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# ISU expands its services for Indigenous students at UAlberta

By Deena Goodrunning, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Indigenous Students' Union (ISU) is a student group at the University of Alberta that advocates for and represents Indigenous students on campus. Formerly known as the Aboriginal Student Council, ISU first began in the 1970s at the University of Alberta with the formation of the Native Students Club. Since then, ISU has had many Indigenous students at the University of Alberta come across its path.

On May 23 the current president of the ISU, Sophie Martel, spoke with *ANNews* and shared information on some of ISU's many events and services. Martel is an Indigenous student originally from Onion Lake Cree Nation and is currently majoring in Criminology.

"The ISU is a student-run and led volunteer group that was built on advocacy for Indigenous students and then we got bigger to the point where we could become a Student Representative Association," Martel explained. "Which means that we get funding so we can actually run events and provide scholarships."

The funding ISU receives comes from DFU's (Dedicated Fee Units) that are fees paid by students when they pay their tuition. Students can opt out of paying the ISU DFU fee, but the fees go towards providing services for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at the University of Alberta.

When asked about services that ISU provides, Martel spoke about the ISU lounge located on campus at the North Power Plant. The ISU lounge is intended to be a safe space for students to hang out and study. The lounge features a community fridge and kitchen stocked with groceries and snacks for students to enjoy.

She said that ISU offers scholarships and childcare bursaries to students. They also provide grant funding for students and students' groups on campus that want to hold cultural and educational Indigenous events.

Over the years, ISU has hosted and planned many events on campus for students. In the 1990s, ISU (then known as the Aboriginal

Student Council) hosted traditional pow wows at the Butterdome.

This past year, ISU has organised a variety of different events. In September 2023, they organised and hosted the third annual Residential Schools Memorial in conjunction with the University of Alberta Students' Union.

ISU also helped plan the third annual Indigenous Celebration Week, which featured performances by Juno award-winning singers The Bearhead sisters and a keynote speech by *Reservations Dogs* actress Paulina Alexis.

They also organised and hosted an Indigenous Awards Celebration Night that took place in March 2024 that celebrated Indigenous students who have won awards from the university. The event included throat-singing by Jana Angulalik and Kristen Tologanak, a jigging performance by an ISU member Kenton Alook, and a musical performance by Juno award nominee Cikwes.

Some other events and activities they've hosted for students include beading workshops, poetry nights and movie nights. They also have the Otâpasinahikêw Art Community, an art club based out of ISU where activities have included workshops on rock carving and learning how to make corn earrings. Otâpasinahikêw translates to "artist who creates" in Cree. Martel additionally mentioned that the ISU hosts many Cree focused cultural events and activities, and that she would like to have more activities like Mohawk, Dene, and Blackfoot cultural activities for students who aren't Cree.

When asked about what she would like to accomplish for ISU next year, Martel said: "I think of it in terms of what can we do as a team. And as a team, I'm really hoping that we can start to branch out and connect to more Indigenous students on campus that don't know we exist, connect to other faculties and other Indigenous subgroups so that we can start being able to help



ISU President Sophie Martel honours actress Paulina Alexis with a Starblanket during Indigenous Celebration Week.

students on a larger scale. It's not something I'm sure we'll be able to fully accomplish within the next year, but I'm hoping that leads down a path of being able to connect Indigenous student groups across campus and across Canada."

Martel said that her favourite part about ISU "is being able to take part in such great events and being able to connect with different people across campus -- as well as being able to be part of an advocacy group that helps fight for Indigenous rights, both on and off campus."

When asked about challenges facing ISU, Martel said, "I think one of the biggest challenges right now is not being quite big enough for the university [to] take us more seriously. I think that we are able to have protests and have our voices heard, but that the bigger we get and the more voices we can add, the more we would be able to actually have the university listen and be able to move forward with positive change, like actually [having the university] follow their *Braided Past, Present and Future: Indigenous Strategic Plan*. Because so far as I've seen and as much as I've read through it, there's a lot of promises that have been made that haven't been followed through with."

Martel said that if students would like to learn more about ISU or become more involved, they could drop by the lounge, email ISU ([acouncil@ualberta.ca](mailto:acouncil@ualberta.ca)) or sign up to their newsletter. When asked about any last things she would like to say, Martel said: "I want people to know that we're definitely wanting to expand and be a bigger presence on campus -- to be able to work and connect and build relationships with other student groups, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous."

Learn more about the Indigenous Student Union at their official Instagram account [@indigenous.su](https://www.instagram.com/indigenous.su) or at their official website address: [www.indigenoustudentsunion.com/](http://www.indigenoustudentsunion.com/)



Happy National Indigenous Peoples Day!

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# Dene songbird Rebecca Strong wins Canada's Got Talent

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Hey Canada! Wake up, look around, listen up! There's a new kid on the block. A young Indigenous lady, who became a millionaire last month by winning *Canada's Got Talent*.

The gal in question, a 20 year-youngster from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, has truly been breaking ground having recently won the 2024 *Canada's Got Talent* television competition. Her name is Rebecca Strong; she is a member of the Black Lake Denesuline First Nation, originally from Stony Rapids. She wowed her voting audience, including CGT judges Howie Mandel, Lilly Singh, Kardinal Offishall and Trish Stratus.

Indeed, this lady proved she has it all together as she proceeded from the March 27th opening round, where judge Lilly Singh gave her a huge stamp of approval by immediately slamming down her hand and hitting the Golden Buzzer. That set off a golden shower of flakes and automatically moved her forward to the May 7th finals in Niagara Falls, Ontario! Plus, it gifted her an automatic 25,000 dollars!

Once the May 14th Finale rolled around, Strong was ready and didn't disappoint as she covered one of Adele's great numbers, *Rollin' in The Deep*. Not only did she demonstrate her superb vocal abilities, she also blew away her competition, with quality and control - the usual standards for long-established, seasoned artists. The audience was spellbound.

An "incredible performance" was the description applied by judge Offishall! "Sensational," chipped in another. As for Strong, she was so overwhelmed with her win when they announced her name that she immediately threw her two hands up and over her mouth in shock, just trembling in disbelief.

"I'm feeling amazing... it's unbelievable...it

hasn't kicked in yet!" she exclaimed.

"Thank you, Rogers, and thank you to everyone who voted for me. Thank you to my family and friends and everyone back home. Thank you so much, Marsi Cho."

Strong has worked hard to get where she is vocally. She practices every day, but overall, singing is "my passion," she said. It's all she ever wants to do.

The main reason she first entered CGT was because she wished to set an example for other Indigenous youth to "follow their dreams."

"Indigenous people are so talented in the arts," she remarked. "I want to inspire them to put themselves out there."

Down the road she hopes to do more touring and "just share my music with the whole world," she explained. And because she enjoys writing some of her own material, she plans to do more of that as well as have "time with my family, celebrate," and prepare new content for future performances.

Then, too, there's her desire to help her family, buy some recording equipment, build a studio, and purchase a new vehicle - "a hoppin' truck," she exclaimed emphatically!

She said she was so appreciative of the support shown her throughout the competition. The contest kicked off on Tuesday, March 19th with 116 different acts in total and wrapped up on May 14th. This was the first time it featured the grand sum of one million dollars to the winner and the first time that an Indigenous person won. Primary sponsors included Rogers, CIBC and Tim Horton's.

Strong was welcomed home in Prince Albert on May 2 with an emotional reception attended by Mayor Greg Dionne, and chiefs representing the



Canada's Got Talent winner Rebecca Strong.

Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations (FSIN) and Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC).

"It's a big day for all of us," FSIN vice-chief David Pratt said, expressing the pride and happiness that the community felt in support of Rebecca and her family.

"I really want to acknowledge our young champion here. Our children need heroes...and you are a hero to all of our kids. You inspired not only First Nations children, but even non-First Nations...You fill our young people with hopes and dreams ... That lets our young people know, they can stand on that stage, too."

Strong performed three songs for the crowd of 750 people at the Prince Albert Exhibition Centre and was honoured by being wrapped in a Star Blanket by the PAGC Chiefs.

Fans will have opportunities to see her live at upcoming events this summer. She will be performing at halftime during the Canadian Elite Basketball League game on June 20, as the Saskatchewan Rattlers take on the Calgary Surge and mark First Nations Night at SaskTel Centre in Saskatoon.

"We are incredibly excited to have an international recording star from Saskatchewan perform at our First Nations Night," Lee Genier, the team's president, said in a statement.

"We welcome all communities around Saskatchewan to celebrate with us ahead of National Indigenous Peoples Day."



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# Connecting Indigenous entrepreneurship with cultural rejuvenation

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In the vast expanses of Southern Alberta, amidst the ancestral territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, J. Nathan Rainy Chief emerges as a guiding force for Indigenous entrepreneurship and cultural rejuvenation. Descending from the Kainai First Nation, Rainy Chief's journey is deeply ingrained in his Indigenous lineage, tracing back to the revered chiefs of his tribe during the signing of Treaty 7.

Rainy Chief's upbringing resonates with the profound traditions passed down by his forebears. He fondly reminisces about the influence of his great-great-grandmother, Rosie Davis, an esteemed elder and masterful beadwork artisan. Her enduring legacy, showcased in museums across North America, stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Blackfoot people.

49 Native Design Inc., the brainchild of J. Nathan Rainy Chief and his partner, began not as a planned business venture but as a serendipitous opportunity. Rainy Chief was recently honoured with a 2023 Indigenous Business Builder Series award by the Aboriginal Community Features in Calgary. This prestigious recognition is bestowed upon prominent business leaders in the Southern Alberta region.

"49 Design, at the very beginning, was never really meant to be a business," explained Rainy Chief. "My partner created a pea coat on Facebook, and someone asked, 'Can you make one? I'll pay you,' and that's how it started." This spontaneous start has evolved into a mission-driven enterprise that emphasizes cultural authenticity and community support.

Initially starting in Kansas, the founders' vision has grown substantially. "49 Native Design Inc. actually started in Kansas, and my partner and I decided to partner together and create the business. We combined our talents, and I helped with growing it into a business," recounted Rainy Chief. He highlighted the importance of collaboration, stating, "You achieve a lot more when you build each other."

The decision to base their operations in Canada rather than the U.S. was strategic. "We see a lot

more potential in Canada than we do in the States," said Rainy Chief. Opening a business, especially one rooted in cultural authenticity, comes with significant financial challenges. "We didn't want to just start a storefront. We were trying to get enough capital, and it costs a lot to open a business, like a lot."

Supporting local businesses and the Canadian economy has been a cornerstone of their strategy. "In order to support business, you have to support local, and that's how you make the Canadian eco-nomy thrive. It's the most influential way you can support businesses," noted Rainy Chief. The company's focus on identity and culture is clear in their approach: "We cultivate our audiences and then ask them what they want, and then we provide that need in an authentic, culturally appropriate way."

Rainy Chief shared insights into their cross-border experiences, emphasizing their commitment to their roots. "We are a bunch of prairie boys going down to the States, and it's a totally different culture down there," he said. Despite these influences, they moved back to Canada to ensure their business stayed true to its roots.

