



AU, Bigstone Cree study will bridge Traditional Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science

A partnership between Bigstone Cree Nation and Athabasca University (AU) researchers will help bridge the gap between Indigenous Ways of Knowing and the traditional way science research is done.

Dr. Shauna Zenteno, microbiologist and dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, and Dr. Janelle Baker, an assistant professor of anthropology in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, are collaborating with Bigstone Cree Nation on a project examining the potential impact of human activity and development on aquatic health in northern Alberta at a microbial level. This project will combine the qualitative observations Bigstone members have made with a quantitative metagenomics analysis of what’s happening in the water.

“We feel that changes to the water biodiversity due to human activity may trigger long-term impacts on plants and animals, which affects food security for First Nations communities,” Zenteno said. “Bacteria are essential to many processes that support ecosystem health and can sense and respond to environmental changes rapidly. An imbalance has

potential downstream impacts on water, plant, and animal health. Bigstone Cree Nation is particularly interested in water quality and moose health.”

This work is supported with an infrastructure grant from the John R. Evans Leaders Fund administered by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. It helps build on similar work Baker has done with the community over the past decade.

Baker studies issues of wild food contamination in collaboration with Bigstone members and has seen first-hand some of the changes community members have observed in the area and spoken about.

Imagine a member of Bigstone Cree Nation harvesting a moose on their traditional territory in northern Alberta. They clean and dress the animal, preparing the meat to sustain their families in much the same way as their ancestors have done for thousands of years.

But not everything is the same as it has been in the past, something Baker has observed while working with members of the First Nation.



The late Clement Auger, a member of Bigstone Cree Nation, collecting water lilies for traditional medicine in Bigstone’s traditional territory in 2009. Community members’ observations of changes to traditional foods and medicine is one of the reasons the community is monitoring water.

“I’ve been out hunting and have seen cysts in the livers of moose, which community members have been telling me about,” she said. “Now they’re able to sample the liver right there, and send it for testing.”

The need for Traditional Indigenous Knowledge

Baker also knows the frustration of seeing Traditional Ways of Knowing dismissed in the context of scientific research. “For me as a cultural anthropologist, and someone with maternal Métis ancestry, I get really exhausted with the dismissal of the knowledge and wisdom of people who have been on the land their entire lives hunting and observing those changes,” she said. “Population dynamics, habitats, and species’ behaviour are just so incredibly nuanced.”

This is in contrast with what Baker and many others have observed in the past. For example, when researchers come into a First Nations

community to study a species - say a type of fish or a particular plant - they may visit specific locations in the bush based on data gathered from maps. This data is processed in a computer lab somewhere, sometimes with inconsistent results.

Meanwhile, community members and elders who rely on those species for food and medicine, and have done so for generations, know from experience exactly where to find those species.

Community partnerships

Both Baker and Zenteno emphasized the importance of having community members take a lead role. That way, the process of making observations and applying Traditional Knowledge aren’t done separately from the scientific work that produces quantifiable data about what’s happening in the systems being studied.

“The Traditional Knowledge and community members themselves help guide the research,” Zenteno said. “Their understanding of the environment and observations over time can help us interpret the data we obtain on water quality and how this relates to our findings in moose.”

Bigstone Cree Nation members, who are being trained to sample water and organize moose kits, are the environmental monitors for this research. They also interview elders and community members as part of the AU course Anthropology 390: Community-Based Research Methods. These activities are funded from an Indigenous community-based monitoring

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“PROUDLY SERVING ALBERTA'S FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES FOR OVER A DECADE”

Jesse Auger: A career in welding

Jesse Auger, alumni of the Northern Lakes College Welder Apprenticeship program, has a practical approach towards his welding career. Hard work, dedication, and an affinity for the trades has built his career into a profitable and fulfilling one, despite the economic downturn.

“I personally enjoy welding. I enjoy the work style. I’m a guy that can work 40 days and still enjoy the complexity of welding. You drive into a new site, that’s basically just an open field, and leave having built multiple buildings with tiles and piping absolutely everywhere. That’s pretty neat,” enthuses Jesse.

After graduating from NLC in 2007, Jesse spent six years working as a welding contractor before trailblazing his own company, Brownie’s Up 5 Welding. As he explains, “I wasn’t tied to any one company in my career, and I liked that. But as a contract employee there were ten welders that had seniority ahead of me, so when it slowed down, I wouldn’t get called in. Eventually, I decided to just veer off on my own and then I was finding work all over Alberta.”

Northern Lakes College gave Jesse the best of both worlds - the option to reside in his hometown while learning his trade, and new opportunities to connect with important mentors.

“I liked that my classes weren’t huge,” Jesse

explains. “We had a lot of people, but it was easy to get a one on one with your instructor, and there was a lot of dedication from the teachers. They just kept on giving advice and sharing their own experiences.”

Though welding can be a seasonal industry, Jesse has taken quiet months as an opportunity to explore other areas of work. Recently, he created a guiding business, Historic Outfitters, where he helps hunters navigate forests during hunting season and pulls from his Indigenous upbringing to introduce others to the land.

He explains, “Welding is seasonal and opposite to hunting season. So, I can guide for hunting season from September to December, and then bear season is May and June, and then I’ll do fishing in the summers. December to April, when the ground is frozen, is usually my busiest time as a welder. Those are the months I’m not guiding. It’s perfect. I go between both and I’m hoping to keep building my guiding outfit.”

