



ALBERTA NATIVE NEWS

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Artist Ryan Willert turns survival story into public art across Alberta

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The beautiful art on the cover of this month's *Alberta Native News* is by Ryan Willert. A powerful voice in Alberta's contemporary Indigenous art scene, Willert has built a visible creative legacy across Red Deer and beyond – one shaped as much by hardship and recovery as by paint, ceremony, and public space.

A member of the Stimson family and part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Willert describes himself simply as a "Blackfoot artist." His work now spans murals, installations, and community-based projects displayed in schools, hospitals, and public buildings throughout Alberta.

Born and raised in Southern Alberta, Ryan Jason Allen Willert is a professional muralist known for large-scale public works rooted in Blackfoot teachings and storytelling. Raised primarily in non-Indigenous communities before reconnecting with his Siksika Nation roots, he learned black-ink drawing and art sales from his father, renowned Siksika artist Richard "Dicky" Stimson. His work has appeared in exhibitions and public projects across Alberta, including collaborations connected to the City of Calgary and the Glenbow Museum. He was also one of two featured artists in the bestselling *Colouring It Forward – Discover Blackfoot Nation Art & Wisdom* and was named Artist of the Year by *New Tribe Magazine* in 2009.

From the streets of Calgary to an art career

Willert's journey into art began in survival. "I've been living off my art for almost 24 years," he said.

While homeless in Calgary and panhandling, his father handed him a folder of family artwork to sell. "My dad gave me a folder of my family's

art and told me I could sell this because I was living on the streets at the time."

Selling prints from artists in his family, including members of the Stimson lineage, became a first step away from street life, even as he struggled with addiction and identity.

"I was feeling guilty that I was selling their art," he said. "And I wanted to start selling my own."

At the time, he says he lacked confidence in his abilities. "I was a terrible artist. I could barely draw or paint."

Persistence eventually led him to develop his own work, including an early black-ink drawing of a bear that became a breakthrough moment. "It was basically a survival thing at the beginning for me."

Identity, trauma, and healing

Much of Willert's story is rooted in the complexity of Indigenous identity and inter-generational trauma. "When I was younger, all I really seen (sic) was the alcoholism and people on the streets," he said. "Nobody really talked about residential schools."

As a teenager, he struggled deeply with self-worth. "When I was a teenager, I wished I was white. I hated being Native."

He says those feelings were shaped by racism and the environment around him. "They looked down on you like you're uncivilized or not as superior as the suburban Caucasian class at the time. And I believed it."

Addiction followed him into adulthood. "I was an alcoholic and a drug addict, just kind of covering that pain of being unhappy with the color of my skin."

A turning point came when he committed to sobriety and reconnected with ceremony and Blackfoot teachings. "Eleven years ago, I made commitments to really do a deep dive into our ceremonial ways."

He credits ceremony with helping him heal and remain sober. "It's kept me sober, and it's really changed my art quite a bit."

Public art and community impact

Now based in Red Deer, Willert's work has become increasingly recognizable across Alberta. His murals and installations can be found in schools, hospitals, public buildings, parks, and gathering spaces throughout Calgary, Edmonton,



Magpie mural in Red Deer by artist Ryan Willert. Facebook photo.

and Red Deer.

His projects often center Blackfoot teachings, healing, identity, recovery, and contemporary Indigenous experiences. In Red Deer, his work includes murals at St. Francis of Assisi Middle School, St. Thomas Aquinas Middle School, and École Camille J. Lerouge School, along with several downtown public murals and civic art installations.

For Willert, the work carries responsibility beyond art itself. "I take it very serious on being a role model," he said. "I take it very serious about being sober, being very involved in my culture."

He hopes his story reaches others struggling with addiction and disconnection from culture.

"There's a lot of our people, our youth, our adults, that are dealing with substance issues and not very involved in their culture," he said. "I want people to see this and hopefully be encouraged to do the same."

Willert says his relationship with Red Deer is rooted in gratitude. "The city of Red Deer has done so much for me."

He also thanked people who supported him by purchasing his artwork during difficult periods of his life. "If you're reading this and you bought art off me, either on the streets or at one of my markets, I want to say thank you."

One of his recent projects included donating a mural to the Safe Harbour Society, which supports people experiencing homelessness and addiction.