One of their key missions is to promote authenticity and proper representation of Indigenous culture. "That's what we're pushing for – authenticity, representation, and Indigenous-owned content led by the community," emphasized Rainy Chief.

49 Design aims to offer more than just products; they strive to create experiences and educational opportunities. "We love having to refresh ourselves with new ideas, and that's why we have a store that invites people in interactive ways," said Rainy Chief. Their store serves as a space for contemporary Indigenous people to find culturally appropriate activewear and other items.

Their commitment to authenticity is evident in their design process. "If you look at our designs, they're really rich in culture. These are authentic, culturally appropriate designs. We did the work to make sure that the community respects us and that we respect the community," explained Rainy



Photo: 49dzine.ca.

Chief. This mutual respect is why they invite artists into their store, fostering a reciprocal relationship.

Educational initiatives are a crucial part of 49 Design's offerings. "We are offering classes in our stores because it's about culture in motion and identity. We are serving people who are living their lives and Indigenous people who want culturally appropriate access to culture," said Rainy Chief. They provide ribbon skirt kits and classes on how to make them, addressing a gap in accessible information, especially in urban centers.

Their efforts are about more than just selling products; they aim to connect traditional families and urban centers, preserving authenticity. "It's about authenticity and access," emphasized Rainy Chief.

49 Design is optimistic about the future of Indigenous identity. "Right now is a good time to be Indigenous. There's just an awakening of our people," said Rainy Chief. They believe that despite past efforts to suppress Indigenous culture, there is now a hunger for identity. "People are craving identity after Canada robbed Indigenous people of their identity," he noted.

49 Design is more than a business; it's a mission to support local economies, promote authentic cultural representation, and provide educational opportunities that honour and preserve Indigenous traditions. Their journey from a small, unexpected start to a flourishing business underscores the power of community, collaboration, and cultural pride.

Since taking ownership of 49 Design, Nathan has driven the company's expansion to international markets and earned a feature in the *Wall Street Journal*. His journey, marked by resilience as a former residential school attendee, saw 49 Design launch its first physical store in Calgary in 2020. After building success with an online e-commerce business for three years, this expansion continued with the opening of a second storefront in Edmonton in 2021, further cementing 49 Design's presence in the retail sector and crediting Edmonton's community for supporting his business. For more information, check out 49dzine.ca.

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# Beauty Queen spotlights the beauty of Indigenous peoples and culture

By Deena Goodrunning, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Indigenous beauty shines everywhere on Turtle Island, and one example of a shining Indigenous beauty is Hailey Hamelin-Wilson. Originally from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, Hamelin-Wilson now lives in Edmonton where she is pursuing a History degree at the University of Alberta.

But academia is only one of Hamelin-Wilson’s numerous pursuits and passions. She’s also a student ambassador, a model, a jingle dress and fancy shawl dancer, an artist, a TikTokker and an activist - and she is a pageant queen.

Only 23 years old, Hamelin-Wilson has held many pageant titles including Miss Teen Canadian Teenager International 2020, Miss Canada Globe 2021, Miss Tourism International Canada 2022 and Miss Charity International Canada 2023. She placed fourth runner up at Miss Globe 2021, out of 50 contestants from across the world. Most recently Hamelin-Wilson has qualified to compete at Miss World Canada 2024, which will take place in Toronto this August. If Hamelin-Wilson wins, she can compete at Miss World, one of the most prestigious and internationally known beauty pageants across the globe.

There has only ever been one other Indigenous woman crowned Miss World Canada: Emma Morrison from Chapleau Cree Nation. Morrison made history in 2022 as the first Indigenous woman to be awarded the title of Miss World Canada.

In an interview with *ANNews*, Hamelin-Wilson spoke about pow wow dancing, modeling and pageantry.

In 2023 she founded the Pow Wow Dance club at the University of Alberta. “Pow wow dancing

is something that I grew up around and I’ve been very passionate about it. When I came to university, I didn’t know too many other people who also pow wow dance so I thought that making a club would be a great opportunity for other pow wow people who want to join. Especially students, because I noticed a lot of students want to dance and they just don’t know where or how to start, or they don’t know anybody. There’s a lot of people who are reconnecting - so it’s a really great opportunity for people to explore their culture and meet other people.”

Hamelin-Wilson is also an artist and enjoys creating regalia and beadwork. On TikTok she creates tutorials on how to make traditional beadwork and regalia for those wanting to learn, and she also makes an income through taking and selling orders for her beadwork and regalia creations.

She became involved in modeling and pageantry after moving to Edmonton as a teenager. While some people dismiss pageantry as useless, Hamelin-Wilson pointed out that pageantry provides many opportunities and can open many doors. It provides Hamelin-Wilson with a platform to spread more awareness and advocate for causes she is passionate about, such as the beauty of Indigenous culture and the issues Indigenous peoples face.

Hamelin-Wilson spoke about wanting to advocate for Indigenous peoples at Miss World Canada. “[Miss World Canada] will be my fifth pageant and I really feel like I can do this, because it’s [a platform where] I can bring more awareness to myself and my community. And I really want to speak about issues such as



MMIW, because, a lot of people internationally don’t even know that Indigenous people exist - so it’s a good opportunity to bring awareness.”

Through her pageantry Hamelin-Wilson has been given opportunities to travel to the Philippines, Albania and Malaysia where she has strived to provide positive representation and a voice for Indigenous peoples.

When asked about challenges she has had, Hamelin-Wilson mentioned being bullied, cyberbullied and dealing with people who dismiss the hard work that she puts into pageantry.

“There’s been times where I’ve spent all of my money just to go to a pageant and I’ve just had so many sleepless nights working really hard so I

Continued on page 8

# The journey ahead

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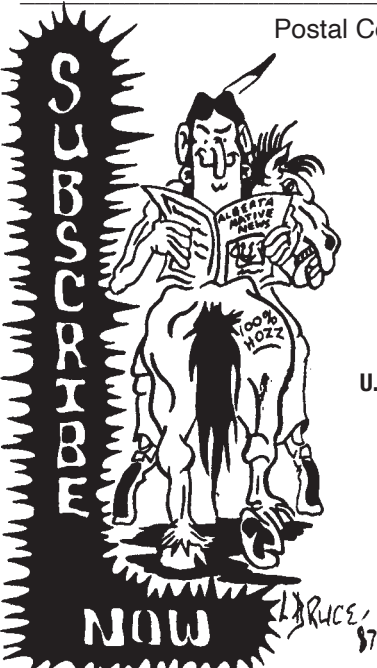
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# Convicted murderer Robert Pickton dies in prison but questions remain

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

One of Canada's most notorious serial killers is gone. Permanently!

On May 31st, the 74-year-old 'pig farmer' Robert Pickton died while in a coma at a Quebec hospital after he was violently assaulted by a fellow inmate in the maximum-security Port-Cartier Institution, approximately 280 Km northeast of Quebec City.

The villain from Port Coquitlam, B.C. was charged with murdering at least 26 women, mostly of Indigenous ancestry, on his huge multi-million-dollar pig farm where he and his brother often hosted huge booze and drug-infested parties attended by at-risk, vulnerable women from Vancouver's Eastside drag area.

Apparently, the unsuspecting victims were often picked up along the drag after the bars closed, then invited, lured or coerced to accompany Pickton and his friends to the pig farm for a late night of partying and entertainment. Despite many, many years of continued female disappearances which police and authorities have been severely criticized about, especially by Indigenous people and organizations, the justice system seems to have failed the people miserably, turned a blind eye and ignored innumerable complaints and pleas for justice.

Finally, in 2002, Pickton was arrested and tried for six of the murders, convicted in 2007 of all cases and sentenced to life without parole for 25 years. Then, within the past year, when Pickton was seeking to acquire day parole, a 51-year-old unidentified inmate at his prison in Quebec assaulted him on May 17, stabbing him in the neck with the sharpened end of a toothbrush, then the pointed portion of a broken broom handle to his head. The as-yet unnamed assailant was promptly arrested and Pickton was rushed to hospital where he was placed in a medically-induced coma, but never regained consciousness before his untimely passing while still in the coma.

As ugly as this may sound, nobody could have been happier than his victims' families who for many years had not recovered from the trauma and impact of their missing or murdered relatives. That said, however, one needs to look at the other side of the coin.

Some relatives have informed media that they feel "he didn't suffer enough" for all the harm he'd caused and they wished he'd have lived out his normal life till he died in jail. To them, so many people have to carry on with their lives, burdened

with the memories, pain and trauma of the many untried court cases as well as the recent attempts by Canada's RCMP to rid themselves of many thousands of pieces of related evidence. And this is especially heartbreaking given the fact Pickton is now deceased.

Still, there are those not totally satisfied because so many were unable to get their day in court, to provide impact statements and extend their feelings of how horribly wronged they feel for the lack of closure or finality or some form of resolution. It is why they continue to struggle and beg for justice. They still seek answers, they still want to uncover if there were others who worked on the farm and likely had knowledge of the murders, and were, thus, accomplices of sorts... especially Robert's own brother. There is the very strong belief that Pickton did not act alone and that there are others who were more than aware of the gruesome murders.

While Pickton was awaiting trial and in jail, he is reported to have claimed that he was responsible for 49 killings and wished he could have made it an "even 50."

Despite his demise, many victims and survivors still clamor for justice, for closure, for answers, investigations and retention of the 40,000 pieces of evidence in police holdings. This evidence, it is felt, could be critical to eventually identifying other involved persons who have never been charged or convicted to this point in time.

As a reporter, I have been told by some victims who managed to escape Pickton's clutches, that a lot of the women murdered and missing were abducted by the pig farmer and some were drugged to render them harmless before hauling them off to the farm.

So, yes, while it appears the case is ended because Pickton is gone for good, what's not gone are the victims' families, the unanswered questions, unresolved and continuing disappearances, the re-examination and restructuring of the judicial system and the potential prevention of similar situations in future.

This all raises the huge question of who else was involved, are there absolutely no accessories to the murders, and have police and investigators truly exhausted all possibilities?? I, for one, think not!

What about you, our readers? What do you think?



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# Report: Drug poisoning crisis has disproportionate impact on First Nations

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

First Nations people continue dying of drug poisoning at a disproportionate rate compared to the non-First Nations population, according to the latest surveillance report from the Alberta government and the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre.

Despite making up just 3.6 per cent of the population in Alberta, First Nations people represent 20 per cent of all apparent unintentional opioid poisoning deaths in the province from 2016 to 2022, the May 2024 report found.

That percentage increased from 14 per cent of all unintentional opioid poisoning deaths in 2016 to 24 per cent in 2022.

For First Nations people, the rate of apparent unintentional opioid poisoning per 100,000 people reached a height of 224 in 2021, compared to 26 for the non-First Nations population, before declining to 205 in 2022, compared to 24 for the non-First Nations population.

