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## Conference brings culture and connection to MacEwan

By Troy Dumont, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The 2026 Indigenous Youth Rising Conference, themed *Forever Young*, brought Indigenous youth and their chaperones to MacEwan University on February 13–14 for two days of culture, leadership, and connection in Edmonton. Hosted by MacEwan's Kihêw Waciston Indigenous Centre, the conference drew strong participation and delivered a full schedule of speakers, breakout sessions, and campus experiences aimed at empowering youth while offering a firsthand look at post-secondary life.

The gathering welcomed Indigenous youth aged 13–17, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students travelling from across the country. Keynote speakers Dr. James Makokis and Leo and Priscilla McGilvery anchored the program, with Tammy Lamouche and nîpîy Iskwêw serving as emcees and guiding the crowd through the two-day event.

Between the mainstage sessions, the conference



Program Coordinator Angelina Foote.

stayed active. Youth moved through breakouts, met new people, and asked questions they might not have felt comfortable asking in a classroom. A MacEwan alumni panel gave students a chance to hear directly from Indigenous graduates about their paths through university. Campus tours added the tangible piece visits through spaces like Chemistry, Sport and Wellness.

Behind the scenes, Angelina Foote, Program Coordinator at kihêw waciston, took the lead in continuing and strengthening a conference with deep roots at the university. MacEwan has run Indigenous Youth Rising since 2021, and the event also carries a longer history under a previous name, the Dreamcatcher Aboriginal Youth Conference. While the conference gives students a chance to see MacEwan up close, Foote says her focus is on something deeper: self-worth. "I love seeing kids with light in their eyes. After they leave anything, I've worked with them on, whether it's a team, a conference, or some kind of session, I want them to feel motivated, like the light has gone on and they have a sense of purpose. A lot of it is about empowering them to take agency and control over their own future. Self-worth is a big part of that."

The first day of the conference, a Bingo-style mixer got students moving around the room and connecting with other youth, staff, and guests. Instead of hanging back, many of them leaned into it, introducing themselves and jumping into the activity even when it pushed them outside their comfort zone.

As the conference moved toward its final hours after tours, panels, and breakout sessions the closing ceremony offered one of the weekend's most



The Indigenous Youth Rising Conference at MacEwan U.

memorable moments: the retiring of the eagle staff, accompanied by a drum group. What began with only a couple of people stepping forward grew steadily as others joined in. The moment carried a quiet power, even with the drumbeat filling the room.

Foote said some of the hardest work happens long before the first session begins. Registration logistics and community outreach are demanding, especially when schools and communities are balancing travel planning, chaperones, and day-to-day realities that can make extra opportunities harder to access. The most rewarding part, she said, comes at the end: hearing from participants about what they took from the experience.

Foote is already looking ahead. She encourages readers to watch for Save the Date posters for the next conference, expected to appear in the fall of this year. Future themes, she said, will follow the teachings of the medicine wheel. This year's theme focused on the emotional, and the next gathering will move to the mental.

Indigenous Youth Rising is a two-day event, but the impact is designed to last longer than a weekend. It creates a space where Indigenous youth can meet each other, connect with culture, and see themselves in post-secondary settings without having to leave who they are at the door. For some students, the takeaway will be a new interest in a program. For others, it will be simpler and just as important: the feeling that they belong in post secondary institutions, and the confidence to keep moving toward what comes next.

## Reclaiming life through culture, community, and spirituality

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



Ken Mackinaw

Ken Mackinaw, known by his Cree name Redrock, of Ermineskin Cree Nation, has faced extraordinary challenges. From racism, homophobia, and discrimination to years struggling with meth and alcohol addiction, his journey could have ended in tragedy. Instead, Ken turned his life around – and now shares his story to inspire others.

"Meth and alcohol were my drugs of choice," Ken recalls. "For years, they controlled my life. I overdosed on April 23, 2021, and that was the wake-up call I needed."

Since 2016, Safe Harbour Society's Medically Supported Detox in Red Deer has played a crucial role in Ken's recovery. The program provides free, 5–10 day medically supervised withdrawal support with 24/7 nursing, physicians, and case management, helping clients safely detox from substances like meth and alcohol while linking them to ongoing treatment and support. In 2024 alone, Safe Harbour supported 564 clients, highlighting its vital role in Central Alberta. ([safeharboursociety.org](https://safeharboursociety.org))

The risks Ken faced were compounded by his identity. As a 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous man, he experienced added pressures. Research shows LGBTQ+ individuals are two to three times more likely to use illicit drugs than

Continued on page 7

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# New book shares insights into Ways of Knowing

By ANNews staff

In a 2012 commencement address to Sir Wilfred Laurier University Graduates, Cree poet and storyteller Louise Bernice-Halfe Skydancer tells the students to unpack their own medicine bundles – and examine their unique gifts and blessings. One gift is the presence of a spirit guardian – who guides us and believes in us. Spirit guardians come in many forms, explains Halfe. They can be a teacher, or an Elder but they can even be a stranger’s insight, a few words or a book. She writes, “They may hold a mixed bouquet of kindness, patience, respect, love and forgiveness.”

In her latest book *Wītāmōwīk / Tell Them: On A Life of Inspiration*, the author and kēhtē-aya /Elder, becomes a spirit guardian and her book is a treasure trove of empowering lessons from a well-lived and beautifully articulated life.

With moving poetry and descriptive prose, Halfe chronicles her childhood in a cabin on reserve, follows her experience in the Indian Residential School system, and her becoming as a writer. In these never-before-collected essays interspersed with new poems, Canada’s parliamentary poet laureate tells the story of the trauma of separation. She writes, “My parents taught us the art of observation. I learned to hunt, skin, and butcher game through non-verbal methods. I also watched my grandparents work on the land and live their spirituality. I helped gather, dry, and grind their medicines. I inhaled the medicines’ power and ingested it. When I left for residential school all this fell asleep.”

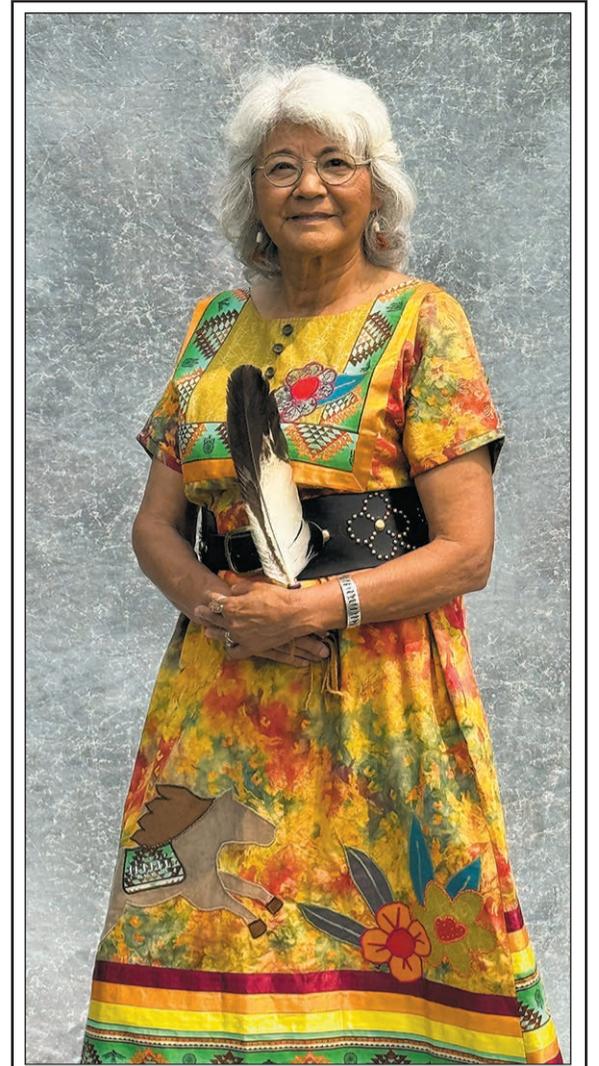
*Wītāmōwīk / Tell Them* is also the story of how she woke up. In Cree, inspiration is described as a sudden insight. Louise finds that it can come from visits from spirit, from the charged reciprocal

experience of being taught by Elders and teaching the next generation, from speaking Cree, which allows the poet to “somersault into memory,” and from the practice of observing and being in relationship with the land as it “constantly gives birth to itself.” *Wītāmōwīk / Tell Them* is a stunning love song to nēhiyaw ways of knowing – ways which Halfe has spent her life working to reclaim from the violence of colonization.