For anyone considering the NLC Welder Apprenticeship program, Jesse’s advice is, “learn how to do the work and then do a good job. It’s all about work ethic. You’re not going to be a successful welder if you can’t show up. If you want to succeed in almost anything in life, you have got to be able to show up and work.”

Jesse resides in Slave Lake, Alberta.



Jesse Auger is an alumni of the Northern Lakes College Welder Apprenticeship Program.

AU study *cont. from p 2*

grant funded by Environment Canada titled “What is in the Water?”

While water is monitored, sampled, and sequenced for analysis, moose kits are collected from hunters as part of the meat-harvesting process. Sequencing and bioinformatics to assess water quality is conducted in collaboration with Dr. Tarah Lynch, and tissue analysis and toxicology are performed by Dr. Susan Kutz, both from the University of Calgary. This is all

in connection to the Traditional Knowledge being gathered from the community and documented.

But ultimately, as much as this project is about understanding what’s happening in northern Alberta aquatic systems at a microbial level and how this impacts the health of moose, it’s also about nurturing long-term relationships.

“It’s not just about going and doing some sampling and then leaving. I have lifelong relationships and obligations to this community,” Baker said, adding she was able to develop these relationships in no small

part than to the support of Bigstone Cree Nation member and fellow AU professor Dr. Josie Auger.

Zenteno said from her perspective, one of the most important goals of the project is not only environmental sustainability, it is about creating capacity, and supporting data sovereignty to ensure the community has ownership of that data.

“Helping to understand the reliance of Western science on Traditional Knowledge is incredibly rewarding,” she said.

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Blockades, policing, politics and double standards

By ANNews writers

First Nation leaders across Turtle Island are condemning the nation-wide occupations, known as the ‘Freedom Convoy,’ that have saturated downtown Ottawa, as well as several other cities across the country and a number of major international border crossings between the US and Canada.

Since January 29, thousands of people and hundreds of vehicles have occupied downtown Ottawa and several border crossings as well as rallying in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and other centres in what they say is an effort to have all COVID restrictions across Canada removed.

However, reporting from the Canadian Anti-Hate Network shows that the convoy has been organized by figures with a host of racist and white supremacist connections.

“We are incredibly disturbed by the so-called protest that has been falsely labeled a “freedom” convoy,” stated Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit political executive. “Based on what we’ve observed, it has become more and more evident that this is nothing more than an occupation of hate and racism. The attacks on Canada’s healthcare workers, the mocking of sacred Indigenous cultural practices and the blatant disregard for the citizens of Ottawa are all clear evidence of the true colours of the extremists who have taken over Canada’s capital.”

“These protests are fueling misinformation about public health mandates and the importance of vaccination. This misinformation has led to vaccine hesitancy, and many deaths,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. “Public health mandates utilize inconvenience to spur higher vaccination rates, but, being inconvenienced is not the same as having your Charter Rights violated. We commend the 90% of truckers who are vaccinated,



especially given that their jobs put them in contact with many people.”

“As evidenced by the destructive, anarchic displays of anti-vax sentiments, as well as the state of emergency recently declared by Ottawa, the so-called ‘Freedom Convoy’ has sown division, intolerance, and misinformation during a time in which we cannot afford to have vaccine mandates and public health and safety endangered,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Chief Bobby Cameron said, “Our First Nations communities have been some of the hardest hit since the beginning of the pandemic. We have been working tirelessly to distribute PPE and supplies to our First Nations because we are highly vulnerable to COVID-19.

“Our families and communities have suffered insurmountable losses because of this horrible virus and our First Nations Chiefs have implemented some of the strictest protocols in the country to keep their membership safe.”

Cameron continued, “This convoy is an insult to our Chiefs, our communities, and to the hundreds of loved ones we’ve lost through this pandemic. Not only are these protestors risking lives and spreading false information, but they’re also disrespecting our traditional drums, pipes, and medicines.

“It’s a disgrace to see our culturally sacred items being used improperly, without proper protocol, in support of anti-vaccine protests.”

Alberta First Nations including the Mikisew Cree First Nation and the Athabasca Fort Chipewyan Nationin have also denounced the protest and the government’s reaction.

A statement released by the Mikisew Cree Nation

Continued on page 9



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Indigenous Delegation will meet the Pope in March

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

An Indigenous delegation will travel to the Vatican to meet Pope Francis in late-March, after the initial meeting scheduled for December 2021 was postponed due to Omicron concerns.

Delegations from the Assembly of First Nations, Métis National Council, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami will each meet separately with the Pope on March 28, according to a statement put out by the three Indigenous groups and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

On April 1, the Pope will then meet with all three delegations together.

The statement hints that there could be another postponement in the event COVID numbers increase again.

“For those individuals who are chosen, they expressed a great desire to represent their people,” Bishop William McGrattan, vice-president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in Calgary, told APTN News.

“They saw this as something beyond their personal pilgrimage, or their personal going to meet the Holy Father. They were representing their communities. I think that’s the significance, the importance.”

Métis National Council President Cassidy Caron told APTN that despite the delay, the delegates’ goals remain the same.

“I look forward to continuing to work with Metis Nation citizens to ensure our stories, especially those of Metis survivors, are shared with Pope Francis,” he wrote in a statement.