This eight percent decline in the opioid poisoning rate among the First Nations population, the report noted, is still within the survey's margin of error, and occurs within the context of a 366 per cent increase overall from 2016 to 2022. By contrast, the rate increased 113 per cent for non-First Nations people in the same time frame.

Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, a family physician at the Blood Tribe Medical Clinic on the Kainai reserve in Standoff, Alta., told *Alberta Native News* that the report shows the UCP government's approach to the drug poisoning crisis is a failure.

In 2019, the UCP's first year in power, there was an "immediate spike in mortality" for First Nations people who experienced drug poisoning, Dr. Tailfeathers noted, with the rate per 100,000 people increasing to 70 from 62, while the rate decreased for non-First Nations people to 11 from 16.

From 2019 to 2021, the opioid poisoning mortality rate skyrocketed for First Nations people to 224 from 70—a 219 per cent increase—whereas for non-First Nations people it increased to 26 from 11—a 136 per cent increase.

"There should be somebody saying, 'what are we doing wrong here?' And there is nobody saying that," said Tailfeathers.

In 2022, 41 per cent of unintentional opioid overdose deaths among First Nations people were in Edmonton and 23 per cent were in Calgary. For non-First Nations people, 36 per cent occurred in Edmonton and 37 per cent in Calgary.

Eight per cent of accidental opioid poisoning deaths among First Nations people occurred in Lethbridge, with another eight per cent occurring elsewhere in Alberta Health Services' South Zone, which includes Blood Tribe. For non-First

Nations people, those figures were four per cent and one per cent, respectively.

Fentanyl's prominence as the substance causing overdoses among First Nations has increased over the six years examined in the report.

In 2016, 44 per cent of accidental opioid overdoses among First Nations people were caused by fentanyl, compared to 66 per cent for the non-First Nations population. By 2022, that figure was 96 per cent for First Nations and 94 per cent for non-First Nations.

Meanwhile, the provincial government remains committed to its recovery-focused approach to addressing the drug poisoning crisis while Premier Danielle Smith spreads misinformation about harm reduction measures, such as safe supply.

Dr. Tailfeathers notes that safe supply already exists for pharmaceutical opioids and has been proven to reduce overdoses substantially, but the premier doesn't appear interested in engaging with experts on this subject, with fatal consequences for First Nations people.

"This government not only doesn't care that the mortality rate is rising, but they're very negligent in the health care and delivery of care to Indigenous people," Tailfeathers said. "If I was a chief or a group of chiefs, I would probably look at a class action suit against this government, because Indigenous people are dying in great numbers and nobody is alarmed by it."

In a statement to *APTN News*, Hunter Baril, press secretary for Addiction and Mental Health Minister Dan Williams, blamed the federal government for the disproportionately high rate of drug poisoning among First Nations people.

"Unfortunately, the federal government has ignored their responsibility of providing care for First Nations, which has left a gap in their ability to access cultural-based treatment and recovery," Baril wrote. "Recognizing this, our government is investing more than \$180 million to support the building of five recovery communities in partnership with Indigenous communities."

The government has recovery communities slated for the Blood Tribe, Enoch Cree Nation, Siksika and Tsuut'ina lands. It's



unclear where the fifth community Baril referenced is located.

The Blood Tribe facility, according to the Government of Alberta website, is under construction. But Tailfeathers, who lives nearby, says that's incorrect.

"There's nothing. There's not even a shovel in the ground. There's been no infrastructure development. It's like a promise with nothing but an empty field," she said.

Even when the recovery centre is built, it will take additional time and funds to hire and train local staff, and develop programming.

"There's not been any consultation or engagement with the community on what they want to see as part of their treatment center or part of the treatment program," Tailfeathers added.



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# MNA proposes parole board reform

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) has launched a petition asking the federal government to reform the Parole Board of Canada after one of the men convicted for killing Métis hunters Jacob Sansom and Maurice Cardinal was granted day parole.

MNA press secretary Kenny Trenton initiated petition e-4853, which is sponsored by Edmonton Griesbach NDP MP Blake Desjarlais, who is of mixed Cree and Métis ancestry.

“The overall justice system needs an overhaul,” MNA president Andrea Sandmaier told *Alberta Native News*. The Canadian government has acknowledged this reality, with the ongoing development of its Indigenous Justice Strategy, as has the MNA, with its work on a Métis Justice Strategy.

The petition, which was launched May 23, calls on Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs

Dominic LeBlanc and Minister of Justice and Attorney General Arif Virani “to prioritize the voices and experiences of Indigenous victims, ensuring that decisions impacting victims and their families, such as granting unescorted temporary absences, are made with an understanding of their significant effects on the community’s core sense of justice and security.”

It proposes three reforms to achieve this outcome:

That the government mandate “cultural safety training and culturally responsive measures” for all Parole Board of Canada employees, in accordance with Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Call to Action 57, which calls on all levels of government to ensure public servants are appropriately versed in Indigenous history and “intercultural competency.”

That the minister update the Decision-Making Policy Manual for Board Members’ Policy 2.1 (Conditional Release Decision-Making) “such that specific consideration is given to systemic and cultural factors when reviewing a case where the victim is Indigenous or Black,” aligning the policy with UNDRIP Article 21, which calls on governments to “take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of [Indigenous] economic and social conditions.”

That Indigenous community members be permitted to participate in Parole Board hearings when the “circumstances of the case suggest the Indigeneity of the victim may have been a factor in the offence.”

Continued on page 23

## Beauty Queen cont. from p 5

can get there,” Hamelin-Wilson said. “And a lot of people think that [my success] just happened easily for me when it didn’t. I’ve faced a lot of bullying and there’s been a lot of people commenting on my looks or body because they want to find something I’m insecure about. When I’m in a vulnerable position it gets hard. But, at the same time I know I’ve already represented Canada before so it’s not going to stop me because I’m still going to keep doing [pageantry.]”

In the future, Hamelin-Wilson wants to start her own company where she would train and support Indigenous girls to be successful in

pageantry and modeling.

“I, definitely one day, want to create my own company. I want to be able to train Indigenous girls and help them get into modeling and pageants,” Hamelin-Wilson said. “Hopefully one day I will be able to send girls to international pageants - so that’s what my main goal is right now.” She said the training would include learning runway walking, posing, and how to do hair and makeup.


When asked about advice she would have for Indigenous girls who would want to pursue modeling and pageantry, Hamelin-Wilson advised hard work and self-investment.

“I would definitely say you have to work really hard because beauty pageants and modeling is a full-time job. You have to invest in yourself and

work on your competence and whatever makes you feel good,” Hamelin-Wilson said.

“But, then also as Indigenous people, we do have our culture - and I feel our culture is very empowering. We can use that to showcase who we are and where we come from and that we’re still here. I’ve always found that when I show people my culture, it brings a lot of people to tears - and people just have so many questions. Because people know the backstory about Indigenous people, but they don’t know that we’re still thriving.”

For those interested in learning more about Hailey Hamelin-Wilson, she can be found at her official Instagram page @haileyykat or her TikTok @haileyykat.





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# Blood Tribe can't sue Ottawa for Treaty violation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the federal government broke its Treaty with Kainai Nation by shortchanging them on reserve land, but the province's statute of limitations precludes the band from seeking remedy through the courts.

On April 12, the court delivered its unanimous decision in the case of *Jim Shot Both Sides v. Canada*, in which Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin declared the Canadian government's failure to fulfill its Treaty obligation "deplorable," but argued the nation failed to bring the matter to court in the required timeframe.

Kate Gunn of First Peoples Law, which represented Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta in the case, called the Supreme Court's decision "disappointing."

"It affirms what the Blood Tribe has been saying all along," Gunn said, referring to the Kainai Nation by its other name, "but it leaves the First Nation in a place where they're not able to get substantive relief from the courts. I think it raises a couple of problematic and challenging issues."

The claim centred around the Crown's failure to set aside as much land as was promised the Blood Tribe when it signed Treaty 7 in 1877. The First Nation, which is part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, initiated legal proceedings against the Crown in the 1980s.

Under Alberta's statute of limitations, plaintiffs have six years to file a lawsuit.

The case hinged upon whether the clock began ticking in 1971—the year a Blackfoot researcher discovered the tribe received 162.5 fewer square miles of land than it was promised in Treaty 7—or 1982, when the Constitution Act officially codified Treaty rights under Canadian law.

Federal Court ruled that the clock began ticking when the Constitution was signed, upholding the land claim. But the Court of Appeal reversed the ruling and prohibited the lawsuit.

The Supreme Court sided with the Court of Appeal, arguing that Treaty rights were enforceable prior to the Constitution's patriation, meaning Blood Tribe could have filed its lawsuit in 1971.

Despite ruling that the lawsuit couldn't proceed, Justice O'Bonsawin acknowledged the "longevity and magnitude of the Crown's dishonourable conduct towards the Blood Tribe."

"Canada breached its treaty promises to the

Blood Tribe. Canada did not provide the land as promised: 162.5 fewer square miles were set aside than should have been," the judge wrote.

"This conduct is deplorable and does not reflect the fundamental objective of the modern law of treaty rights, which is the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and their respective claims, interests, and ambition."

Acknowledging the wrongdoing, O'Bonsawin wrote, "will promote reconciliation and help to

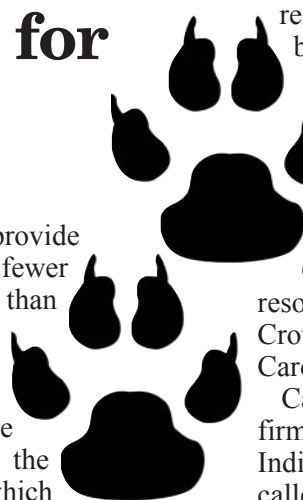
restore the nation-to-nation relationship between the Blood Tribe and the Crown."

The ruling gives the Blood Tribe an upper hand if it chooses to take the federal government to a specific claims tribunal, where it can be awarded up to \$150 million.

"The Blood Tribe and the Government of Canada are actively in negotiations on resolving this past injustice," Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations spokesperson Carolane Gratton told the CBC.

Calgary-based lawyer Ron Maurice, whose firm represented the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations as an intervenor in this case, called the ruling "cold comfort."

However, Maurice and Gunn both noted with optimism that the court didn't rule on the constitutionality of provincial statutes of limitations as they pertain to holding the Crown accountable for historic misdeeds.



## The voices of Indigenous youth matter.

Indigenous youth have an important role in Canada. That's why we're putting our energy into working with the Indigenous Youth Advisory Council. We understand the wisdom that today's young Indigenous leaders bring, and the power of their voices. Through listening, sharing and reflection, we can work together to act on issues of mutual interest that are affecting communities and the lives of Indigenous youth.