She writes, “We need to lift up and acknowledge the cultural risk-takers who went underground but then resurfaced and led our cultural restoration. They beaded their souls, patched and quilted their knowledge, sought out others still living in the deep woods of memory and brought back the ceremonies. Our life is that walk.”

In the book’s forward, Louise’s daughter Omeasoo Wahpasiw writes that this collection weaves her “mom’s insights across her generations” and that each piece is a “journey – but none is a leisurely stroll.” She says after all she experienced, one might think that her mother is a gathering thunderstorm but that she is actually the sun. “So many of her poems reference the joy of living in the world.” Her words are chosen carefully and each word grouping paints a vivid image. There are many wonderful lessons written within the pages of *Wītāmōwīk / Tell Them*. They are a gift and should be savoured.

Louise Bernice-Halfe Skydancer is an acclaimed nēhiyaw (Plains Cree) poet and writer from the Saddle Lake First Nation in Alberta. She has been the recipient of multiple awards and appointments for her work, including the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal, Saskatchewan Provincial Poet



Louise Bernice-Halfe Skydancer

Laureate, Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate, King Charles III Coronation Medal, and Member of the Order of Canada. *Wītāmōwīk / Tell Them* is available from University of Regina Press or from your favourite bookseller.

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## Assembly of Treaty Chiefs votes no-confidence in UCP government

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In an historic vote, an umbrella organization representing chiefs from Treaties 6, 7 and 8 has called on the Legislative Assembly to hold a vote of non-confidence in Alberta Premier Danielle Smith and the UCP.

The vote was unanimous at the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs (AOTC) Feb. 26 meeting at River Cree Resort in Enoch. It's the first time the AOTC has voted non-confidence in a government.

"A responsible government requires independent democratic oversight and a transparent legislative process. The UCP has obstructed and failed to meet these basic requirements to govern," reads an AOTC news release.

The chiefs are calling for UCP, NDP and independent MLAs to "officially and expeditiously" hold a vote of non-confidence in the government in the Legislative Assembly. With a UCP majority government, that's unlikely to occur.

Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) in Treaty 8 told *Alberta Native News* that as long as Smith remains in power, First Nations will use every legal means at their disposal to block resource development.

"The message is that we're not going to open the floodgates to any kind of resource development in our traditional territories," said Chief Adam.

"We could tie industry up in the court system for the next 20 years if we want to, or else we could open the door in six months. Take your pick."

Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations Grand Chief Joey Pete accused Smith's government of having "created conditions in Alberta that are unsafe for First Nations Peoples – promoting ignorance and intolerance along with its support for the separatist agenda is leading to outright racism."

Referring to the U.S. presidential administration of Donald Trump, Pete added that the UCP government is "acting as an embassy for the worst we've seen from south of the border, and it's time to say no."

"No one wants the future this government is taking us into," said Pete in the AOTC news release.

The provincial government has twice changed rules regarding referendums to make it easier for separatists to have a referendum on Alberta independence.

If the organization Stay Free Alberta is successful in collecting 177,732 petition signatures by May, the province is expected to

have an independence referendum on Oct. 19. The government has already scheduled referendums on five questions regarding immigrants' ability to access social services and four constitutional questions for that date.

There are four legal cases before the courts challenging the province's authority to approve a referendum on independence, given its inherent impact on Treaty rights, which are the product of agreements with the Crown that predate Alberta's existence.

These challenges are being led by Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, ACFN, Mikisew Cree Nation, and the Piikani, Siksika and Kainai Nations.

"Our Rights are non-negotiable," the Blackfoot Confederacy Chiefs said in the AOTC news release.

Chief Adam noted that as the court challenges to the premier's policies "keep mounting up," industry might begin having second thoughts about investing in Alberta.

"The message is already being sent," he said. "You want calmness? Get her out of there."

The AFCN's case is being heard from April 8 to 10.

Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi said in the AOTC release that the government has "repeatedly demonstrated to all Treaty people that it does not have the capacity to responsibly navigate the political instability resulting from the chaos Danielle Smith has created."

Mercredi attributed a "growing climate of division" directly to the UCP government's unwillingness to uphold "Treaty rights, constitutional obligations, and the foundational relationship between First Nations and the Crown."

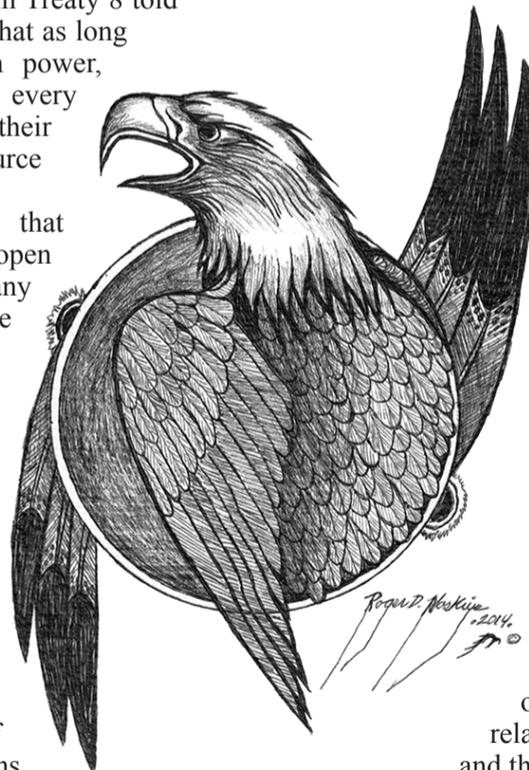
Xakiji Suh Xakiji, or Chief Ellery Starlight, of Tsuut'ina Nation in Treaty 7 described the AOTC vote as "swift action" against the premier for her "unconstitutional exercise to separate Alberta from the Crown."

Xakiji accused the UCP of attempting to breach the "lifelong covenant that contributed to the establishment of Canada through our Treaties."

"As long as the sun shines, grass grows, and the rivers flow, we remain connected as neighbors and partners with all humans on this land," he said.

In a Feb. 27 joint statement, NDP leader Naheed Nenshi and Indigenous NDP MLAs Brooks Arcand-Paul and Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse noted the "historic" nature of the AOTC vote.

"This has never happened in Alberta's history, and it reflects the profound harm caused by the Premier's embrace of separatism," they said.



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## Kaber's story: Balancing duty, family, and education

Kaber Koski's career as a first responder is evidence of his dedication to service, community, and lifelong learning. As Deputy Chief of the Sucker Creek First Nation fire department, Kaber has devoted over 11 years to firefighting and emergency response and has continually sought to enhance his skills and knowledge to better serve those in need.

Earlier in his career, Kaber became certified as a professional firefighter, HAZMAT technician, and fire training instructor through a fire academy in Texas, USA. However, Kaber decided to expand his expertise to include emergency medical training upon recognizing the need for further emergency response skills in his community.