Back in November, former AFN national chief Phil Fontaine said the delegates expected the Pope to apologize for the Church’s role in operating residential schools on an upcoming trip to Turtle Island, which could occur as soon as the fall.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is set to cover the travel costs of the trek to the Vatican.

The purpose of the journey is to determine how

Indigenous Peoples and the Catholic Church can move forward together on the road to healing and reconciliation.

While they could have moved the meeting online and done it sooner, organizers felt it was crucial for the Pope to hear from survivors themselves in the flesh.

“This was an opportunity not only for him to hear what they have been experiencing but also, I think, to help prepare him for his eventual visit,” McGrattan said.

Meanwhile, on January 28 it was announced by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) that the organization would be creating a new registered charity to advance healing and reconciliation initiatives.

The Indigenous Reconciliation Fund will be operated by a six-member board of directors, which includes Wilton Littlechild, a former commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

Other Indigenous people part of the board include: Giselle Marion, born and raised in Behchokǫ, NT; and Rosella Kinoshameg, an Odawa/Ojibway woman from the Wikwemikong unceded First Nation Territory.

Natale Gallo, Claude Bédard and Barbara Dowding are also members of the corporation.

“The Bishops of Canada are fully committed to addressing the historical and ongoing trauma caused by the residential school system,” said Bishop Raymond Poisson, President of the CCCB. “In moving forward with our collective financial commitment, we will continue to be guided by the experience and wisdom of Indigenous peoples across the country”.

The CCCB has said that they will accept contributions granted to this end by the 73 dioceses across the country in order to fulfill the \$30 million



commitment made by the Canadian Bishops in September.

Furthermore, the organization has said that the fund will publish annual reports and will be subject to an audit by an independent accounting firm each year. Any administrative costs will be on top of the \$30 million being raised and will not be deducted from the principal amount.

On top of that, the CCCB said that they will also establish Regional and/or Diocesan Granting Committees in order to identify projects that further the fund’s priorities, review applications and request funds to support such projects.

While specific disbursement guidelines will be informed by additional input from Indigenous partners, the CCCB intends to contribute to the following priorities: Healing and reconciliation for communities and families; Culture and language revitalization; Education and community building; and Dialogues for promoting Indigenous spirituality and culture.

The Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program has a hotline to help residential school survivors and their relatives suffering trauma invoked by the recall of past abuse. The number is 1-866-925-4419.

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Making informed choices about Covid-19 vaccines

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities across Canada are continuing their efforts in responding to COVID-19. They are joining ancient and contemporary practices to change the course of history by surviving and thriving during the pandemic.

As of January 25, 2022, over 86% of individuals aged 12 and older in First Nations, Inuit and territorial communities have received a second dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Over 43% of youth aged 5 to 11 have received at least one dose.

Beyond the pandemic’s effect on health, there is often a crisis within the crisis as unequal distribution of vaccines extends the pandemic further. This is not the case in Canada, where Indigenous Peoples are included among priority groups receiving the vaccine. This serves as a way of addressing historical inequities making Indigenous Peoples disproportionately more vulnerable to viruses.

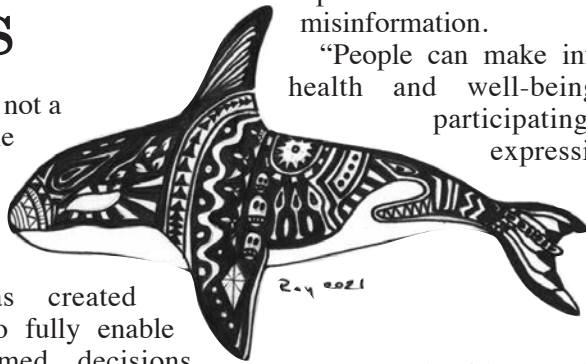
First Nations, Inuit and Métis have access to vaccines through many clinics across the country. Plus, if First Nations peoples and Inuit need to travel out of their community to get to their vaccination or booster appointment, the applicable travel costs will be covered by non-insured health benefits.

While access to the vaccine is not a barrier, many Indigenous people are still experiencing vaccine hesitancy most commonly due to confusion with conflicting information. The Circle of Eagles Lodge Society has created culturally-relevant resources to fully enable individuals to make informed decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccines.

“We are not here to judge anyone’s choices. We’re here to work with our Indigenous community to help everyone make informed choices that are right for them,” said Merv Thomas, CEO of Circle of Eagles Lodge Society.

Circle of Eagles Lodge Society (COELS) operates Indigenous halfway homes in Vancouver, BC on the Coast Salish territory to assist Indigenous Brothers and Sisters leaving Canadian federal institutions and those dislocated from society. For over 50 years, COELS has provided supports to reintegrate them into communities by providing men’s and women’s residences, pre-employment programming, cultural healing, and life skills.

Their COVID-19 decision-making resources range



from education on variants, vaccine comparison charts, a review of side effects and likelihood, to tips on how to audit trusted sources to avoid misinformation.

“People can make informed choices about their health and well-being by asking questions, participating in fireside chats and expressing their feelings about COVID-19 vaccinations, and leveraging science-driven experts.”

Thomas cautions, “Listen to scientists not social media. Do your own research with trusted sources and make informed choices that blend education along with lifeways, customs, and spirituality driven by the ancestral force.”

Some of the best ways to identify trusted sources are to go beyond the headlines, identify the author, check the date, examine the supporting evidence, check your biases and turn to fact-checkers.