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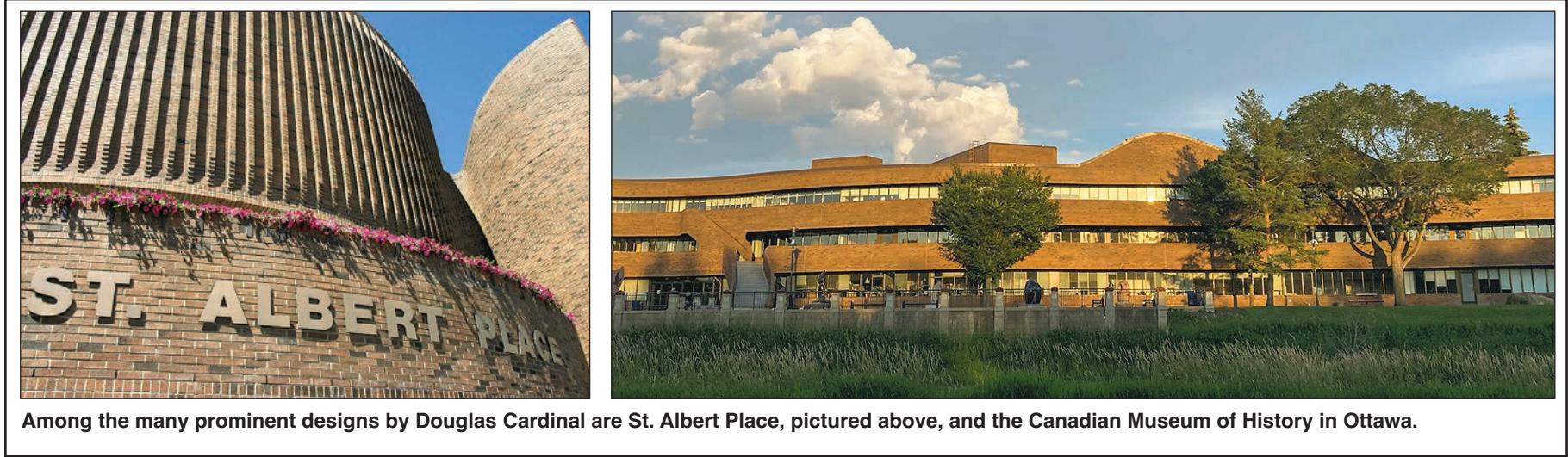
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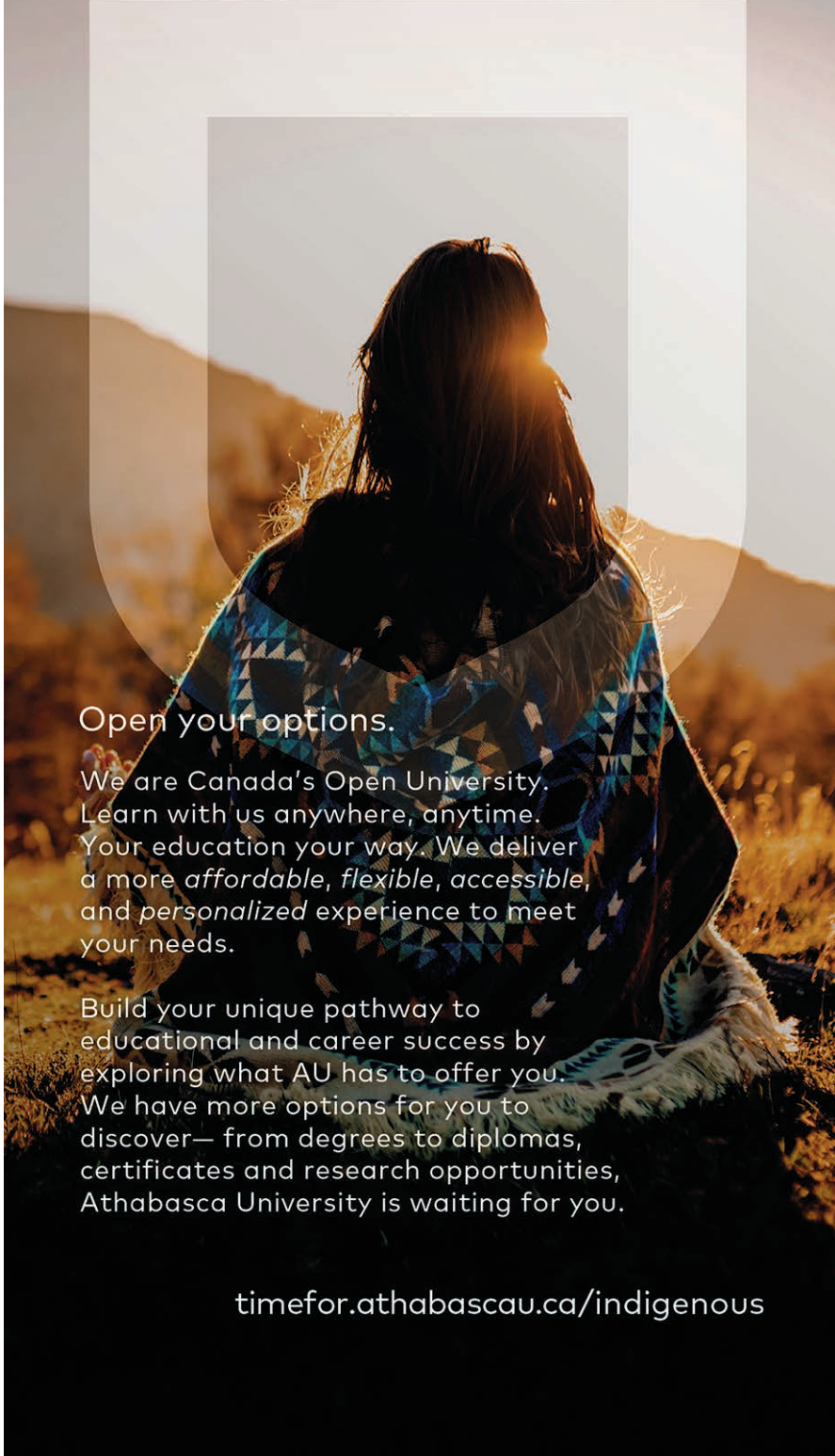




Among the many prominent designs by Douglas Cardinal are St. Albert Place, pictured above, and the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa.

# Athabasca U to honour Douglas Cardinal





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Distinguished Athabasca University (AU) alum and renowned architect Douglas Cardinal will receive an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree. This honorary degree recognizes exceptional public service and is among the highest honours that AU bestows.

**Design inspired by natural world, Indigenous culture**


Cardinal is a legendary fixture in the field of architecture and Indigenous human rights. His life's work has been to create deeply personal buildings inspired by the natural world and Indigenous culture.

Born in Calgary, Cardinal drew early inspiration from natural features in the varied landscape of Southern Alberta. The curvaceous, non-linear style he developed is evident in his work, including many prominent designs across Canada that draw inspiration from the natural world: Northwestern Polytechnic in Grande Prairie, TELUS World of Science in Edmonton, St. Albert Place, the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa, First Nations University in Regina, the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., and many others. That connection to the natural world is a fundamental part of Cardinal's design philosophy.

"As a child, I was taught to respect all life around me," he said. "As a planner and architect, I strive to follow these teachings to create a better future for the next generations, so we learn to live inharmony and balance with this amazing blue planet, our Mother, the Earth."


AU will recognize the outstanding contributions of Cardinal at Convocation 2024 in Athabasca, AB on June 19, 2024





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# Artist Linus Woods returns to YEG for Night Market at River Cree

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Acclaimed First Nations artist Linus Woods is returning to Treaty 6 territory this month for the fourth annual Night Market at River Cree. The event, which is billed as the largest Indigenous outdoor market in Canada, is happening June 20-23 at the River Cree Casino and Resort in Enoch.

Woods, who lives on the Long Plain First Nation reserve in southern Manitoba, is no stranger to Amiskwaciy Waskahikan. He has served several terms as a popular artist-in-residence at Highland Junior High School in northeast Edmonton.

He'll be coming to Enoch with about 50 paintings to sell throughout the weekend at the market, including a couple of large six-by-four ft. canvases. To the delight of patrons, he will also be doing live paintings "to keep busy," and he might even take some requests.

Woods credits his work's appearance at galleries, including Wah-Sa in Winnipeg and Bearclaw in Edmonton, for helping him build a large following, but these days he tends to eschew art galleries, because he doesn't want to be limited in the types of paintings he pursues. Those looking to purchase his art can do so either at Winnipeg Art Gallery's gift shop, at markets, like the one at River Cree, or via the boutique Wakina Gallery in Edmonton (wakinagallery.com).

"I don't have one style of painting," he told *Alberta Native News*. "I paint so much and there are so many things I like painting."

Woods described much of his art as "whimsical," including paintings of rabbits in different scenarios, inspired by his natural surroundings on reserve.

"It's half realism and half cartoon," he

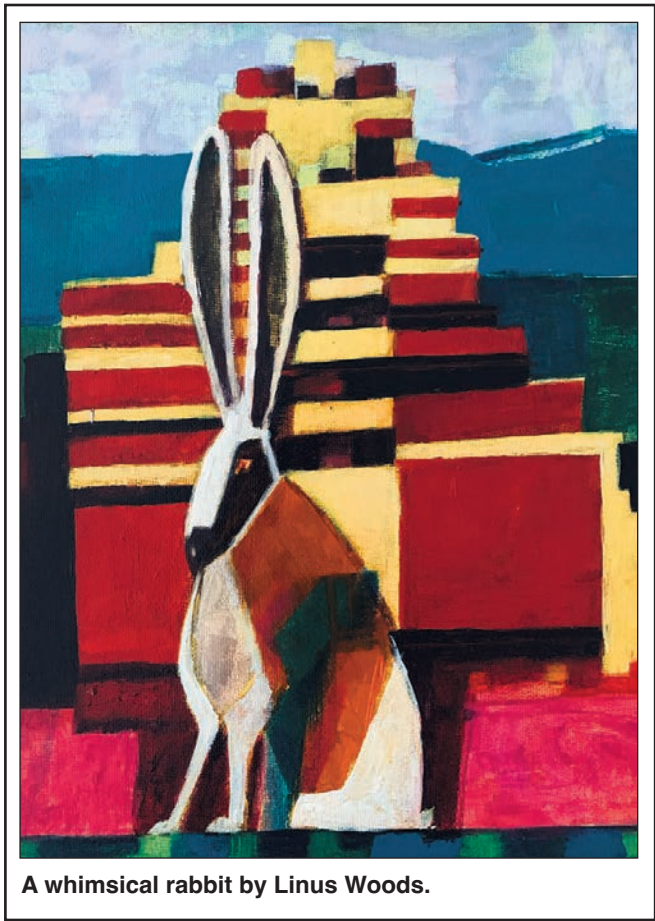
explained. "Because I paint these little, hidden characters. We used to call them spirits. I had no way to explain them to some viewers. I called them 'little grandfathers' hidden all over the place. In some of these paintings, you really have to look to find a little cherry tree in there."

The fabulous image on this month's cover of *Alberta Native News* is a detail from one of his whimsical pieces of art. Entitled "Squirrel's view of a Bull Moose from a tree" the viewer has to look twice to recognize the image – and then there is an "of course" moment of delight. The vibrant colours are joyful and the aerial view is simply wonderful. The painting is a 12" x 12" acrylic stretched on a wood canvas and it is available on exhibit and for sale at wakinagallery.com's boutique location.