Kaber embarked on his educational journey at Northern Lakes College, earning his Emergency Medical Responder certificate in 2018 before

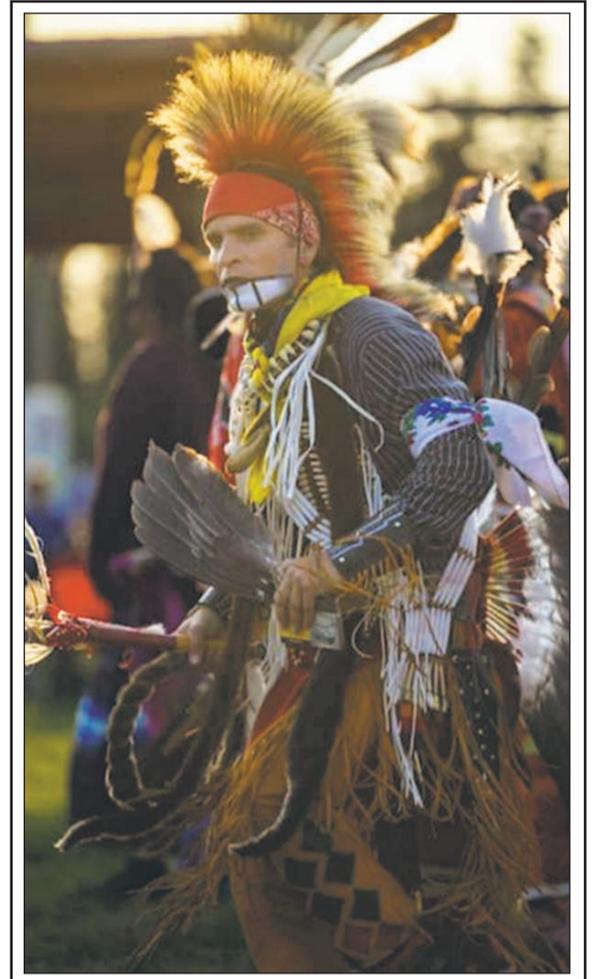
enrolling in the Primary Care Paramedic (PCP) program a few years later. "I decided it was time to take the next step in life and complete the PCP program," Kaber shares.

Dedicated to giving back to his community, Kaber continued to provide firefighting services with the fire department while pursuing his studies. Balancing the demands of family life and career with his studies was a challenge, but Kaber soon found strategies to cope with his competing demands. "Managing my time was pretty difficult," he acknowledges. "But, eventually, I discovered the time of day when I work best and without interruption. For me, that was usually in the late evening."

As father to 11 children, the demands on Kaber's time were extreme, but he remained committed to his educational goals and soon noticed how his studies empowered his parenting. "My wife and I have a blended family," Kaber shares. "Our eldest is 16 years old, and we currently have another on the way. I actually assisted in the delivery of our last two children after I started the PCP program, so I felt quite prepared. My wife delivered our children at home in a teepee. It was incredible."

Looking to the future, Kaber remains committed to serving northern communities as a Primary Care Paramedic, with plans to continue his education at NLC by enrolling in the Advanced Care Paramedic program. His dedication and hard work have not only inspired his own career aspirations but have also influenced his eldest daughter, who plans to follow in her father's footsteps by entering the Primary Care Paramedic program upon her graduation from high school.

Offering advice to those considering a career in first response, Kaber emphasizes the importance of commitment. "Make sure the career is right for



**Kaber Koski is a first responder and powwow dancer who is dedicated to giving back to his community.**



**NLC alum Kaber Koski**

you," he advises. "Volunteer, go on ride-along calls. It takes a lot of courage."

Through his unwavering commitment to his community and his own personal growth, Kaber serves as an inspiration to all who aspire to make a difference in the lives of others.

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## Stephanie Harpe: Working together to protect youth

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On Feb. 22, National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, Cree, Dene, and Métis advocate Stephanie Harpe shared her experience as a survivor. She highlighted the risks facing Indigenous youth, and called for stronger community support and prevention programs.

Harpe, a Cree, Dene, and Métis advocate from Fort McKay First Nation, has transformed her personal experiences as a survivor of domestic trafficking and family violence into a platform for education, healing, and advocacy across Indigenous communities in Canada.

"I'm just trying to make sure we're educating everybody and speaking about this more. Human trafficking is far more common than people realize. Survivors are in grocery stores, in meetings, in restaurants, and in traditional circles – it's important for the public to know what's really happening," Harpe says.

She has shared this message nationally and internationally, delivering TED Talks, speaking at conferences in London, Malaysia, and Dubai, and participating in documentaries and youth programs. Her advocacy is complemented by her music career; with The Stephanie Harpe Experience, she blends rock and Indigenous storytelling and has opened for Blue Rodeo, Tom Cochrane, and Barenaked Ladies, earning an Indie Spirit Award.

Harpe's work spans multiple areas, including community workshops, documentaries, and school-based programs, all designed to equip youth and families with practical tools to prevent exploitation and trauma.

Protecting youth remains a top priority for Harpe.

"We have children being lured online, sometimes into chat rooms, sometimes by adults pretending to be kids. Some of our youth have been severely abused. We have to talk to them about the risks and help them understand the red flags before it's too late," she explains.

She also emphasizes the dangers of sextortion, pornography, and AI-facilitated exploitation:

"We really tell people not to share any photos of their children or grandchildren. Children can access explicit material as soon as they get a phone, and that can normalize violence. That's one of the leading causes of why our women and girls are hurt or exploited."

To address these risks, Harpe is developing educational materials with Treaty 8, including age-appropriate presentations and videos that teach online safety, personal protection, and sexual abuse prevention. She also helped create

the *End to the Lights* documentary with Native Health Services, providing a sensitive introduction to human trafficking, highlighting how victims can recognize danger early and access support.

Her programs target children in care, youth living in poverty, and those with disabilities or mental health challenges — groups statistically more vulnerable to exploitation.

Harpe emphasizes that combating human trafficking is not only about protecting youth but also strengthening communities.

"If we got rid of lateral violence and stopped fighting with each other, we'd be much safer. The fight isn't with each other; the fight is with systems that are failing us. When we come together as Nations, we can be stronger and protect our children," Harpe says.

Addressing trauma and fostering unity in families and communities is central to her approach:

"A lot of what we're trying to do is falling on deaf ears. We have hurt each other, but some hurts are forgivable, and some are not. We just have to work together to heal and be strong."

Harpe's advocacy also includes men and boys. She is developing a short documentary and programming highlighting their experiences within the murdered and missing framework, and continues to organize Blue Jean Jacket Day on June 6, now recognized nationally and internationally to honour murdered and missing Indigenous men and boys.

"Families are really happy that we get to honour our males and have them included," she says.

Harpe collaborates with Indigenous organizations, health services, and local leadership to create preventative programs addressing sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and online safety. She is particularly focused on youth education, community workshops, and mentorship programs.

Her programs also aim to support survivors of trafficking and abuse, helping them heal and reintegrate safely into their communities. By combining education, awareness, and cultural connection, Harpe creates spaces for empower-



Indigenous rights advocate Stephanie Harpe is increasing awareness of the risks facing Indigenous youth, and calling for stronger community support and prevention programs. RCMP Photo.

ment and resilience.

Music plays a central role in Harpe's advocacy and personal wellness:

"My wellness comes from my family, my community, and my music," she says.

Through The Stephanie Harpe Experience, she uses folk and rock music to engage audiences, raise awareness about Indigenous issues, and amplify her message of youth protection and community healing. Music becomes both a storytelling medium and a therapeutic tool for her and her audiences.

Harpe's work has reached audiences across Canada and globally, and her contributions have been recognized with an Indie Spirit Award. She continues to perform, speak, and mentor, demonstrating how art, advocacy, and education can intersect to protect youth and strengthen Indigenous communities. Her efforts reflect a commitment to education, prevention, and community healing. On Feb. 22 – National Human Trafficking Awareness Day – her message was simple: communities must come together, youth must be protected, and Indigenous voices must be amplified.

According to Statistics Canada, police-reported human trafficking incidents have more than tripled since 2014, with 608 incidents reported in 2024, most victims being women and girls, many of them youth.

"The truth is what will set us free. When we're more empowered to talk about it, we can prevent it — and protect our children from human trafficking and exploitation," Harpe says.

Her work serves as both a warning and a guide: by educating, protecting, and uniting, communities can reduce the prevalence of exploitation and build safer environments for all youth.