Health experts say Indigenous communities in Canada can be at greater risk than other groups during a pandemic. Canada wide, Indigenous communities are taking actions such as using masks, physically distancing, and vaccination to protect their community, Elders and family.

Circle of Eagles Lodge Society resources are available at www.coels.ca/covid-19-2022

All Albertans should learn more about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Suzanne Life-Yeomans is a member of the Liidlíi Kue First Nation but was raised in Cowichan Tribes Territory on Vancouver Island, BC. She is a committee member for the Alberta Joint Working Group for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women,

Girls and 2S+ (AJWG), and a member of the Alberta First Nation Women’s Council on Economic Security. In an interview with *Alberta Native News*, Life-Yeomans discusses her life, career, education, and her family’s personal connection to MMIWG. She calls

on support for families of MMIWG2S+ and she said that the AJWG heard that “loud and clear.”

Currently, Life-Yeomans is Chair for Lands and Economic Development Advisory Council, a member

Continued on page 11

Indigenous Community Actions Against COVID-19

"I got vaccinated to protect myself, my work, and my community."
- Craig

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Stephanie Harpe advocates for exploited Indigenous people

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stephanie Harpe is a passionate international advocate for Missing, Murdered and Exploited Indigenous People (MMEIP). She is speaking out to increase awareness of the need for “action, support for grassroots people, and supportive programming for families” of MMEIP.

The need has never been greater than right now, said Harpe in an exclusive interview with *ANNews*. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing social conditions and criminal acts against Indigenous communities have increased during the pandemic.

She is calling on the Canadian Justice Criminal Justice System for stronger sentences for people who murder Indigenous people, who target Indigenous people, who participate in sex trafficking rings that exploit Indigenous bodies – people who try to control, intimidate, victimize and exploit Indigenous people.

Light sentences given to offenders who commit acts of violence towards Indigenous peoples give the impression that Canada doesn’t value Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous peoples, explained Harpe. The Justice System needs to set examples, so non-Indigenous people know they can’t get away with targeting Indigenous people.

Harpe is an acclaimed singer, songwriter. She comes from an Indigenous political family in Northern Alberta, from Fort McKay First Nation, and speaking up for others, leading by example, and using her voice comes naturally to her.

Notable family members include Harpe’s aunt Chief Dorothy MacDonald, the first Aboriginal woman to be elected Chief of an Alberta Band. She was also a pioneer in the development of consultation models, regulatory boards, and agencies that protect Fort McKay and other First Nations across Canada. Hereditary Chief Phillip McDonald is her grandfather.

Stephanie’s mission and dedication to the MMEIP movement stems from a personal family tragedy;

her mother Ruby Anne McDonald was brutally murdered in Edmonton in 1999 and tragically “many of my friends have gone missing and murdered,” said Harpe.

“I am a survivor, but most of all I am also a powerful, healed person... I am a voice for people who are unable to use their voice.”

High rates of systemic discrimination, exploitation, community stalking, lateral violence, hate groups, online threats, abuse, and violence against Canada’s First Peoples make speaking up difficult for some Indigenous people – that leaves many people without a voice due to fear of retaliation. Harpe’s advocacy helps give them a voice.

Her healing journey has helped her become an effective and compassionate advocate for others in similar situations. Being an advocate is 24 hours /7 days a week role, she said, and she is using her voice to speak with and for families of MMEIP and youth.

Harpe facilitates many effective in-person and virtual workshops across Canada – advocating for and empowering families of MMEIP, and increasing awareness. She collaborates with Kari Thomason on many of her projects and the two have been an effective advocacy team in Edmonton.

Harpe said that she is frustrated with all the government delays during the pandemic and she is ready to get to work. “We have done some provincial work during the pandemic through Act Alberta,” she said. “We advised on getting an Indigenous liaison officer hired by Edmonton Police Service EPS.”

The 2019 report titled – Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 231 Calls for Justice was released almost two years ago, Harpe explained, but no clear actions have been taken by the Canadian Government.

Earlier this month the Alberta government received



Stephanie Harpe is an advocate for missing, murdered and exploited Indigenous people and their families.

the MMIW working group’s final report and the province is now reviewing the report to study their recommendations and determine the next steps.

Harpe told *ANNews* that the scope of the crisis is not gender specific and she explained that the new acronym MMEIP better describes the ongoing national tragedy of Missing, Murdered and Exploited Indigenous Peoples across Canada. The new acronym is all-inclusive for males, females and people who are gender diverse.

She added that there are over 700 murdered and missing Indigenous men and boys in Alberta that no one is talking about. “That’s why we changed it to MMEIP to include all victims.”

Harpe said that there is not one organization that is doing the work on MMEIP but there are many organizations. She said funding needs to be prioritized to organizations that are doing meaningful work, that hire Indigenous professionals, and have ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities.

Harpe ended the interview by telling *Alberta Native News* readers about a new website called aboriginalalert.ca which is continually sharing information about missing individuals in Canada.



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BBMAs available for post secondary Metis students

By Jake Cardinal, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

BBMAs are for serious students of Métis ancestry who need financial assistance for tuition in order to complete their education. If you fit that description, now is the time to submit your online application for a Belcourt Brosseau Métis Award (BBMA); the deadline is March 31.

