that support, not everyone has that kind of friend, family, or colleague support, and I wanted to be that person for people, so that's what I did and continue to do, and it's very rewarding.

"It's life-changing in terms of finances and being role models. We have over 125 journey-people through SIIT (since 2009) and that's a lot of lives changed, so that's a triumph," she said.

She and her colleague, Sylvia Hamilton, are known as the "dynamic duo," she said.

"She's a journey-person as well and helps me so much, she's a godsend," she said.

MacNab's vision of reconciliation is knowing what the past and present look like, and what we want in the future for Indigenous people.

"I've been fortunate to work in an Indigenous institute where I can do things that make a difference. I feel like I've been practicing reconciliation ever since I started here," she said.

"I've made some really great relationships with folks and colleagues and Elders and the STC and FSIN... that's been part of the journey too."

She didn't grow up in a racist family, but says most

non-Indigenous people didn't have much knowledge of First Nations people, so she had her eyes opened over the years.

"I always knew that Indigenous folks were not treated equally, that's for sure, but when you start to get to know people and their lives and families, it really makes an impact. I think all of us need to do our part to improve the lives currently and in the future of Indigenous folks in this country. If we all did just a little bit I think we could see some big changes."

She likens it to COVID response; if everyone does their part, the virus can be shut down like racism should be.

"My mom has always instilled in me, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I do put myself in other peoples' shoes and you know it's just who I am. I've always had lots of empathy and I guess maybe that's where part of my passion comes from as well."



**Shelley MacNab takes inspiration from her mom Barb for her dedication to students at the SIIT Women in Trades program. Photo by Danielle Stasiuk**

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Pine Grove Correctional Centre**

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The deadline for applications is:  
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## Métis broadcaster David Kirton elected Saskatoon City Councilor

By Creeden Martell  
for Eagle Feather News

David Kirton is returning to news scrums at Saskatoon's City Hall but the former broadcast journalist will be the one answering questions as the newest addition to city council.

The Métis man spent more than four decades as a journalist covering city hall in places like Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Edmonton before he was elected as the Ward 3 councillor in the November municipal election. Kirton replaces Ann Iwanchuk, who chose not to seek re-election.

"It's been a learning curve that is virtually vertical," Kirton said of the career change. "It's great. I was expecting it to be bittersweet but I'm so involved in what I'm doing right now that I haven't had a chance to look back and wonder if I'm doing the right thing or not."

Kirton was sworn in as a councillor on Nov. 16th and it was a job that required him to hit the ground running.

The former radio man decided 43 years in journalism was the time to leave the microphone behind and make the jump to civil service.

By giving up his career in journalism, the free time allows him to put full time hours as a councillor, which he says will be needed.

"I know that there are a lot of reporters who don't like covering city council. I was fascinated with it from the beginning -- I'm passionate about it," Kirton said.

The election went ahead under the looming presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was further complicated by a snowfall which delayed the elec-

tion five days, from Nov. 9th to Nov. 13th.

The new council is also required to meet on the first Monday after the election, which meant Kirton and his new colleagues on council only had a weekend to prepare rather than seven days.

Kirton describes the amount of information he has had to process in the days since starting the job as, "mind boggling, in a good way."

There are many ways to help a constituent as much as possible, he said, but he is not able to help a constituent on every occasion.

"That's a little bit frustrating, I must admit, but I'm learning as I go. Hopefully over time, I'll learn to become a more effective city councillor and be able to help them and know exactly where to go," he said. "I'm still fumbling a little bit."

He heard from constituents about crime and community safety as major concerns during his campaign. Kirton said underlying issues like addiction and poverty need to be addressed with housing first.

"You can spend 28 days in rehab if you're an addict and if all you're worrying about when you get out of that rehab is where you're going to stay warm tonight, I think those 28 days was a waste," he said.

The Saskatoon Tribal Council's downtown pilot project, Sawéyihotan, aimed at addressing homelessness and addiction excites Kirton in that regard.

People living in vulnerable circumstances, like at The Lighthouse, cannot just be picked up and moved out of downtown, Kirton said.

"That's what some people want us to do: 'just get them away from me' and I hate that when I even hear that," he said.



Former journalist David Kirton has become the first self declared Indigenous person to be elected to Saskatoons City Council. Photo supplied



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