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# Cadmus Delorme discusses the need for uncomfortable conversations

By Jennifer Kovacs, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

With approximately 9000 attending the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention Association (GETCA), the former Chief of Cowessess First Nation, Cadmus Delorme, took the stage in a powerful session on reconciliation. Through humour, storytelling, and authenticity Delorme challenged the audience toward a "rewiring" of our collective understanding of Truth and Reconciliation and what it looks like. Delorme's message is clear – reconciliation is about acknowledging the truths and ensuring Indigenous people no longer feel the need to "fit in" but that they truly belong.

Central to Delorme's talk was the use of the analogy of two canoes, one Indigenous and one Canadian, traveling down the same river. These two canoes exist together, but the Indigenous canoe has been held back by policies. The Indian Act and the Residential school policy being implemented without consent and input are examples of the oppressions that have been

imposed. However, as Delorme explained, we are in a significant era, where millennials are the first generation that are beginning to learn "the truths."

Truth, acceptance, and uncomfortable conversations were described as ways towards reconciliation, and ways that are helping that canoe to catch up. Delorme noted that while FMNI learning has the inherent ability to be "in any room," they are often impeded by a lack of mentorship, partnerships, and resources. Delorme heartfully shared traditional stories that can be woven into learnings, like the *Origin Story of Cree People* and *Legendary Story of the Dogs*.

True reconciliation requires the acceptance of "uncomfortable conversations," and "asking the right questions" such as acknowledging and searching for missing Indigenous women or the validation of the pain found in unmarked graves. Delorme urged the audience to look at their "inner layer," the one in the mirror, and ask oneself what



Former Cowessess Chief Cadmus Delorme

they are "handing off to the next generation." By embracing both worldviews, Delorme ensures that society can move toward a future where the Indigenous "canoe" isn't just surviving, but thriving alongside the Canadian "canoe."

## Reclaiming life cont. from p 2

heterosexual adults, with higher rates of alcohol and substance misuse. Factors such as discrimination, social stigma, and minority stress make recovery more complex, emphasizing the need for specialized supports that understand both Indigenous and LGBTQ+ experiences. (addictiongroup.org, coastaldetox.com)

For Ken, recovery was not just medical – it was also spiritual and cultural. "Prayer and smudging are part of my daily life now," he says. "They keep me grounded and connected to who I am."

He also credits the Wellbriety Movement for giving him direction. "When I first became clean and sober, I attended Wellbriety Circles here in Red Deer at the Native Friendship Center. It empowered me so much that I strengthened my spiritual connection through Wellbriety by smudging. It played a powerful role in my recovery. I encourage anyone who hears about Wellbriety in their community to check it out. It's a great way to step out of your comfort zone and connect with like-minded people continuing or seeking sobriety."

Ken's life today is radically different. He

surrounds himself with sober friends and family, embraces his feelings openly, and lives a life grounded in purpose and culture. "Sharing my story at events like the Wellbriety Conference in Red Deer showed me that my journey can help others," he says.

His advice to anyone struggling is clear: "Follow your heart. Reach out. You can get clean and sober."

Watch Ken share his story:  
 United Way Central Alberta Video  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukTm71Id0uE&list=RDJX2GkxNT-IQ&index=7](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukTm71Id0uE&list=RDJX2GkxNT-IQ&index=7)



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# EIA welcomes travelers to Treaty 6 territory

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Edmonton International Airport now features a vibrant public art installation that celebrates Indigenous culture, kinship, and connection. Award-winning Two-Spirit artist and television personality Lance Cardinal created Wâhkôhtowin, an indigenized welcome at the arrivals gate, reflecting the spirit of Edmonton's Indigenous communities.

Growing up in Calling Lake, a small northern hamlet of roughly 500 people, Cardinal often felt unseen amid poverty, addiction, and violence.

"Nobody wanted to hear it. Nobody wanted to look at me. Nobody wanted to understand me – except for my mom," Cardinal recalls. "She was my number one supporter. She was the one who told me what it was like to be a strong and different person growing up."

Television provided a lifeline, offering role models and inspiration: "We only had one channel – CBC – with the rabbit ears. I would watch those kids' show entertainers and hear them speak such positive words. Those were the only male role models I had in my life – television hosts like Mr. Dressup, Fred Penner, and The Friendly Giant.

They were the ones who encouraged me to be who I am. They told me I was perfect just the way that I am. They encouraged me to be creative, to express myself, and they always showed me fun, imaginative ways to see the world – ways that were very different from what I saw in my little community.

That's really where it started for me. As I got older, I continued to turn to art as my escape, my safety, my place of expression. I feel like we've never really had this conversation before."

Cardinal sees art as a bridge to understanding, a

way to communicate beyond words.

"I think art is a good way to view different perspectives, ideologies, and conversations without it becoming too loaded through words or arguments. I love the way art introduces ideas in an emotional, connected way – it lets you feel the messaging.

That's why my work is always colorful and bright. It reflects the beauty of our culture in a positive way and invites people in with open arms. That's how I approach it."

Cardinal's childhood love of television inspired his media work.

"Growing up, I loved the kids' television shows, and I'm so excited to have been asked by APTN to produce a kids' show with them, which was recently successful. Indigenous Art Adventures just finished Season 2, and I won a Canadian Screen Award for Best Kids Show last year.

It was exciting to get that acknowledgement and to have a show that celebrates Indigenous culture, encourages kids to love themselves, be creative, and express themselves in a positive way. It also shares language and culture with anyone who wants to watch."

Through *CTV Your Morning*, Cardinal reaches a national audience. "I'm a morning show host on *CTV Morning Live*, now called *CTV Your Morning*. I've been there for four years, doing



Artist Lance Cardinal with the Wâhkôhtowin installation that welcomes visitors at the Edmonton International Airport.

Indigenous segments that bring culture and ideas to people, share language, and encourage conversations about being allies. We talk about important dates like Orange Shirt Day or the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

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## Public Art:

### Wâhkôhtowin at YEG

Wâhkôhtowin is now a permanent installation at Edmonton International Airport, welcoming visitors with imagery that celebrates Indigenous perspectives.

"It features the letters YEG, and within those letters I've designed imagery that celebrates Indigenous people and our perspective of the world. The three letters represent the fields, the mountain rose, and the

northern spirit – landscapes that reflect our people and our deep connection to Mother Earth, and the importance of our relationship with the land.

The sign was created to welcome guests coming to Edmonton for the International Indigenous Tourism Conference last month. It was created for the conference but it will remain as a permanent installation at the airport going forward.

The 2026 International Indigenous Tourism Conference was the largest Indigenous tourism gathering globally, with nearly 1,000 delegates celebrating culture, language, storytelling, and economic empowerment.

"I think it's exciting that we had his amazing Indigenous Tourism Conference here in Edmonton. It was a great chance for nations to come together, see each other, and hear about the exciting things people are doing. That inspires us here in our territory and motivates us to create more Indigenous tourism.

I love the idea of creating industry for ourselves – inspired by our people, created by our people, in our traditional territories. Indigenous tourism is the number one tourism industry in the world, and when we encourage our people to share rich experiences, tell our stories, take people on our traplines, and show how we live on the land, it builds confidence, strengthens our identity, and provides economic opportunity. At the same time, it encourages understanding – true reconciliation – allowing others to see us authentically and celebrate our differences in a genuine way."

## Reconciliation, Strength, and Self-Guided Healing

"Territory – put your feet in the grass, touch the water, talk to the elders, just be in the area and feel how that feels to have connection. That will provide pride and authentic belonging.

"We need to build our power, our fuel tank, so we have strength and resilience. When we're knocked down a hundred times, we need that fuel to get back up. We haven't built enough of that yet from our elders, language, and experiences, but we're learning. We're making mistakes, and we're making successes – and that's exactly how it should be."