To be eligible for the BBMA awards, you must: be Métis from the Métis Nation of Alberta or a Métis Settlement in Alberta, be an Alberta Resident with Canadian citizenship and be studying in an eligible program at an eligible post-secondary institution

Applicants are evaluated on a number of criteria, including but not limited to; likelihood of connection to their Métis community, improved opportunities through education, financial need, and, personal circumstances.

“Awards,” explained Georges Brosseau, “can be as little as \$1,000 and as high as \$10,000. Recipients are selected on an individual basis; awards are not based on marks alone. We look at the overall individual in a holistic way, providing they meet the criteria of the awards Panel, which is made up of Metis people. Sometimes an individual is selected because we see that he or she has struggled through difficult times, but remains dedicated to achieving both an education and a successful life.

“People are not refused because they don’t have high marks; we base our decisions on the whole person and are very cognizant that they sometimes don’t have opportunities. We try to provide the opportunity that many of our young students need – what they do with it will determine their future.”

The awards, he added, were created “to uplift our people so they can succeed in the world; to do this they need to be educated. Education is the key to success and therefore we are pushing as hard as we can to give out as many awards as we can each year.”

Since being created in 2001, the award initiative has

given out more than 2000 awards to over 1,500 Métis students attending more than 200 different post-secondary programs throughout Alberta and beyond.

In all, more than \$9 million in awards have been disbursed.

These awards are one of the largest non-governmental sources of funding for Métis students in Canada.

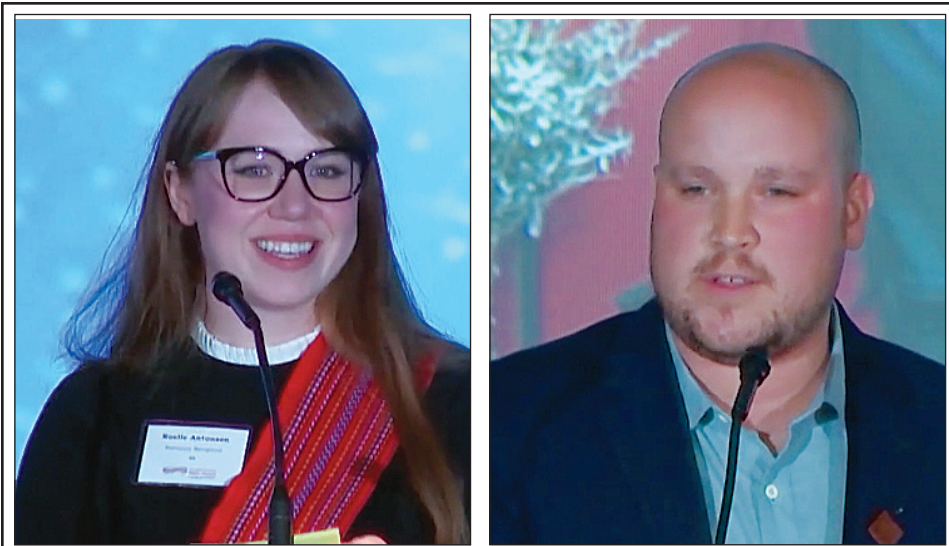
“I didn’t believe that I belonged in post-secondary and I definitely never thought I would graduate from university,” 2015 BBMA recipient, Connor Kerr, Manager of Indigenous Relations and Supports at NorQuest College, said of the awards. “I didn’t believe in reaching out ... and I didn’t really think about the value of community. I was young and dumb and lost in searching for my place.

“Then I heard about the BBMAs and I put in an application — somehow it got approved.”

“By receiving that award as a student, it helped validate who I was and showed that I meant something. It made me confident in being a Métis person on campus,” added Kerr.

“But here’s the really cool thing about being Métis: you are descended from revolutionaries and rebels, strong matriarchal leaders, and people who kept culture, language and most importantly, the dream of a better future for generations of Métis people.”

Noelle Antonsen, a past award recipient and midwifery student, said of her journey with BBMA, “Midwifery students spend over half of their degree on placements all over Alberta. While on placement



Noelle Antonsen and Connor Kerr are recipients of Belcourt Brosseau Metis Awards who expressed their appreciation at the 2019 Sash Awards Gala.

we must have a reliable vehicle, we have to purchase medical supplies, we have to relocate every few months for our next placement, and we have to follow the on-call schedule of registered mid-wives.”

“Due to the cost associated with this, I would be unable to continue my studies without the help of the BBMA,” explained Antonsen.

“Currently, Indigenous people in Canada experience poorer health outcomes, especially when it comes to reproductive healthcare, pregnancy, and birth — this is frequently justified by these groups being categorized as high-risk. I find this classification short-sighted, especially considering out knowledge of the socio-economic determinate of health.”

“I believe that it is important for Métis people to become educated and to proudly share who we are,” she concluded.

If you are a Métis student needing help to pay your tuition apply to the BBMAs for studies beginning in the 2022-23 academic year. The application is now open online at www.bbma.ca. March 31 is the Deadline.



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Building an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem for Alberta Women

Work is underway to build a more inclusive and efficient entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Alberta.

Recognizing the opportunity to leverage the combined strength of entrepreneurial services, resources, and expertise across Alberta, Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, and 68 entrepreneurial service organizations took a collective impact approach to better address the barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs through the Strengthening Partnerships Initiative. The initiative recently released an Impact Report – *Leveraging Economic Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in Alberta* outlining the work done and the recommendations to move forward.