Woods said he's not constrained by the traditional stylings of his nation's art, which is Ojibway and Dakota, incorporating stylings from Cree, Inuit and South American Indigenous Peoples as well.

He communicates a broad spectrum of emotions in his art. In some paintings, he tells a story of movement where you can feel the speed of a galloping horse or the crashing waves of a river. In others, he conveys the still of a meadow or a cloudy sky with such detail that you immediately feel at ease.

There are so many elements contained in each image. His large paintings are breathtaking, but even the smaller images and the portraits are full of surprises and expression - and his use of colour is amazing, sometimes vibrant, other times layered but always interesting.



A whimsical rabbit by Linus Woods.

Woods' mastery of his craft continues to amaze art lovers – the range of his subjects and techniques is diverse and elicits a sense of awe and wonderment in everyone who views his art.

Be sure to visit his booth at the Night Market at River Cree over the National Indigenous Day weekend. Admission is \$5, but it is free for Elders who are 60 and older, and children under 12.

Attendees are eligible for a 10 per cent discount to stay at the resort, which can be booked by calling 1-844-425-CREE(2733).

The market is open 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. each day, except for the final day, Sunday, June 23, when it's open noon to 5 p.m.

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# Powwows and Gatherings

**It's Powwow Season again!**  
At *Alberta Native News* we have put together a schedule of some of the upcoming powwow events and other happenings.  
Our list will be updated as the season progresses and we hope it gives you an idea of what to expect in the weeks to come. Good luck to all the summer festival participants.  
Have a great time!

**June 21**  
National Indigenous Peoples' Day across Canada. There are numerous celebrations at schools, museums, libraries and other venues. Check your local listings to find an event that is taking place near you. Cities, towns and villages are celebrating NIPD throughout Alberta and the country.

**June 21 – 22**  
6th Annual Metis Fest  
Metis Crossing, Smoky Lake, AB

**June 21**  
Indigenous Peoples Day Powwow  
Sinulta Community Association, Calgary

**June 21 - 23**  
Saddle Lake Cree Nation, AB

**June 21 – 23**  
Kahkewistahaw First Nation 2024 Powwow  
Kehkewistahaw, SK

**June 21 – 23**  
Grande Prairie Traditional Pow Wow  
Grande Prairie, AB

**June 27**  
Prairie Chicken Dance Championships  
Piiksapi Memorial Arbor, Siksika, AB

**June 28 - 30**  
Siksika Nation Fair Powwow  
Siksika, AB

**June 28 – 30**  
Kamloops Powwow  
345 Powwow Trail  
Kamloops, BC

**June 28 – 30**  
Frog Lake First Nations Pow Wow  
6 Chiefs Cultural Grounds, AB

**June 28 – 30**  
43rd Annual Kamloopa Powwow  
Carry the Kettle, SK

**June 29 – 30**  
Muskeg Lake Cree Nation Veterans Traditional  
Pow Wow. Muskeg Lake, SK

**July 2 – 4**  
Red Pheasant 8th Annual Competition Powwow  
George Benson Memorial Powwow Grounds.  
Red Pheasant, SK

**July 5 – 7**  
Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. Glenevis, AB

**July 5 – 7**  
Squamish Nation 2nd Annual Memorial  
Youth Pow Wow  
Xwmelch'stn Village, West Vancouver, BC

**July 5 – 7**  
Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First  
Nations Pow Wow  
South of Battleford, SK

**July 7 – 8**  
Calgary Stampede Pow Wow  
Calgary, AB

**July 12**  
Red Deer Two Spirit Powwow  
Fort Normandeaus, Red Deer, AB

**July 12 – 14**  
Enoch Cree Nation Competition Pow Wow  
Enoch, AB

**July 12 – 14**  
Kehewin Cree Nation Pow Wow  
Kehewin, AB

**July 12 – 14**  
Vyper 3rd Annual Reclaiming Youth Contest  
Pow Wow. 34110 Lougheed Hwy, Mission, BC

**July 12 – 14**  
White Bear First Nations Pow Wow  
White Bear First Nations, SK

**July 16 – 17**  
Sweetgrass First Nation Annual Traditional  
Powwow. Sweetgrass Powwow Grounds, SK

**July 18 – 21**  
Back to Batoche Days. Batoche, SK

**July 19 – 21**  
Kanai Pow Wow Celebration  
Red Crow Park, Standoff, AB

# COLD LAKE FIRST NATIONS SECOND ANNUAL – TRADITIONAL HEALING POW WOW

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# Implementation of the Calls for Justice is 'far from complete'

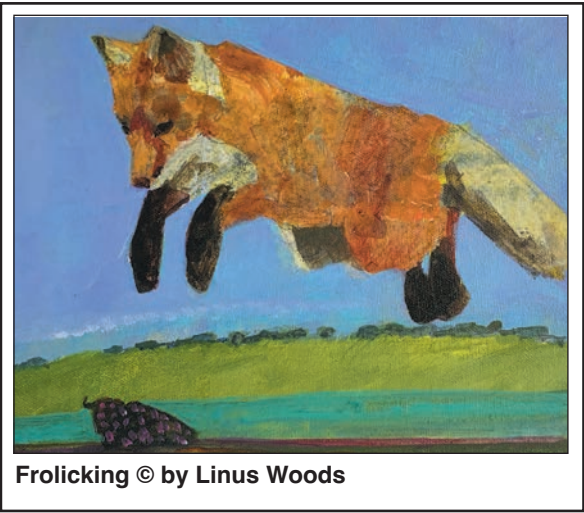
On June 3, the fifth anniversary of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Final Report, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) released a new progress report evaluating the advances made in implementing the National Inquiry’s 231 Calls for Justice.

“Preventing violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people remains a critical priority for First Nations. Despite some encouraging steps, the AFN progress report reveals that the implementation of the Calls for Justice is far from complete,” said AFN National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak.

“Significant and substantive action is needed

now more than ever to enhance the safety for First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people and ensure justice for survivors and families. We call on all levels of government to recommit to implementing the Calls for Justice and ensure that First Nations are meaningfully included, based on the principles of justice, respect for human rights, and good faith, to improve safety of First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.”

This five-year independent review assesses the implementation progress across various themes identified in the National Inquiry’s final report. The findings indicate that only two of the Calls for Justice impacting First Nations have been



Frollicking © by Linus Woods

fully implemented, with the majority showing minimal or no progress. The report highlights the urgent need for increased resources to achieve full implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice.

“Five years have passed since the release of the final report, and Survivors and families demand immediate action,” said Grand Chief Connie Big Eagle, Chair of the AFN Women’s Council. “While we have seen progress like studies for the establishment of new human rights institutions, the progress report shows that critical areas such as policing and corrections require urgent reforms. This was further highlighted in the Auditor General’s report released in March 2024, which indicated significant mismanagement of resources and poorly designed policing programs by Public Safety Canada. This inaction and lack of adequate funding and resources is unacceptable and must be addressed. Our Nations cannot afford to wait while our First Nations women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ members continue to face violence or disappear.”

“It’s shameful how little has been done to address the specific needs of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals,” said Tyler George, Chair of the AFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Council. “While we have made some progress, more must be done to ensure the safety, security, and rights of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals. We call on Canada to prioritize and accelerate its efforts for the full implementation of the 231 Calls for Justice. This is essential not only to protect but also to uplift 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, creating safe and inclusive environments where they can thrive and where their rights as First Nations and 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals are respected and upheld.”

The report builds on the AFN’s research and initiatives on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) as mandated by First Nations-in-Assembly. The AFN has previously released two reports, including one in June 2021 and one on June 3, 2023.

If you or someone you know needs support – it is available. The Hope for Wellness Help Line provides immediate mental health counseling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous people across Canada. This toll-free service is accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To talk with someone, please call 1-855-242-3310. Phone and chat counselling is available in English and French. Phone counselling is also available in Cree, Ojibwe, and Inuktitut, upon request.



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**Good Luck to all who enter!**

Entry Form



**Wishing you a very Happy National Indigenous Peoples Day!**



**GERALD SOROKA MP**  
YELLOWHEAD



# New resource offers a starting point for Indigenous language revitalization

By Bev Betkowski, University of Alberta

A new resource has been developed to support the work of Indigenous people, communities and organizations in language revitalization.

*Towards Indigenous Language Revitalization: An Informative Resource* offers learners and communities ideas on what to consider when tailoring their own strategies for language learning and revitalization, says Pamela McCoy Jones, executive director of Supporting Indigenous Language Revitalization.

SILR, a comprehensive six-year initiative administered by the University of Alberta, developed the guide as part of its mandate to support Indigenous and community-led projects to revitalize languages for current and coming generations.

“The resource helps transform and strengthen the capacity of Indigenous-led language revitalization,” McCoy Jones says.

Designed to be accessible for all Indigenous language advocates, educators, speakers, leaders and learners, the resource can help them “see a path forward” in their revitalization efforts, she adds.

“People don’t always see themselves in formal learning environments, so we wanted to provide an abundance of information so that anyone looking at language learning would be inspired, and able to see themselves in this resource as learners, developers and advocates.”

The guide also recognizes the richness and complexity of Indigenous languages and how they are intertwined with cultural, social and historical contexts, she notes.

“It highlights the intricate web of relationships with diverse dialects and linguistic structures, and the oral traditions unique to each community.”

Along with that, the resource shows how the work of language revitalization requires a collective effort from communities, leaders, educators, administrators and policy workers, she adds.

“There is no ‘one size fits all’ in this work, and there’s this broad scope of effort and investment that is necessary.”

The resource supports the work already being done by Indigenous communities and through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action, relatively new Indigenous language legislation in Canada and international focus through the Indigenous languages Decade (2022-2032) to reclaim and revitalize their languages, she adds.

“It recognizes all the language champions who have come before us and reminds us to focus steadily on the importance of our work and the intended impact for future generations.”

The guide drew on Indigenous language movements and strategies already happening in communities, First Nations schools and post-secondary institutions across Canada.

The resource focuses on key areas of education, advocacy and sustainability to help make the information easily applicable “and to show how users can mobilize and move the information into action,” McCoy Jones says.

The first area of focus helps set the foundation for understanding the broad spectrum of Indigenous languages, their level of status — which can range from thriving to critically endangered — and measures of fluency.

“We wanted people to be able to see themselves in the spectrum, say if they are early learners, and to see that there is a progression



Pam McCoy Jones of SILR (right) with language advocate Lynda Minoose, who heads the first Denesųłin  Language and Culture Department on Cold Lake First Nations. (Photo credit: John Ulan, UAlberta)

they can build on, so they can think about advancement, and how they can come to do work as fluent language instructors and speakers.”

The guide also outlines strategies for language revitalization, including forming language committees, finding partnerships and developing more certification and post-secondary training for instructors.

“Learning and training opportunities are crucial for the success of language programs,” McCoy Jones notes. “It was a concern we heard from instructors wondering about who will take over and continue the work.”