Cardinal emphasizes Indigenous self-accountability: "The barriers we face often come from within ourselves, not the outside world. We need confidence in who we are, in our culture, and to take responsibility for our own journey and our communities. That's our role – nobody else can tell us how to do it. We create authority by working with our elders, engaging our young people, and prioritizing our people's progress. Sometimes we create barriers to avoid looking at ourselves, but true growth comes from self-accountability, facing the parts of our nations that need healing, and learning new skills as we go. That process is exactly as it should be."

## Two-Spirit Advocacy and Youth Guidance

"The world has become a little less tolerant recently. There's been a push toward a more conservative existence globally, and I think it's important for us to support communities that need

Continued on page 10



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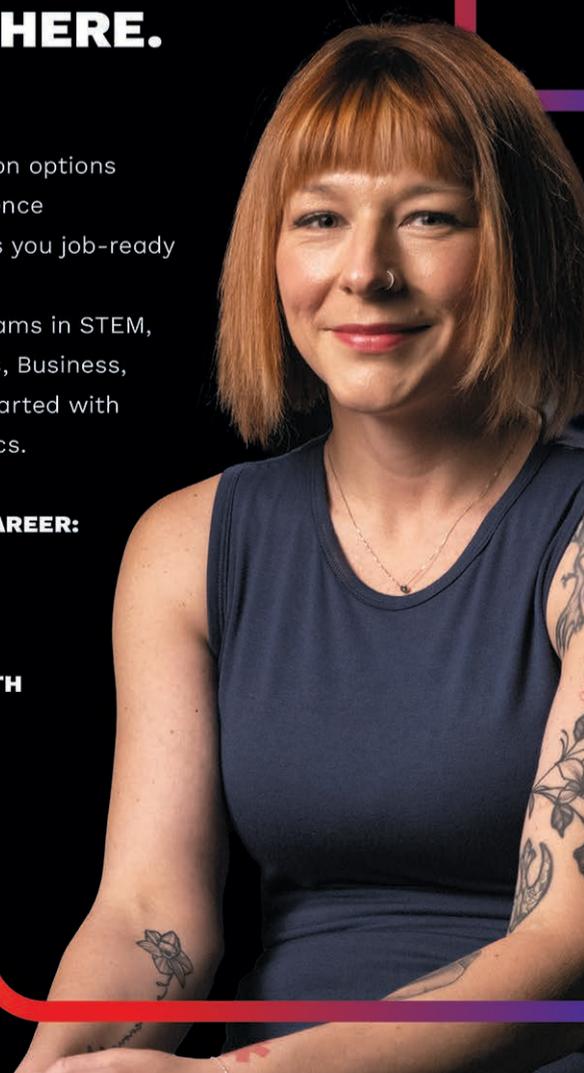
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# About our cover artist: Darrell Chocolate

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The stunning art on the cover of this month's *Alberta Native News* is by Northwest Territories-born artist Darrell Chocolate.

Chocolate traveled south last month to showcase his art at the International Indigenous Tourism Conference, which took place at the Edmonton Convention Centre in Amiskwacî-wâskahikan (Edmonton).

Chocolate was among artists and entrepreneurs journeying from across Indigenous territories to participate in what was recognized as the largest Indigenous tourism conference in the world, bringing together Indigenous leaders, creators, businesses, and international delegates to celebrate culture, innovation, and sustainable tourism.

Held on Treaty 6 Territory, the three-day conference featured panels, workshops, keynote speakers, cultural programming, and a large vendor marketplace designed to elevate Indigenous-owned businesses and artists from across Turtle Island and beyond.

For Chocolate, attending as an artist/vendor was an opportunity to bring northern perspectives, stories, and visual traditions to a global audience.

"My mission is to help bring humility and gratefulness for what we have in our lives," Chocolate says.

Drawing from personal experiences, he

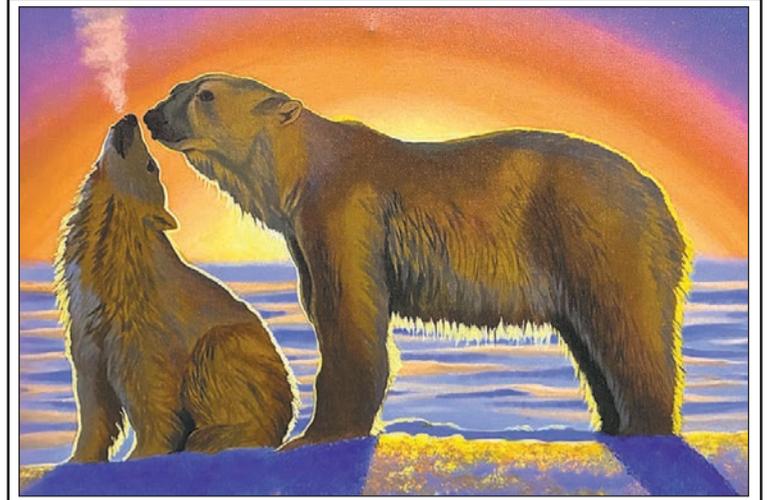
explains that both hardship and joy have shaped his worldview and artistic purpose. He believes emotional struggles can deepen character and resilience, while joyful moments reinforce gratitude for family, community, and the natural world.

"Feeling defeated or let down brings new meaning to character," he says. "It teaches you how to lift yourself up in your lowest moments and to keep going forward."

Chocolate credits his wife and children, parents, siblings, close friends, and late grandparents for grounding him, along with the teachings of respecting the land and animals. "To give respect to the land and the animals that are on this earth is part of who I am," he says.

His art practice focuses primarily on wildlife and human portraiture, often created through commission work that honours loved ones and ancestors. "My art business does mostly wildlife and human portraits," he says. "With human portraits, I get requests from people who want portraits of their grandparents, their parents, their loved ones."

As a northern artist, Chocolate says authenticity is central to his work and what may set him apart. "Maybe it's the realism in my wildlife and



Art by Darrell Chocolate. Photo: Terry Lusty

portrait paintings," he says. "I try to make it as authentic as I can – whether it's an eagle, the eyes, the details, everything."

Chocolate has been sketching and drawing since the age of six and began pursuing painting professionally in 2009. He says attending the conference was also about representation. "It's time to help represent the Northwest Territories," he says. "That's where I'm from."

By traveling from the North to Edmonton, Chocolate shone a spotlight on northern Indigenous artists and helped strengthen connections between art, tourism, and cultural storytelling on an international stage.

He is open to commissions and encourages those interested in his work to connect with him through his website and social media platforms.

Check out his art on his socials at [darrellchocolatefineart.com](http://darrellchocolatefineart.com).

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# AFN criticizes travel advisory for First Nations people entering the U.S.

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is backing the cross-border Jay Treaty Alliance's criticism of a recent Canadian government travel advisory urging First Nations people to carry a Canadian passport when entering the U.S.

Article III of the 1794 Jay Treaty between the U.S. and what was then British North America guaranteed free cross-border travel for U.S. citizens, British subjects and "the Indians dwelling on either side of the boundary line," in addition to exempting Indigenous travellers from duties and taxes on "their own proper goods" when crossing the border.

According to Pine Tree Legal Assistance, a non-profit law firm based in Portland, Maine, anyone from Canada who has more than 50 per cent "Aboriginal blood" can travel to or work in the U.S. without a U.S. visa or Canadian passport.

Instead, U.S. border security can ask for any combination of a blood quantum letter, status card, long-form birth certificate, or photo ID.

On Feb. 19, the federal government updated its travel advisory website to say that First Nations people "may be able to cross the Canada-U.S. border by land or water" with their status card.

"However, the acceptance of all status cards is entirely at the discretion of U.S. officials," reads the advisory, which "strongly recommended" First Nations people also carry a Canadian passport.

According to an archived version, the website previously stated that First Nations people "may freely enter the United States for the purposes of employment, study, retirement, investing, or immigration."

The AFN urged caution for First Nations band members crossing the border after a First Nations man was detained during an Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid. According to reporting from the Canadian Press, he had his status card seized and was deported.