Launched in January 2020, the individuals and organizations involved in Strengthening Partnerships

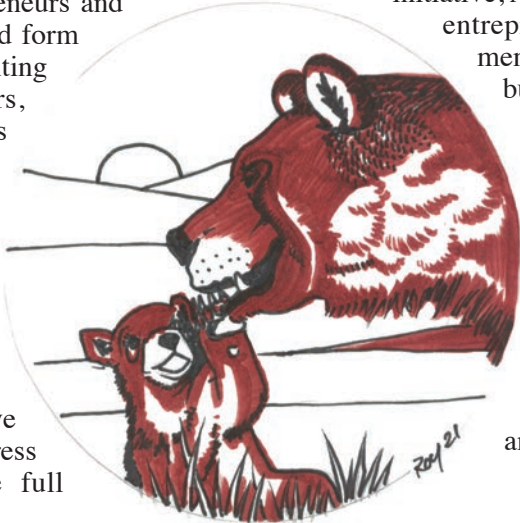
shared the common agenda of identifying the challenges for women entrepreneurs and solving them using a structured form of collaboration. After consulting with diverse stakeholders, including women entrepreneurs across Alberta, a steering committee from diverse organizations was formed to undertake high-level visioning, set the strategic direction, and provide the leadership required to ensure success.

“With the work done, we have the opportunity to fully address the barriers and unlock the full

potential of women entrepreneurs,” said Marcela Mandeville, CEO of Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE). “We know we are on the right path, and we will continue to work together to build a powerful future with the support of leaders from across Alberta.”

Along with the Strengthening Partnerships initiative, AWE has worked with thousands of entrepreneurs through coaching, mentorship, leadership development, business advising, access to capital, and access to networks over the last 26 years.

To learn more about the work done by AWE and read the entire Impact Report, visit www.awebusiness.com. The work done by Strengthening Partnerships was made possible because of the funding support from the Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada.



Blockades *cont. from p 4*

referred to an Indigenous protest in 2020 and 2021, in which the Alberta government was swift to target largely Indigenous protesters for showing solidarity with land defenders in BC and Ontario.

When a rail line was blocked in Edmonton, the province was quick to pass *Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act*, and police immediately moved to enforce it, arresting Indigenous individuals who were peacefully protesting. Calls for the rule of law were loud from the Alberta government.

“Yet, the rule of law doesn’t appear to apply to the (current) occupiers,” said the statement. “There is little to no enforcement while critical infrastructure is blocked, hate speech, intimidation and defacing property is allowed to continue.”

UBCIC Chief Stewart Phillip noted that “the racist double-standard in policing in this country is on full display — had these protesters been Indigenous, the

police would have cleared them out in a heartbeat.”

Mikisew Nation Chief Peter Powder stated: “We are troubled by what is happening in southern Alberta and across the country. The occupations show the racism in the way that government and law enforcement deal with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people protesting.

“Our people are overrepresented across the criminal justice system, from victims of crime to over-incarceration. The law applies unequally to our people, who receive criminal records for minor offences, while we watch occupiers violate the law without any consequence.”

It is important to recognize the disparity between how Indigenous and non-indigenous protests are approached by our government, stated the Athabasca Fort Chipewyan Chief and Council. “It is shocking to see this blatant disparity as we watch the complete government inaction to address the blockade at Coutts.

“If peaceful protests of critical infrastructure at Coutts is allowed, then we expect the same to be true in the future should Indigenous people engage in similar forms of protest.”

The First Nations Leadership Council calls for a stronger response to the escalating and gross displays of aggression that comprise the convoy and calls on Canada to treat and prosecute racist attacks and hate speech as the crimes they are.

“The path out of this awful pandemic is to continue to allow medical science to dictate health mandates and protocols, not caving in to misguided protests born out of frustration, hate and racism. Canadians must band together to support and protect health care workers and first responders who have consistently stepped up and exposed themselves to higher risks on a daily basis to protect Canadians,” concluded Cheryl Casimer.

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Pipon Village at the 'Deep Freeze' Festival in Edmonton included six tipis which featured traditional Indigenous activities. Lauroncia Tootoosis-Janvier and 7 month old Reevan pose for this photo with Merrick Hall at their crafts table. Photos by Terry Lusty

Warm weather welcomes YEG Deep Freeze event

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This year's *Deep Freeze: A Byzantine Winter Fete*, was held from Jan. 14-24 along 118th Avenue in northeast Edmonton. No matter one's age, the event truly had something for everyone.

Festival goers enjoyed slippin' and slidin' down a mountain of snow. Some could be seen around an open wood-fed fire pit roasting hotdogs and marshmallows or around a table dabbling in various forms of artwork or craftmaking. Or wearing snowshoes strapped snugly onto their footwear, just like the trappers of an earlier golden age.

Many were seen smiling and laughing on a large horse-drawn wagon that is a popular mainstay of the beloved winter festival which celebrated its 15th anniversary this year.

In addition to the children's activities, visitors could

try traditional Indigenous games such as hoop and ring or tap their toes to the electrifying fiddle tunes of Indigenous fiddler Brianna Lizotte or the veteran fiddler "extraordinaire" Calvin Volrath. Or they could go one block westward to the Carrot Cafe where Indigenous singer-musician Jay Gilday, among others, also entertained the visitors who stopped in for a hot cup of coffee and a friendly atmosphere.

Around the corner of 93rd Street south of 118th Avenue, short films were rolling off the reels at St. Faith's Anglican Church on January 22nd.