Education is also suggested as an important consideration, including curriculum development for Indigenous language instruction, spanning early learning to Grade 12 classes, along with the importance of developing resources to support it. In addition, the guide mentions leveraging technology in forms like podcasts as a user-friendly way to learn.

“It provides a lot of options so people can see

Continued on page 21

## NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY JUNE 21, 2024

A day of recognition to celebrate the history, culture, and contributions of Indigenous Peoples across Canada.



Canadian Native Flag (Standing together in support of each other)  
By Mulidzas-Curtis Wilson (1980 – 2019)



Committed to real reconciliation via the 94 Calls to Action of the TRC and the 231 Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into MMIWG

**Heather McPherson**

Member of Parliament  
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DAY 2  
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DAY 3  
9AM-1PM



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Actor and  
Storyteller



**Geena Jackson**  
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**Gloria & Olivia Iatridis**  
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## Indspire celebrates 2024 Indspire Award recipients

Nine outstanding Indigenous achievers and three youth achievers from a diverse list of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are the recipients of the 2024 Indspire Awards. They will be honoured during the broadcast of the 2024 Indspire Awards on Friday, June 21, 2024, at 5 pm MT on CBC, CBC Gem, APTN, and APTN lumi.

The Indspire Awards represent the highest honour the Indigenous community bestows upon its own people. The Awards recognize Indigenous professionals and youth who demonstrate outstanding career achievement on a national level in a variety of fields, including: the arts; business and commerce; culture, heritage and spirituality; education; health; law and justice; public service; sports; and lifetime achievement.

Dr. Mike DeGagné, President and CEO of Indspire, expressed, “The Indspire Awards are a powerful platform to showcase the outstanding achievements of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada. These awards not only celebrate Indigenous excellence but also inspire future generations to pursue their dreams and make a positive impact in our world.”

The recipients of the 2024 Indspire Awards are:

**Arts:** For nearly 30 years, Eden Robinson, (Haisla Nation and Heiltsuk Nation), has been changing the world through storytelling. This award-winning author of five novels and a short story collection has had her works published around the world, translated into multiple languages, and adapted for film. She has served as a role model and mentor to other Indigenous authors.

After graduating from the University of Victoria with a B.A. in creative writing in 1992, Eden went on to receive an M.F.A. from the University of British Columbia’s Dept. of Creative Writing in 1995, along with an honorary Ph.D. from the same institution in 2018.

Eden’s work blends the supernatural with elements of contemporary Indigenous experiences in Canada. Her infusion of traditional Haisla and Heiltsuk stories and motifs into

contemporary settings makes her work innovative and wholly unique.

Her first work, *Traplines*, a collection of short stories, received national and international acclaim; it was a *New York Times* Notable Book and won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. *Monkey Beach*, her first novel, won the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for the Governor General’s Literary Award (Fiction) and the Scotiabank Giller Prize. A national bestseller, it was adapted as a feature film in 2020.

Eden is perhaps best known for her acclaimed Trickster Trilogy: *Son of a Trickster*, *Trickster Drift*, and *Return of the Trickster*. *Son of a Trickster* was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize; it was also adapted into a popular TV series and was a contender for the 2020 edition of *Canada Reads*. Each book in the trilogy was a national bestseller and appeared on numerous ‘best of’ lists.

**Business & Commerce:** Victoria LaBillois. (Listuguj Mi’gmaq First Nation), knows that mentorship and entrepreneurship must go hand in hand to be truly effective – and she’s been putting that paradigm into practice throughout her career. A graduate of the University of New Brunswick, she received her B.A. in 1991 and then returned for her M.B.A. in 2004, winning the E.D. Maher Graduate Student Prize for having the top average in her graduating class.

She is the co-owner and president of Wejuseg Construction Inc. and the owner and president of Wejipeg Excavation Inc., two companies which were instrumental in the construction of wind park development in the Gaspésie region and which have been key to creating employment opportunities for Mi’gmaq community members and fuelling economic development in the region.

Victoria’s voice resonates both nationally and internationally, speaking across Canada and around the world; notable venues include the Māori Women Entrepreneurs in New Zealand, the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, and the inaugural national Indigenous Women Leadership

Summit. She also served as a moderator for the 2018 Peace and Friendship Leadership Dialogue between the New Brunswick Mi’gmaq and Wolastoqiyik Chiefs and federal and provincial ministers.

She mentors Indigenous women from across Canada through St. Francis Xavier University’s Coady Institute’s Indigenous Women and Community Leadership program and also through the JEDI Aboriginal Business Accelerator Program. She has twice been recognized as one of Canada’s Top 100 Most Powerful Women by the Women’s Executive Network (WEN). In November 2023, Victoria moderated an economic reconciliation panel with national Indigenous leaders and federal-provincial-territorial ministers on Indigenous affairs.

Victoria actively volunteers in her community and is named to several boards by the Listuguj Mi’gmaq Government. She is a proud member of Pugwales’g, a women’s hand-drum group, and is also a sought-after MC and speaker. She also teaches financial literacy to Listuguj youth.

**Culture, Heritage & Spirituality:** Edna Manitowabi, (Wiikwemkoong First Nation), has been changing lives across Turtle Island for decades – and her work is far from finished. As a teacher at the forefront of the Indigenous cultural revitalization movement of the 1960s and ‘70s, she was a founding member, teacher, and curriculum designer of the Bidassige Native Way School in 1976. With her friend Kathy Bird, she established medicine lodges in many First Nations communities across Ontario and Manitoba to share traditional medicinal knowledge.

She is a Fifth Degree member of the Midewiwin Society, the head woman and the Ogimaakwe (Head Leader Woman) of the Eastern Doorway Minweyweywigaan Lodge which spans across Ontario and Manitoba. Edna co-founded this Lodge with the late Chief and Ogimaa Charles Nelson of the Western Doorway of the

Continued on page 17



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**Indspire** cont. from p 16

Lodge. She has helped Minweyweywaan Lodge grow exponentially.

A teacher of Anishinaabemowin, Edna is also the author of teaching texts which have become key curricular components in disciplines such as Indigenous Studies, Women’s Studies, and Cultural Studies. She taught at Trent University for many years and is a Professor Emerita there; she was the driving force behind the creation of Nozhem Theatre, Trent’s dedicated Indigenous performance space, and the Indigenous Studies Department’s biennial Native Women’s Symposium.

Edna has served as the Traditional Cultural Director for The Native Theatre School, The Centre for Indigenous Theatre, and the Banff Aboriginal Dance Program. She is an accomplished actor, beginning in 1994 with her first-ever role in Drew Hayden Taylor’s play *Someday*. Her more recent work includes roles in the films *Indian Horse* and *Café Daughter* as well as the series *Resident Alien*.

**Education:** Kanonhsyonne Jan Hill, (Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte), never stops working to change the post-secondary landscape. Her career began in grassroots education in 1988 when a ten-day contract turned into ten years at Queen’s University’s Faculty of Education, helping to create the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP). She engaged Indigenous communities to encourage young Indigenous people to become teachers, acting as the community liaison while facilitating student-teacher candidate placements, ultimately serving as the program’s co-director while simultaneously completing a B.Ed. degree at Queen’s.

After graduating, Jan returned to her community of Tyendinaga, where she created change on multiple levels: teaching adult education at the First Nations Technical Institute

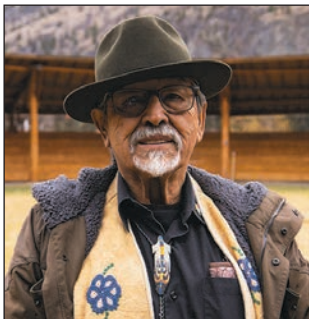
(FNTI), founding and leading a high school rooted in Haudenosaunee culture, and serving as FNTI’s first Academic Dean.

Jan returned to Queen’s in 2010, where she served as the Director of the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre (FDASC) and the Director of Indigenous Initiatives. Under her leadership, the FDASC expanded significantly, supporting many Indigenous students and strengthening the university’s relationships with Indigenous communities. She is currently the Associate Vice-Principal of Indigenous Initiatives and Reconciliation at Queen’s.


Mentorship is integral to Jan’s way of life. She has served as a Turtle Clan Mother in the Longhouse at Tyendinaga for years and is a founding member of the Tsi Tsyonnheht Onkwawenna Language Circle (TTO). She helped found the Haudenosaunee Opportunity for Personal Education (HOPE) program for Mohawk high school students, was a founding member of the Kanhiote Tyendinaga Territory Public Library, co-founded the Kahswentha Indigenous Knowledge Initiative, and served on many committees related to Indigenous education, language, and culture.

**Health:** Lea Bill (Pelican Lake First Nation) knows that authentic health and healing can come from many different sources. Growing up traditionally, speaking only Cree until she was 14 years old, Lea received her first healthcare lessons from her grandmother. She has worked for over 30 years as an Indigenous Knowledge Holder, researcher, and community health nurse, blending Indigenous ways of knowing with her training as a registered nurse in the Western system.


Lea’s knowledge has been consistently sought by Indigenous and Western organizations alike; she worked in government health structures in




**Ronald Eric Ignace**  
Language



**Michelle O'Bonsawin**  
Law and Justice



**Jocelyn Formsma**  
Public Service



**Thomas V. Hill**  
Lifetime Achievement

the, Northwest Territories, and Alberta and in advisory capacities in Saskatchewan and in international forums. She served on the board of directors of the Aboriginal Nurses’ Association of Canada (now the Canadian Indigenous Nurses’ Association – CINA) and then as its President for three terms. She is also Executive Director of the Alberta First Nations Indigenous Governance Centre (AFNIGC).

A pipe carrier, Lea has often provided significant advice on the subject of ‘research as ceremony’ in such key venues as the Canadian partnership Against Cancer’s Indigenous Cancer Strategy work. She has participated as Co-Lead in several significant First Nations research initiatives regarding cancer and cancer prevention

Continued on page 18



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Indspire cont. from p 17

and anti-Indigenous racism in the emergency department.

Lea’s voice is heard on the national stage and around the world. On Indigenous Nurses Day during national Nursing Week celebrations, she and CINA were recognized in Standing Orders for the House of Commons. She is the First Nation advisor for the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis at the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, and represented Canada as a co-convenor at the 2nd World Indigenous Cancer Conference in Calgary 2019 and more recently at the WICC in Australia in March 2024.

Whether she is teaching, caring for patients, speaking to youth or to international experts, Lea is an unfailing advocate for Indigenous well-being.

**Language:** Ronald Eric Ignace (Skeetchestn Indian Band, Secwépemc Nation) is a living embodiment of the strength of language and culture. Raised traditionally and coming from a long line of hereditary chiefs, Ron was forced to attend the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Not only did he defy all attempts to destroy his language, but he also went on to teach new generations – and, in 2021, became Canada’s

first-ever Indigenous Languages Commissioner. With a B.A. and an M.A. in sociology from the University of British Columbia (UBC), Commissioner Ignace returned to his community after graduation and began to serve as elected Kukwpi7 (Chief) – a position which he held for over 30 years. He was also chairman of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council and president of its cultural society.