In a Feb. 26 statement, AFN Grand Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said that the new travel

advisory runs "directly counter to the inherent right of First Nations" to travel freely between the U.S.-Canada border, as stipulated by the Jay Treaty.

"This right recognizes that First Nations moved freely through our traditional territories for ceremony, for trade, for harvesting and for family. That right must be recognized and upheld by governments on both sides of the border which was not our making," said Woodhouse Nepinak.

Requiring First Nations people to use Canadian passports, she added, "undermines our inherent right and the principle of self-determination."

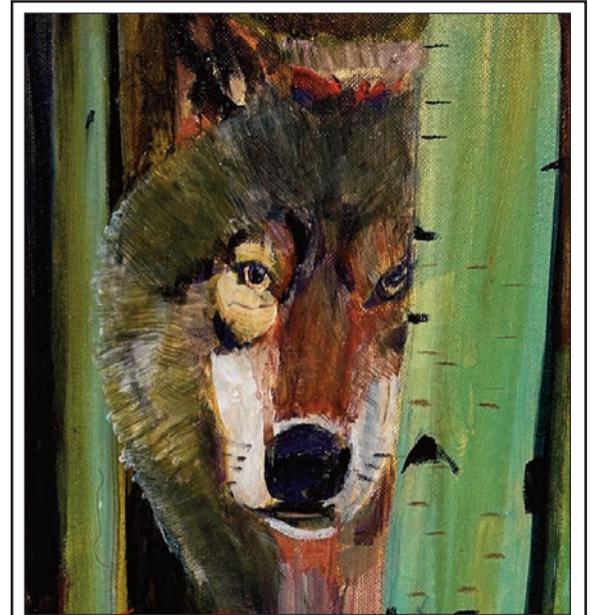
A few days earlier, the Jay Treaty Border Alliance (JTBA) issued a statement to express its "profound disappointment" with the travel advisory, calling the right to travel freely across traditional Indigenous lands "paramount."

The JTBA is a collaborative initiative between First Nations and tribal governments on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border to uphold their mobility rights.

Its leadership consists of Chief Michael L. Conners of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe in New York State, chairwoman Jennifer Porter of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Regional Chief Abraham Benedict of the Chiefs of Ontario, and Grand Chief Cody Diabo of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake in Quebec.

In addition to acknowledging the inherent rights of First Nations, the JTBA is asking the Canadian government "to specifically affirm the right of American born First Nations citizens to enter Canada."

"The creation of the border imposed lasting divisions on Indigenous Nations, in many cases permanently separating families and communities. The Alliance urges Canada to work directly with First Nations to address all violations, including those imposed by both the United States and Canada," the JTBA statement reads.



"Sneaking Around" by Linus Woods. See Wakinagallery.com

In 1956, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Jay Treaty was unenforceable on the Canadian side of the border, since it was never ratified by the Canadian parliament.

This means that the Canadian government only recognizes the right to travel freely into Canada and the U.S. for members of First Nations registered under the Indian Act, not members of tribes based in the U.S.

The JTBA statement calls on the Canadian government "to correct this inequity."

The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA), which sits on the borders of Ontario, Quebec and New York, issued its own news release, noting that its members' "mobility across this territory does not depend on Canadian citizenship documentation but flows from who we are as a people and must be upheld."

"While documentation establishing Indigenous status may be required when interacting with border agencies, no travel advisory can override the rights of Akwesasronon to move freely within our territory," said MCA Grand Chief Leonard Lazore in a Feb. 26 statement.

Global Affairs Canada didn't respond to *Alberta Native News's* inquiry by deadline.

## EIA welcomes cont. from p 8

our love – not just our Two-Spirit or Indigenous communities, but also others like the Chinese community, or anyone who needs support.

"For young people who feel unseen or afraid to be who they are, I encourage you to go to an elder, start praying, connect with the land, do a

smudge, or find ceremony. Our people accept everything in a traditional perspective. Elders tell us that who we are as Two-Spirit people is beautiful and celebrated in traditional ways. Talk to elders, your parents, your grandparents – their perspectives matter, but ultimately, how you see yourself matters most.

"I also think it's important to find ways to express yourself – through art, music, fashion, or any other medium. You can be on-reserve and successful anywhere. You can be a trapper and have a million followers on Instagram. You don't have to leave your community to succeed or to have value. Who you are as an Indigenous person

is valuable, and expressing that Indigeneity to the world through your eyes is success."

### From Calling Lake to a Platform of Impact

"If you're flexible and if you're able to bring yourself into the moment, there is so much opportunity."

From a child navigating trauma to an award-winning television producer, artist, and public voice, Cardinal demonstrates that Indigenous creativity, pride, and cultural strength can flourish – and invites the world to see, feel, and understand it.

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# Walking for Justice at the Edmonton Memorial March

By Chevi Rabbi, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Nikki Goodswimmer, the Valentine’s Day Memorial Walk in Edmonton is far more than an annual event — it is a deeply personal commitment to community, memory, and justice. Originally from Sturgeon Lake Nation, Nikki has navigated the challenges of growing up in care and has spent the past six years working on the front lines of Edmonton’s overlapping crises of homelessness, addiction, and gender-based violence.

“I am a former youth from care. But I work on the front lines as well right now. I’ve been on the front lines for six years now,” Nikki shares, grounding her advocacy in lived experience and community care.

Through her work with Hiregood, a social enterprise operated by Boyle Street Community Services, Nikki provides life-saving support in Edmonton’s downtown core.

“I worked alongside Hiregood, and we do overdose prevention and community cleanup,” she explains.

That work, however, has faced significant setbacks.

“I don’t know if anybody else knows about this, but within the last year – since around September or October – we had our contracts taken away due to budget cuts, alongside other harm reduction organizations. Even public hospitals were affected. We were taken off the front lines, and right now we’re just working our way up,” she says.

Despite these challenges, Nikki continues to show up – especially on February 14.

The Valentine’s Day Memorial Walk in Edmonton is part of a broader tradition of annual marches held every February 14, originally known as the Women’s Memorial March. The first march took place in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside in 1992, when family members and community allies gathered to honour Indigenous women who had been murdered or gone missing. What began as a grassroots act of mourning grew into an international movement observed in cities across Canada and the United States, calling attention to violence against Indigenous women, girls, and

Two-Spirit people while demanding systemic change.

In Edmonton, the first local walk was organized in 2006 by the late Danielle Boudreau in memory of her sister and two friends who were missing and murdered Indigenous women. She launched the Edmonton chapter alongside April Eve Wiberg, Stephanie Harpe, and other women on the front lines of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples movement, creating a space for advocacy, ceremony, and remembrance.

After Danielle passed away, there was uncertainty about whether the walk would continue. Nikki saw the gap and stepped forward, understanding that the community needed someone willing to carry the work forward.

Mentored by April Eve Wiberg and Stephanie Harpe, Nikki continued building her voice as an advocate. Through that mentorship, she began speaking publicly about the violence impacting Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people.

“In 2019, I was really involved with the community and public speaking. That was actually my very first time speaking about gender-based violence and domestic violence, as we were commemorating women and Two-Spirit people in our LGBTQ community and addressing the violence that takes place in the streets,” she recalls.



The Edmonton Valentine's Day Memorial March. Photo by Paula Kirman.

Each year, the Valentine’s Day Memorial Walk offers families and community members a space to gather, grieve, and demand accountability.

“It’s commemorating women and Two-Spirit and our LGBTQ community and speaking about the violence that takes place in the streets,” Nikki emphasizes. “This year, there was a big turnout, with many people coming out to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women, Two-Spirit people, and boys.”

As participants walked together through Edmonton’s streets, they asserted their presence and affirmed that Indigenous lives matter. The strong turnout reflects an ongoing reality: Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people continue to face disproportionately high rates of violence.

For Nikki, the march is both remembrance and resistance – a promise that the names carried each February 14 will not be forgotten, and that the community will continue to demand justice.