Of the six tipis set up at Pipon Village where most of the cultural events took place, two of the canvas covered lodges hosted the artistic crafts of Indigenous artisans. Another tipi featured the unique finger weaving prowess of craftmakers producing traditional sashes. As well, there was Tim Moreland, another talented artisan whose blacksmithing skills were on display, a trade of yesteryear that has been handed down through the generations and Tim's family line, to the tradesmen of today.

Shadow art ice sculptures, traditional Native cooking, and other activities were also held onsite.

For those who participated, it proved an opportunity to experience these traditions at no personal cost other than the expenditure of one's time and energy to be the "creator" of something new, something different, something wonderful.

In addition to the activities at the Pipon Village and the Carrot Café, further east at Borden Park, was a raft of additional, interesting visually pleasing attractions.

To the delight of its visitors, this site hosted the ever-popular fireworks at the park's soccer field. As well, various forms of art installations came to life through such mediums as lights, sounds, lantern art, poetry, storytelling, songs and dance, and ice sculptures.

All of this was made possible through the tireless efforts of dozens of artists, creators, and skilled individuals who graciously share their talents each year. And one cannot forget the innumerable volunteers who contribute to the success of the annual event as well as the many sponsors and funders, including organizations like Amiskwaciy Academy, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and Metis Child, Family and Community Services in addition to dozens of other services and organizations that generously contribute.

This year, 2022, the Deep Freeze was amply blessed by the Creator who blanketed the annual festivities with above-average plus temperatures that are generally a rarity during the usual sub-zero climatic period of an Alberta January.



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MMIWG *cont. from p 6*

of Treaty & Aboriginal Land Stewards Association of Alberta, Chair for Town of Ponoka Economic Development Board, and a member of the Ponoka Youth Centre Board.

When talking about her role as a committee member for the AJWG Life-Yeomans explained, “It was an extensive process of examining what is happening currently and what are suggested improvements.

“We gathered the input of family members and advocates through engagements conducted by IAAW and Awo Taan Healing Lodge, reaching out to groups for absent perspectives and an online survey.”

She said by addressing the calls for justice, society as a whole can participate in creating an Alberta where Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people are valued, respected, and are safe to lead lives filled with hope and promise.

She added, “Over 46 full-day meetings or 337 hours and 100 hours + of preparation time was given by members for this process. The final report contains over 100 recommended actions in several areas. The report was presented to the three Ministers on December 23 and currently, it is in review.”

Professionally, Life-Yeomans has 25 years of experience working with First Nation communities focusing on Aboriginal Consultation, Lands, Policies, Economic Development, and Governance which included the Government of British Columbia, The Alberta Government, Six Nations, Cowichan Tribes, Khowutzun Development Corporation, Enoch Cree Nation, Montana First Nation, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, and Town of Ponoka.

She’s achieved a master’s degree in Business, a bachelor’s degree in Law, Indigenous Corporate Relations Diploma, and an Indigenous Governance Diploma. Her educational endeavours include many certifications – most recently a Technician Level Certification for Cando’s Certified Aboriginal Economic Developer.

Life-Yeomans explained that COVID-19 health and safety measures impacted in-person meetings for AJWG, however, the meaningful work continued through the pandemic. This resulted in a nine-month extension for AJWG, which was granted by the Government of Alberta to thoroughly examine the issues and come up with recommendations.

“Our goal is to collaboratively build an Alberta where Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples are valued, respected, and are safe,” she added. “We fully understand it will require system change at a number of different levels and therefore, it can’t be just government alone.”

According to Life-Yeomans, lived experience by survivors, and families must take the lead and be a high priority in actions and any solutions that are implemented. “For far too long, Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA have been thought of only as recipients of services. There are many fully qualified Indigenous women who can lead this necessary change.”

Life-Yeomans shared her personal story with *ANNews*. “My mother was raised in NWT but did not live with her family for very long; she was put into residential school and then was adopted into a white family (60’s scoop). She ended up in an abusive relationship and left NWT for BC,” explained Life-Yeomans.

“She met my father and had two children with him, my brother and me, but she could not escape her pain. She was addicted to alcohol and drugs, and my father ended up with us. She married another addict, and she was physically and mentally abused by him for years. She left him, but was again in another abusive relationship, this time she almost died.”

“Throughout all these years, my mom was missing,” said Life-Yeomans. “I did not learn of these events until I was older. She spent many years in the bad parts of Vancouver (East Hastings); she was almost murdered and was put into witness protection. She would call me once in a while, high or drunk, and tell me how she wanted her funeral and what songs to play.

“She passed away four years ago this coming June. I always say her spirit died back in residential school, as she was severely abused both sexually, mentally, and physically. My mom loved her children and grandchildren with all her heart. She stopped drinking when I was in my 20s but stayed addicted to prescription drugs; she could never outrun her pain.”

Life-Yeomans had her mother in her thoughts the whole time that she was sitting on the AJWG and developing the recommendations. “She is one of the reasons I have such a strong voice. I hope that she is proud of me and not mad that I have shared her tragic story.”

Life-Yeomans said that her time working on the AJWG was very emotional and brought up painful memories. “I know I am fortunate in that my mom was not murdered and I had her longer than some.”



Suzanne Life-Yeomans and Minister of Indigenous Relations Rick Wilson at the walk to remember and raise awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children. Photo by Darlene Hildebrandt.