Commissioner Ignace has a Ph.D. in anthropology from Simon Fraser University (SFU), with his dissertation focusing on Secwépemc oral history. With his partner, Dr. Marianne Ignace, he co-wrote the groundbreaking *Secwépemc People, Land and Laws: Yeri7 re Stsq’ey’s-kucw*, a seminal work which covers 10,000 years of Secwépemc history and law. It received multiple accolades and was instrumental in the Ignaces winning the Governor General’s Innovation Award in 2019.

Commissioner Ignace has taught Secwepemtsín through a partnership he, Marianne, and other community leaders established with SFU in 1988, which continues to exist as the SFU Indigenous Languages Program, enabling new generations to gain fluency in Indigenous languages.

Commissioner Ignace served as chair of the

Department of Canadian Heritage’s 2003-2005 Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (TFALC) and co-chaired the Assembly of First Nations’ Chiefs Committee on Languages, where in 2015-19 he played an instrumental role in the development and passage of Bill C-91, the Indigenous Languages Act.

**Law & Justice:** Justice Michelle O’Bonsawin (Abenaki First Nation of Odanak) has a B.A. from Laurentian University, an LLB from the University of Ottawa, a Master of Law from Osgoode Hall Law School, and a Doctorate in Law from the University of Ottawa. She began her legal career with the RCMP and then served as counsel with Canada Post, specializing in labour and employment law, human rights, and privacy law.

Prior to her appointment to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in 2017, Justice O’Bonsawin was General Counsel for the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group, which gave her insight into mental health issues – specifically, the application of *Gladue* principles to Indigenous people accused in the forensic mental health system.

She taught Indigenous law at the University of Ottawa’s Common Law Program and was responsible for the Indigenous Relations Program at the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group. She is a frequent guest speaker on *Gladue* principles and Indigenous issues as well as mental health, labour, and privacy law.

As a bilingual instructor with the Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice -(CIAJ), Justice O’Bonsawin has provided training to many communities across Turtle Island. She is passionate about learning her Abenaki language and is active in her community, mentoring other Indigenous female lawyers.

Justice O’Bonsawin was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada in 2022, where she is a forthright, compassionate advocate for Indigenous peoples and legal traditions.

**Public Service:** Jocelyn Formsma (Moose Creek First Nation) exemplifies the revolutionary power of bringing people together in good ways. Passionate about the rights of Indigenous people, Jocelyn has advanced reconciliation at multiple levels with many groups in different venues across Turtle Island and around the world.

Jocelyn served on the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Youth Council and the Chiefs of Ontario Youth Council, also working for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCSC). After graduating with a Juris Doctorate from the University of Ottawa, she was called to the Bar of Ontario and worked as a lawyer for a First Nations-owned law firm. She also served as a board member of the Indigenous Bar Association and was an advisory to the Ontario Indigenous Youth

Continued on page 19

# Sweetgrass First Nation Traditional Powwow 2024

## JULY 16 & 17, 2024

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Pow wow Thunder

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

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306-480-2418

**VENDOR INFORMATION:**

Dottie Pooyak  
306-480-2502

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- Give Aways

- Daily Rations
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- Showers (Gym)
- Camping

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- Momma/Baby Tipi
- Children’s Area
- FIREWORKS!!

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- Sweetgrass Powwow Committee is not responsible for THEFT, TRAVEL, OR INJURY



# Indspire cont. from p 18

Partnership Project.

She is the CEO of the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) and has been involved with the NAFC for many years. The youngest-ever Chairperson at the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN), Jocelyn is also a trustee of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. She was chosen to join the Deputy Prime Minister’s Task Force on Women and the Economy.

Jocelyn’s commitment to child welfare is both national and international in scope. She sits as a board member on the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) and was one of two Canadian delegates selected by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to join the Young Global Leaders Community, an international community of exceptional young leaders. She has spoken at international venues such as the United Nations and the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

**Lifetime Achievement:** For over 50 years, the multitalented Thomas Hill, (Six Nations of the Grand River), worked to showcase the transformative power of Indigenous art. Tom graduated from the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University) in 1967 and was instrumental in creating the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo ’67 in Montreal while continuing his studies on a scholarship at the National Gallery of Canada and Carleton University.

The following year, he took a position as director of the newly-created Cultural Development section of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (now CIRNAC), where he engaged in important dialogue with stakeholders about promoting more realistic, less stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples. He led the way in emphasizing the need for self-directed presentation of Indigenous arts by Indigenous peoples.

In 1982, Tom became the Museum Director and Curator of the Woodland Cultural Centre located on the site of the former Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School on Six Nations Territory. For twenty years, Tom guided the organization in the development of programming, exhibitions, festivals, and other initiatives. Under his leadership, the Centre became an internationally

renowned artistic and performance venue. Tom published widely; his works serve as valuable guides that have shaped everything from curation to exhibition to the decolonization of artistic spaces. He mentored many young Indigenous artists across Turtle Island and was a founding member of the Indigenous Education Council at OCAD University.

Tom earned numerous accolades, including a Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts. He was invested as a Member of the Order of Ontario in 1993 to recognize his work in promoting Indigenous art as well as his contribution to the Canadian Museums Association’s *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples*. This document was pivotal in redefining the relationship between Indigenous peoples and museums in Canada.

As well as a renowned artist, Tom was also an adept playwright, performer, author, art historian, administrator, filmmaker, and mentor. Active in the Six Nations community, he also presented at conferences across Canada and around the world, creating and fostering positive relationships with artists, curators, and museums.

On November 11, 2023, surrounded by his loved ones, Tom Hill passed away. His wide-reaching artistic legacy continues to inspire, educate, and entertain new generations.

“Recognizing and celebrating Indigenous excellence is a collaborative endeavour,” said Indspire president and CEO Mike DeGagné. “This year, as we extend our celebration into new channels with a new format, we are looking forward to sharing the outstanding achievements of these twelve Indigenous leaders with even more people across Turtle Island – a moment which wouldn’t have been possible without the combined assistance of new and established partners.”

The 2024 Indspire Laureates received their Awards during an in-person gala ceremony on April 18, 2024, in Ottawa. This year’s show was produced by Indigenous Geographic, helmed by co-founders Matt LeMay and Crystal Martin. Indigenous Geographic is an Indigenous-owned video production company and educational platform that amplifies Indigenous voices and



shares Indigenous stories from across Turtle Island and around the world.

Focusing on each recipient’s story with innovative new elements serving as a culturally-rooted framework, the 2024 Indspire Awards broadcast will be a simultaneous celebration of tradition and Indigenous excellence.

“Working with Indspire to showcase the lives and achievements of the 2024 Laureates has been a profoundly moving experience, and our whole team welcomed this inspiring project,” said LeMay. Martin added, “We are grateful to all of the Laureates who invited us into their homes and communities to share their stories, and we’re looking forward to sharing them with Turtle Island.”

“We’re excited about the new approach Indspire has taken this year, from the addition of the Language Award to the incorporation of traditional knowledge and storytelling in the awards program,” said Sally Catto, General Manager, Entertainment, Factual & Sports, CBC. “We look forward to celebrating the achievements of this year’s laureates on June 21 along with our partners at the Indspire Awards, APTN, our new production partners at Indigenous Geographic, and with audiences across the country.”

“At APTN, our commitment goes beyond partnership; it’s about amplifying Indigenous voices through our platform,” said Adam Garnet Jones of APTN. “Airing the 2024 Indspire Awards allows us to shine a spotlight on the extraordinary accomplishments of these Indigenous leaders, celebrating their resilience, and inspiring communities across the country.”

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## Three remarkable youth receive Inspire Awards

In addition to the nine accomplished recipients of 2024 Inspire Awards, three Youth Recipients were also awarded: Adam Gauthier, from Tla’amin Nation, BC, Braden Kadlun from Kugluktuk, NU and Dr. Jayelle Friesen-Enns from Manitoba (Red River Métis).

As a Two-Spirit youth, **Adam Gauthier** is rooted in intergenerational knowledge and immersed in teachings about traditional language, humility, listening, respect, and cultural competencies. He completed Camosun College’s Indigenous Family Support and Community, Family & Child Studies programs while simultaneously working with Indigenous families at organizations such as the M’akola Group of Societies, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, and Surrounded by Cedar Child & Family Services. Following this, Adam went on to complete his Bachelor of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

One of Adam’s major endeavours is the Wellness Project, an initiative that creates Wellness Kits for on-reserve and urban Indigenous children and youth across Vancouver Island. He began this project to share the gift of self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic; each kit contained water bottles and medicines as well as art supplies, games, language cards, and cooking recipes. They were created by youth with support from Adam at the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), where he served as the Child & Youth Care Coordinator on the Mental Health & Wellness Team.

Growing up in the far north, **Braden Kadlun**

always remained immersed in his Inuit culture even as he encountered mental health and substance use challenges. He landed a small role in the acclaimed film *The Grizzlies* at the age of 17; it shared a story from his home community. Braden’s journey of advocacy for Inuit ways of life began in 2017. After sharing a ‘sealfie’ of himself wearing a sealskin parka created for him by his mother as a graduation present, the photo went viral and prompted a wide-ranging conversation about traditional Inuit practices and ways of living. It wasn’t until 2022 that Braden took an active role in this conversation on social media. He has since immersed himself in content creation by sharing language, traditional food, and his sobriety journey.

A sought-after keynote speaker at various venues across Canada, Braden never misses an opportunity to share insights about the realities of Northern living, sobriety, healing, and Inuit culture. He has participated on multiple panels and completed the TikTok Accelerator for Indigenous Creators program in December 2022. This mentorship program, in partnership with the National Screen Institute, fostered his media skills and also led to collaborations with institutions such as CBC, APTN, and the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG).

Braden’s recent endeavours include facilitating workshops in communities alongside his mother, Hovak Johnston, which highlight their respective healing journeys. He also co-produced and hosted *Local Lives*, a 2023 television series through StoryHive which provided an Indigenous lens on

the experiences of Indigenous small business owners, Knowledge Keepers, artists, and activists in Treaty 6 and 7 Territories.

Healthcare isn’t just a profession for **Dr. Jayelle Friesen-Enns**; it’s also a mission. A proud Cree and Métis person who was adopted, growing up in a small farming town, her ancestry connects her to Indigenous communities in both Manitoba and Alberta. She served as President of the Class of 2023 while studying medicine at the Max Rady College of Medicine at the University of Manitoba, where her exceptional dedication to leadership, volunteering, advocacy, and research set her apart from other medical students. She also completed graduate-level research during her time in medical school and served as a mentor for younger students.

After talking to other Indigenous medical students, Jayelle discovered that they were all experiencing similar challenges in pursuing their studies: access, financial pressures, racism. So she co-founded the Indigenous Medical Students’ Association of Canada (IMSAC), a new organization which fills a major gap in peer support for Indigenous medical students across Canada and which also supports the TRC’s Calls to Action regarding healthcare.