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# MNC signs agreement with Northwest Territory Metis Nation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Metis National Council (MNC) President Victoria Pruden was in Edmonton on March 9 to sign an agreement with the Northwest Territory Metis Nation (NTMN) to advance shared priorities, which could potentially lead to the NTMN eventually joining the MNC.

Pruden signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with NTMN President Garry Bailey at a ceremony at the Chateau Louis Conference Centre, with representatives of the local Otimpesiwak Metis Government (OMG) and Metis Nation of Ontario in attendance, as well as former MNC president Cassidy Caron.

After Pruden and Bailey each provided introductory remarks, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Rebecca Alty spoke via video feed.

The MOU includes a one-year work plan that will be revisited, but its contents are “evergreen,” Pruden told *Alberta Native News* in an interview.

“As we shift and change what the Metis National Council looks like governance-wise, [the MOU] could evolve into something more substantive,” she said.

One of the key shared priorities identified by both Pruden and Bailey was pushing the federal government to implement the Supreme Court of Canada’s 2016 Daniels Decision, which Pruden noted was approaching its 10-year anniversary.

The ruling recognized Metis and non-status First Nations people as “Indians” under the Constitution Act, meaning the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility towards them.

“We’ve still seen no major movement or commitment on the fiduciary responsibility for programs and services for the Metis nation,”

Pruden said, noting that Metis people were excluded from Jordan’s Principle funding, which was given to First Nations to ensure that they can provide social supports for their members.

Bailey agreed that it was time to hold the federal government “accountable and start getting some action on the Daniels decision.”

“Doing that nationally, bringing a northern perspective as well, is going to move things a lot faster,” he told this newspaper.

It made sense for the NTMN, which has about 2,800 members, to pool its resources with the 100,000 members of the OMG and Metis Nation of Ontario, said Bailey.

While he hopes the agreement “goes further,” Bailey noted some incongruence between the MNC’s bylaws and the NTMN’s governance structure that needs to be addressed before the NTMN is eligible for full membership.

According to the MNC’s bylaws, each member organization’s provincial executive must be directly “elected by Province wide [sic] ballot.”

The NTMN president, vice president and secretary, however, are elected by 100 delegates from its three constituent communities – Fort Resolution (Deninu), Fort Smith (Thebacha) and Hay River (Xatlo Dehe) – at an assembly.

The MNC, which acts as an umbrella organization advocating for Metis communities at the federal level, has lost more than half its member organizations over the past five years.

The Manitoba Metis Federation withdrew from the MNC in 2021 and Metis Nation-Saskatchewan followed suit in 2024, with both citing the inclusion of the Metis Nation of Ontario, which has been accused of allowing non-Metis members to join.



Presidents Garry Bailey and Victoria Pruden

The Metis Nation of B.C. (MNBC) also left the MNC in 2024 over concerns regarding its governance structure.

Pruden, who is a member of the MNBC, said that there have been “lots of good, positive conversations” with Metis communities outside the MNC fold.

“We’re looking at opportunities for us to really play a role, not dictating, but convening and supporting collaborative conversations on areas of policy and priority that we share,” Pruden explained.

She said the August 2025 summit for Metis leaders Prime Minister Mark Carney convened to discuss the Building Canada Act gave her the opportunity to engage with some of them, including the NTMN.

The Manitoba Metis Federation, however, boycotted the event, as did the MNBC after it was only invited as an observer. Other communities weren’t invited, such as the Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan Metis nations in Alberta, which aren’t part of the OMG.

OMG president Andrea Sandmaier told *Alberta Native News* that the MOU with NTMN was a “great step” towards “unity among the Metis governments in the homeland.”

“We can do great things when we’re doing them together, and we have lots of priorities in common,” Sandmaier said in an interview.



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# The International Indigenous Tourism Conference was a success!

Article and photos by Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This year, Edmonton played host to the International Indigenous Tourism Conference and Awards Gala at the city's downtown Convention Centre. With over 1,000 visiting delegates from across Canada, the Northern Territories, and Central and South America, it rang of success.

The annual gathering is meant to provide an opportunity for Indigenous people to showcase successful tourism initiatives. Also, to demonstrate best practices and assist each other in learning strategies to improve their own tourism-related objectives. To achieve these goals, various professionals, entrepreneurs and experts were on hand to participate as speakers, panelists and presenters.

Just a few of the specialists included Sebastien Benedict from Tourism Industry of Canada, Christine Loth-Bown from Parks Canada, Philip Mondos - the President of Tourism HR Canada, and Marsha Walden, President and CEO of Destination Canada.

A four-member panel of youth shared their views and experiences relative to youth, entrepreneurship and tourism – through their own eyes. The individuals were: Colin Alexander, Mackenzie Brown, Mikayla Lafferty and Jodie Johnson.

*How to power tourism forward via partnerships* was the focus of representatives from the Walking Together panel and included Chelsey Quirks of Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Travel Alberta's David Goldstein, and Traci Bednard from Explore Edmonton.

The main IITC hosts during the conference were its president and CEO, Keith Henry,

Director of Marketing - Tamara Littlelight, Director of Business Development - Tara Saunders, and Director of Partnerships - Teresa Ryder.

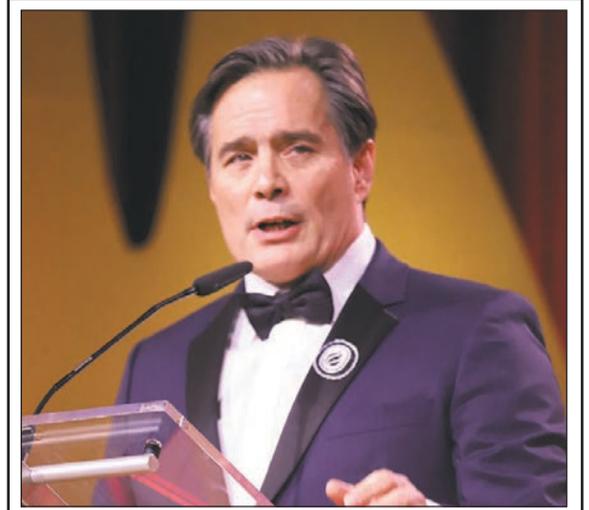
Throughout the conference proceedings, hundreds of delegates milled about, visiting the onsite crafts market which offered all sorts of handmade goodies. Approximately 40-45 craft booths exhibited items made from hide, feathers, leathers, bone, stone, shells, and beads. There was a tremendous variety for sure - even artistically designed hats, shawls, shirts, skirts, and more.

The conference emcees were charismatic and delightful: Ashley Callingbull, an internationally renowned motivational speaker, actress, model and Indigenous activist and Lance Cardinal a popular designer, and television personality from the Bigstone Cree Nation.

This year's keynote presentation was award-winning actress, Crystle Lightning, the co-founder and director, as well as actor, of the highly acclaimed production, *Bear Grease* which toured New York last summer. And, before standing ovation audiences in Times Square no less! She is from Enoch Cree Nation on the southwestern outskirts of Edmonton.

Also featured performers were First Nation powwow dancers, Metis jiggers, hoop dancers, contemporary vocalists and musicians such as Celeigh Cardinal, Stirling John, Kaeley Jade, Tia Wood, and more!