She commends Alberta Minister of Indigenous Relations Rick Wilson for his support of the AJWG. “He was a strong force and was supporting us throughout the whole process,” she said. “He has a great team that helped organize all our meetings, took notes, kept us on track and met all our needs.”

“There are many organizations throughout Alberta that support MMIWG2S+ and we will continue to work with them,” she added. “I firmly believe that the GOA has been hearing us and will continue to hear us going into the future.”

“I encourage all Albertans to learn more about MMIWG2S+ and educate your children, as this issue is not going anywhere,” concluded Life-Yeomans. “We all need to be part of the solution as it affects us all.”

The Alberta government recently received the MMIW working group’s final report and the province is now reviewing the report to study their recommendations and determine the next steps.

Métis and Jews in Canada
A Conversation

Monday, March 7 @ 4:00 pm MST
Live Zoom Presentation and Q&A

David S. Koffman is the J. Richard Shiff Chair for the Study of Canadian Jewry in the Department of History at York University.

Paul L. Gareau is Métis and is an associate professor in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta.

This dialogue - between a scholar of Métis life and a scholar of Jewish history – begins by unpacking the strange results of the 2016 Canadian Census, which mistakenly showed that the number of Métis people doubled since the previous census, while the number of Jews in Canada fell by half during the same time. The two scholars will then move to ask questions of one another about the nature of difference, identity, and racialization in Canada using these two groups as case studies, about what Métis Studies and Jewish Studies have to offer one another, and about how the two communities speak both to and past one another.

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Our cover artist: Tattooist Don Ward JR.

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The striking image on the cover of this month’s Alberta Native News is by Don Ward JR - a successful Edmonton-based tattoo artist who comes from a family of artisans. He is the proud owner of Styles Inkz – the name is derived from when he was a break-dancer known as Styles in the ’90s. He is a multi-talented Cree artisan from Enoch Cree Nation who in addition to tattoos, creates low-rider cars, airbrushing, and various native arts and crafts.

Ward JR is part of a growing number of Indigenous tattoo artists reclaiming their ancestral craft in tattoos, that have long been part of Canadian Indigenous culture and tradition. He is diligently working to preserve important tattoo techniques that are deeply embedded within Indigenous culture.

Ward JR has been tattooing since 1994, at the age of 14. Creating art helped him survive through a turbulent childhood, he said, and it continues to be a healing force.

There have been moments in his life when he’s struggled with addiction, and he felt lost, but “I picked up that paintbrush and I would create,” he said.

“I never thought tattooing would be the extent that it is today – my life revolves around it. I feel proud to show the world what I can do... It’s a freedom for me.”

Although he is the first tattoo artist of the family, Ward JR. says he inherited most of his art genes from his father who was a gifted Indigenous artisan.

“My late father was a sketch artist and he inspired me to be an artist,” he said, “and he had tattoos. I wanted to be like my dad – Donald Bruce Ward SR. I wanted to have a tattoo like my dad. He plays a huge inspiration behind my interest in cars, art, and crafts.”

Tattooing takes passion and that is something Ward JR lives by. “I don’t look at tattooing as something taboo,” he explained, rather it is something that represents you as an individual.

“Every tattoo on your body represents something in your life that you have gone through or you’re working towards,” he said.

Most people get tattoos to respond to a personal journey in their life and it has meaning to the individual getting the tattoo. Then there are those people that get trend tattoos – which Ward JR does not recommend. “Trend dies out and your tattoos won’t be meaningful forever,” he said.

“I’m close within our Indigenous culture when it comes to tattooing,” he explained. He works with his clients to make sure they get the right tattoo. “I try to reach into their imagination and pull it out. Where they basically get the tattoo that they thought of, but I created.”

He said that Indigenous people have lost a lot of culture due to the impacts of colonialism, racism, and cultural genocide. Historically Indigenous people created tattoos that represent sacred ceremonies, rites of passage, and sacred rituals. When a Cree person reached adulthood, they would go through ceremony and after the ceremony, they would get a tattoo to represent their Nation and Clan, he explained.

As a result of “everything our people have gone through we have lost a lot of our ancestors’ history, and many have forgotten,” said Ward JR.

Artists are re-learning the culture of Indigenous tattoo art and it’s part of an overall resurgence in reclaiming our history and Nationhood markers, he said.

Ward JR started creating art when he just a child. It was a form of escapism from a turbulent childhood.

He said, “Home life wasn’t good. My parents were drinking, and I would put myself away in the corner of the house and create art.”

“Painting saved my life as a child. Growing up in an alcoholic family, art was my escape from that world.”

He said when he had no one else to talk to he would pick up a paintbrush. “You can lose yourself in art where you don’t even feel like you are on this planet anymore,” said Ward JR.

His message to Indigenous youth is: “Don’t let anything stop you from getting what you want. Your dreams are always there as long as you want to




Tattoo artist Don Ward Jr.

get there.”

He offers some safety tips for those thinking of getting a tattoo. You need to ensure that your tattoo artist is up to code and standards to prevent bloodborne pathogens which are infectious microorganisms in human blood that can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include but are not limited to, hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Needlesticks and other sharps-related injuries may expose workers to bloodborne pathogens. Visit My Alberta for safety tips on Tattoo and Piercing Safety.

For more information visit [styles_inkz](#) on Instagram, Don Ward JR on Facebook or email donward79@gmail.com.



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