Through her work as a member of the Canadian Medical Association’s Indigenous Guiding Circle, Jayelle helped to create the health goal which stipulates measurable, ongoing improvements in health and wellness for Indigenous People, supported by a transformed, discrimination-free healthcare system. The supports that she has helped to implement in medical education will improve the well-being of Indigenous medical students while helping their future Indigenous patients.

After graduating, Jayelle took a position as a resident physician in the Calgary Emergency Medicine Residency Program, continuing her important work to create a more equitable and responsible medical education and healthcare system in Canada.

The Inspire Awards recognize Indigenous professionals and youth who demonstrate outstanding career achievement, promote self-esteem and pride for Indigenous communities, and provide inspirational role models for future generations. This year marks the 31st anniversary of the awards, a testament to the enduring commitment of Indigenous peoples to pursuing excellence in multiple fields of endeavour.



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**By Regan Treewater, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter**

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The resource also lays out several options for language learning, including not just early and K-12 programming, but also programs based in immersion, bilingualism, mentoring, community and culture, as well as post-secondary and

The resource was also shared with more than 400 attendees from across Canada and the United States at the 2024 SILR Gathering last week highlighting the diversity of languages

This project was supported through a grant to the U of A from the BHP Foundation.

*This article was originally published by the University of Alberta – Folio.*

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# Thank goodness the birds are singing

By Xavier Kataquapit

Every morning for a few weeks now I am waking up to the sound of Pee-Nay-Sheesh (small birds) singing outside my window. Mostly the singing is coming from the tree swallows flying frantically around in what seems like circles. I never learned the Cree name for this pretty little bird because they are rare to see on the James Bay coast. At this time of year, they are either mating or challenging each other for the ownership of the birdhouse I constructed a few years ago and perched on the garage roof. They are up at the crack of dawn which of course means my mornings now start quite early.

Several weeks ago I also heard for a brief time the familiar honking of Niska (Canada Geese) on a stop over in the field behind my home while on their long flight north to James Bay. That sound has a lot of meaning to me and brings back so many memories of time on the land harvesting Niska in the spring.

My neighbours the swallows have a very shrill chirping sound that is rather like an alarm clock. They are amazing birds in that they are found in many parts of the world and they migrate up north to my area in the spring and leave in late summer or early autumn. They survive on insects and are keen hunters. I am all for their need to hunt so many pesky insects that invade my patio in the summer. I am amazed at their flying ability as they are like little jet fighters and can spin around in the air at great speed and swoop inches from me during their hunt.

These swallows are likely returning to the same nest area every year, so I guess the same family has been coming back to the birdhouse for the past five years or so. Considering it took us humans such a long time to develop technology for mapping and navigation it is awe inspiring to realize that these small birds have a built in global mapping system. Their instinct allows them to fly

on a route every year to the south when it gets cold and then return to us in the spring when things warm up again in the north.

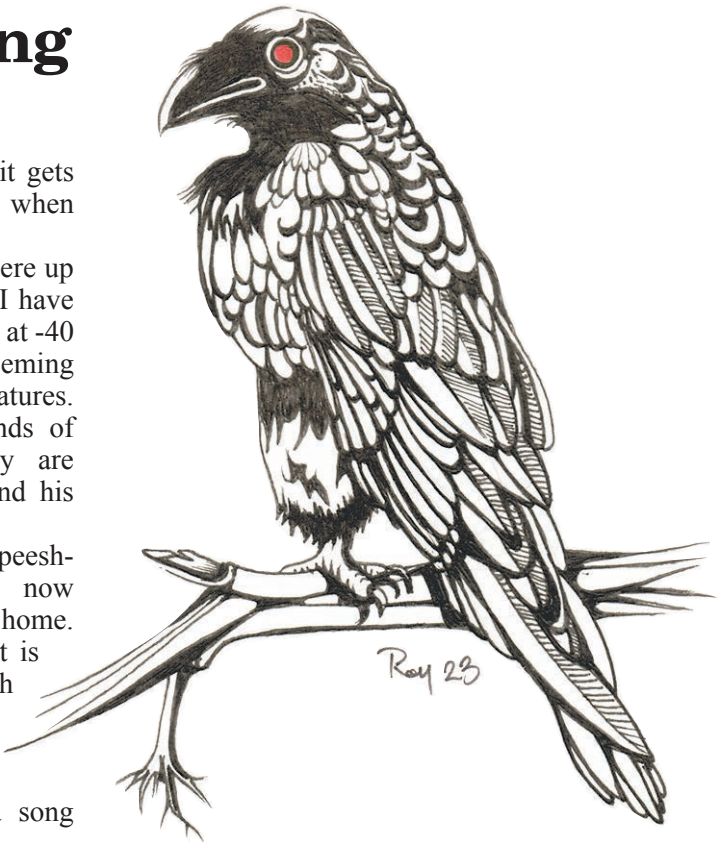
Of course the Kah-kah-koo (raven) are here up north all winter and they are tough birds. I have seen them all over the north and sometimes at -40 degrees Celsius as they fly casually by seeming not bothered at all by the freezing temperatures. They don't really sing but make all kinds of sounds and sometimes seem like they are mimicking other creatures. My partner and his Irish family refer to them as black turkeys.

I enjoy the warble like song of the Pee-peesh-cheh-oo (robin) that are returning now and that adds to the bird music around my home. Red wing blackbirds are another bird that is relatively new to me as we didn't see much of them up north. They are very cool looking and are dabbed with a splash of red on their black bodies and wings. They have a really soothing warble and is a song anyone can love.

Black Birds and crows spend a lot of time on the block getting into mischief. They seem to be the bad boys of the bird species and are forever bothering every other species of bird in the area. They often seem menacing and full of trouble. More like the ravens they are not easily intimidated and a little bratty.

Once in a while I am fortunate to hear the cry of the Mah-kwa (loon) and that sounds is very haunting to me and goes well with a bird that has a history that spans thousands of years to prehistoric times. Loons prefer to be near water and they are much better swimmers and divers than they are at flying or walking on land. Amazingly, they can live to be 20 to 30 years of age. Waking with the cry of the Mah-kwa near a lake or river is a feeling that is very special.

My spring concerts are not only about birds. For the past few days I have noticed that the



Ah-nee-kish (frogs), especially the peepers are singing and performing every evening. It's no wonder we Cree refer to this month as Aneekkee peesim (the frog moon). This is a sound that I identify with the first warm spring nights as a teen hanging with my friends on the streets of Attawapiskat surrounded by choirs of peepers. This is a very comforting sound to me.

The sounds of nature continue to bring us peace and comfort all over the world even in the midst of wars in the Ukraine and Gaza and the threat of climate change which is impacting people all over Mother Earth. Even with all the turmoil and anxiety in our world, thank goodness the birds are singing.

For more columns by Xavier Kataquapit visit [underthenorthernsky.com](http://underthenorthernsky.com)

*Happy National Indigenous Peoples' Day*

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MNA proposes cont. from p 8

Desjarlais told this newspaper that these demands offer a “pragmatic solution” to Indigenous justice reform while the Indigenous Justice Strategy is in the works. But he said he’s seen “no indication” that the federal Liberals appreciate the “urgency” of broader reform.

Roger Bilodeau was convicted of two counts of manslaughter for his role in the March 2020 killing of Sansom, 39, and Sansom’s uncle, Cardinal, 57, in northern Alberta, receiving a 10-year prison sentence, half of which he was credited for having served in pre-trial custody.

His son, Anthony, who fired the shots that killed the Métis hunters, was convicted on two counts of second-degree murder for both deaths and was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 13 years.

The Bilodeaus didn’t call police or paramedics after they killed Sansom and Cardinal, leaving their bodies at the side of the road outside Glendon, Alta., a village with a population of 500.

Sandmaier described how she provided support to Sansom and Cardinal’s families after their murder.

“I attended hearings with them and the trial, and walked alongside them through this horrible, horrific experience,” she said.

In early May, Roger Bilodeau was granted day parole for six months, with the Parole Board citing his lack of criminal history and cooperation with correctional authorities while in prison as reasons for his conditional release, a decision which Sandmaier said “deeply troubled our citizens and our government.”

“We want to make change, so this petition is the first step to make some changes to the way the Parole Board of Canada is dealing with Indigenous victims,” Sandmaier explained.

The Parole Board reportedly heard victim impact statements from the Sansom and Cardinal families, alongside more generalized statements from the Métis community, police and the broader community.

“The hearings are very closed,” Sandmaier said,

noting that the MNA had to apply to participate in the parole hearing. The petition is asking that participation from Indigenous community organizations be made mandatory in cases where the victim is believed to have been targetted based on anti-Indigenous racism.

“I don’t think the family felt like what we were saying to the Parole Board was heard,” Sandmaier said.

But it’s not just the family that’s impacted by the murders. Sandmaier spoke to her own experience.

“Driving down a road is really scary. If I had to pull over, I’d be terrified. Citizens have told me the same thing—that person is now in the community and it’s trauma inducing,” she said.

The issue also hit close to home for Desjarlais, the NDP MP sponsoring the petition in the House of Commons, who was raised not far from Glendon on Fishing Lake Métis Settlement.

“I’ve always grown up in, been familiar with and experienced racism. I’ve experienced systemic issues that are plaguing much of rural Canada, but particularly rural Alberta,” Desjarlais said.

He described a “growing sentiment” that the killing of Sansom and Cardinal is “another example of farmers taking justice into their own hands,” likening it to the 2018 killing of Colten Boushie, a 22-year-old Cree man who was fatally shot for trespassing on a farm in rural Saskatchewan.

“I know that pain deeply and I know that it exists and continues to exist in Canada. There’s been calls to action many, many times by Indigenous people on parole board reform,” he said.

Desjarlais said Sandmaier approached him about sponsoring the MNA’s petition.

“I offered them my support because I really do feel a personal connection to this work, because ... it frustrates me personally to know that we have a Métis family going through this, bearing



Spread Your Wings © by Art of Mohan

witness and suffering from these really brutal institutions that promised them justice,” he noted.

Soon after Roger Bilodeau received day parole, his and Anthony Bilodeau’s efforts to appeal their sentences were quashed in separate Alberta Court of Appeal decisions.

One of Sansom and Cardinal’s relatives reacted to this news with mixed emotions.

“Every time that there is a new hearing, or parole hearing, we are brought right back to day one,” Gina Levasseur, Jacob Sansom’s sister and Maurice Cardinal’s niece, said in a May 7 statement from the MNA. “That day, our family, and the Métis community lost two incredible human beings that were important to us.

“Maurice and Jacob’s deaths cannot be appealed, their deaths cannot be undone. It hurts that the system has given the Bilodeaus ample opportunity to continually de-humanize my brother and uncle as if their senseless murders were justified. The system needs to change, and we need action, more than ever, now.”

The MNA-initiated petition is open for signatures until Sept. 20. Desjarlais said he’ll present the petition in the House whenever the Sansom and Cardinal families indicate they’re ready.

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