The final day - Feb. 19 - was THE day, set aside for the much-anticipated Awards Gala and banquet. The evening event incorporated still more entertainment, keynote speaker, exciting



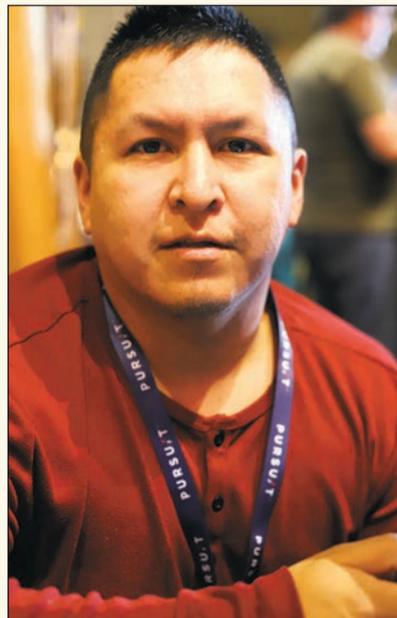
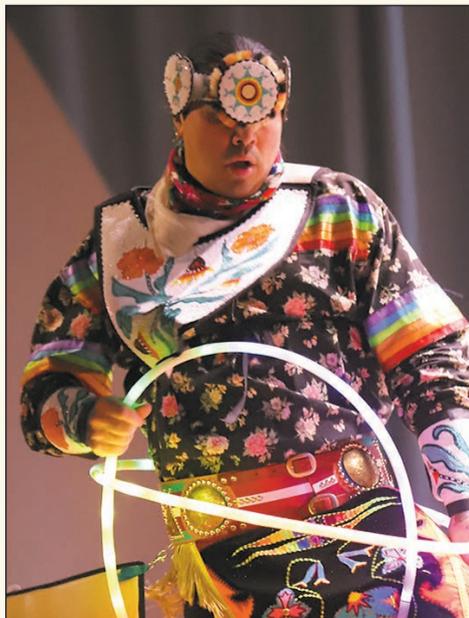
ITAC President and CEO Keith Henry.

tourism awards and numerous good individuals to break bread with. The banquet was a sit-down, catered affair and very delicious.

Eleven awards were presented to excited recipients who hailed from coast to coast, across Canada and one even went all the way southward to Panama! Of those handed out to deserving recipients, no fewer than four went to representatives of Indigenous initiatives right in the host province of Alberta! Winners included Ungava Polar Eco-Tours (Cultural Experience), Métis Crossing (Alberta Leadership), and Spirit Bear Lodge (Sustainability).

By and large, the awards recognized outstanding leadership, dedication, creativity, sustainability, business acumen and new or wonderful initiatives in the realm of Indigenous tourism.

As for 2027, Winnipeg, Manitoba, is scheduled to host the colossal event. Planning is already underway and it's sure to be engaging, informative and festive.



Reporter Terry Lusty poses with International Indigenous Tourism Conference delegates from Mexico. The conference featured wonderful vendors and performers including keynote Crystle Lightning, a variety of powwow dancers, artist Darrell Chocolate and performer Tia Wood.

# Georgina Lightning: Alberta should be Indigenous film capital of the world

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Georgina Lightning is a Cree filmmaker, screenwriter, actor, and Indigenous media advocate from Edmonton, Alberta, and a member of Samson Cree Nation. With more than three decades in film and television, she has dedicated her career to advancing Indigenous voices on screen.

Speaking with *Alberta Native News*, Lightning outlined her vision to transform Alberta into a global hub for Indigenous-owned film and media, focusing on story ownership, economic development, and sustainability. She said Alberta must support its own storytellers: “These are Alberta workers, and we’re trying to make Alberta the Indigenous film capital of the world. That means working with ministers and with Nations across Treaty 6, 7, and 8 – every treaty region – to build something that’s real and lasting.”

Lightning emphasized that the timing is right to advance this initiative. “We’re now working with the Edmonton Screen Office, and Luke Acevedo is on fire. For the first time, it feels like everything in my career has led to this moment. This work is necessary, it’s needed, and now it’s finally being welcomed.” She noted the success of her Banff Centre lecture on Decolonizing the Narrative on November 19, 2025, as evidence of strong interest.

Highlighting systemic underinvestment in Indigenous filmmaking, she said, “Last year, only one Indigenous film from Alberta was funded by Telefilm – and that was my son Cody Lightning’s film. Alberta should be comparable to any other province. Why aren’t we producing content at the same scale as Ontario?” In response, she and collaborators announced a dedicated film fund for

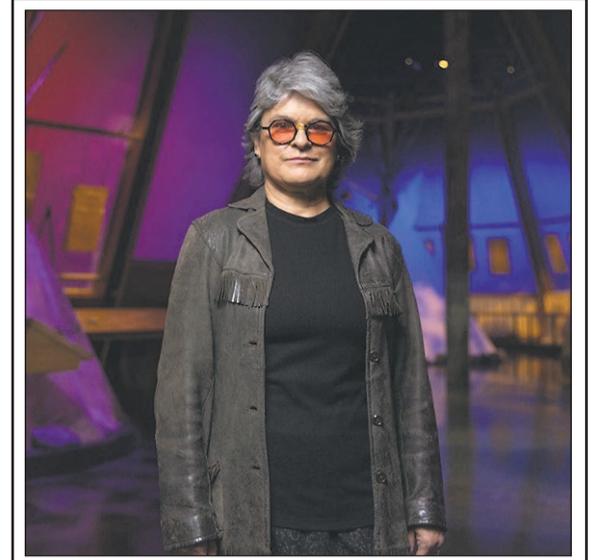
Alberta-based Indigenous creators. “Luke from the Edmonton Screen Office brought several Alberta film commissioners with him, and they were incredibly receptive and eager to work with us. We announced that we’re developing a film fund specifically for Alberta-based storytellers. That doesn’t mean we’re becoming exclusive – it’s about investing in our own storytellers at home.”

Alberta, Lightning noted, must shift from a service-provider model. “Provinces like Ontario and British Columbia function largely as service providers. The stories come from somewhere else – often Hollywood – and productions come here because it’s cheaper. But the intellectual property and profits go back to where the story is owned. Alberta people need to own the stories. We need to develop them here, produce them here, and distribute them from here.”

She stressed the economic potential of film. “This is a multi-billion-dollar industry, yet we still treat it primarily as art or culture, tucked into the arts portfolio. Those films are important – but film also belongs in economic development. We need to be investing far more in building Indigenous-owned intellectual property right here in Alberta.”

Lightning also described the influence of media on public perception. “I always use *Blood Diamond* as an example. That one film changed how people viewed and purchased diamonds worldwide. That’s the impact of a well-told, socially relevant story. Media shapes perception and shifts the social climate.”

She highlighted the value of Alberta’s skilled workforce. “If you’re great in marketing, we bring you in. If you’re an accountant or a lawyer from oil and gas, we create transitional programs and move those skills into film. Film is a product. You sell it into different territories around the world. That’s how you build an economy – and it



Filmmaker Georgina Lightning.  
Photo: Edmonton Screen

could be the next great economy in Alberta.”

Returning to her core message, Lightning said, “Story is the resource. If we get behind our storytellers, we don’t just change culture – we build an economy. Hollywood doesn’t exist without story. You can have a thousand producers, but if there’s nothing to produce, none of it matters. Indigenous people have tons of stories. In a world experiencing a spiritual deficit, people are hungry for meaning – and they respond deeply to Indigenous storytelling.”

For Lightning, Alberta has a clear opportunity: by investing in Indigenous storytellers and keeping the value of stories within the province, Indigenous filmmakers can reshape both the cultural and economic future of Alberta.

## Alberta Film Industry Context

Alberta’s film and television sector has seen rapid growth in recent years, with over 130 productions generating more than 3,200 jobs and contributing over \$250 million to the provincial economy. Major projects like *The Last of Us* spent over \$140 million locally, supporting more than 1,000 businesses and nearly 1,500 jobs. Incentives such as the Film and Television Tax Credit, offering up to 30% refundable credits, and the Alberta Made Screen Industries Program have attracted numerous productions. However, Lightning emphasizes that Indigenous creators have not fully benefited from these programs.

By focusing on Indigenous-led content, Alberta can strengthen both its creative culture and economic impact, ensuring that the province’s stories are owned, produced, and distributed locally.

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# HAPPY Easter

Wishing you a very Happy Easter filled with love, peace, and joy.

May this season of renewal bring warmth, happiness, and bright new beginnings to you and your loved ones, not just today, but always.





## The 2026 Census is now underway in select northern and remote communities.

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Find out more at [census.gc.ca/north](https://census.gc.ca/north)