"I lived on the streets for almost five years, and it's very dear to me," he said. "Recovery is an important thing."

Today, Willert's work stands at the intersection of Indigenous identity, recovery, and public storytelling. For an artist who once struggled with survival and self-worth, Alberta's walls have become both canvas and testimony – reflecting not only where he has been, but where he continues to go.



Artist Ryan Willert. Facebook photo.

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Commemorating Red Dress Day in Edmonton

Article and photos by Terry Lusty, LJI Reporter

May 5th is respected as the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQ+ people. It is also known as Red Dress Day and is a dedicated day of remembrance, activism, and education honouring the lives lost to this ongoing crisis.

All across Canada there are memorial walks and tributes for Indigenous relatives who have gone missing, faced violence, or were murdered.

On this past May 5th there were two locations in Edmonton where special ceremonies or walks transpired. The downtown core of the city hosted a gathering and memorial at Beaver Hills Park, located along Jasper Avenue at 105th Street.

Hundreds of participants, as well as victims and family members gathered at the park during the noon hour. They arrived in ribbon skirts, ribbon shirts, red dresses or sweaters in honour of those violated in any of a number of ways.

In its early years, beginning in the spring of 2007, the Stolen Sisters Movement in Alberta, started in Edmonton by April Eve Wiberg, held events to raise awareness of MMIW. That grew to later include 2SLGBTQ, men, boys, and people of Indigenous ancestry.

Today these memorials are widespread all across the country.

And so it was on Monday, May 5th, 2026, that hundreds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people struck out with walkers at approximately 1:00 p.m. in Edmonton's downtown area. Still others gathered for a similar function along 118th Ave at 92 Street.

Prior to the departure from Beaver Hills Park, five drummers mounted a hilly area of the park and sang an honour song to the accompaniment of rawhide hand drums.

Attired in their red dresses and/or ribbon skirts and shirts, the walkers made their way south, along 107th Street, and down to the Alberta Legislative Building, holding signs, singing Indigenous Warriors' Songs, and/or carrying or wearing red dresses. Upon arriving at the Legislative Building, the names of missing and murdered people were said aloud. Some of the walkers spoke publicly about how they lost relatives and friends, while demanding improvements in the justice system to better address the disproportionate numbers of those missing, murdered, or violated.

The walkers then returned to Beaver Hills Park where they were treated to snacks and beverages. There, they also mingled and consoled one another, offering their moral and loving support to those impacted by the trauma they continue to live with.



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Treaty 8 chiefs warn about potential 'civil disobedience'

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta's grand chief has written an open letter to Premier Danielle Smith calling on her to cancel October's referendum on whether to pursue a future independence referendum.

"We state this plainly so that there can be no misunderstanding: there is no lawful path by which Alberta can pursue separation from Canada while bypassing the rights, consent, and constitutional status of Treaty 8 First Nations," wrote Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi in the June 3 correspondence.

"That consent has not been sought. It has not been given. Nor will it be given under duress or through any process designed to circumvent our constitutional rights."

On Oct. 19, Albertans will be asked: "Should Alberta remain a province of Canada or should the Government of Alberta commence the legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada?"

At a June 4 news conference, Mercredi warned Alberta Premier Danielle Smith that there would be consequences for continuing with the referendum in the absence of consulting with First Nations.

"When we say that we'll take a look at all avenues, that means everything," he said. "That means stopping industry, that means maybe going out on the highways, that means doing what we need to do to be heard on this issue of separation."

Mercredi added that this could mean "civil disobedience, but it is our last resort."

"It's up to the governments. Do they choose to hear us? Do they want to push us aside? Do they think that our rights don't matter? Do they think the Treaty is a myth?" he said.

"There is no path to reconciliation here in Alberta when it comes to the UCP."

According to Mercredi, Smith "hasn't offered to sit down with Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta."

Some Treaty 8 chiefs have met with Indigenous Relations Minister Rajan Sawhney, who is attempting to secure Indigenous support for a new bitumen pipeline to the B.C. coast.

"For the Indigenous Relations minister of Alberta to be consulting on behalf of the province when it comes to a pipeline project because they're a proponent, it cloudies up the waters of what her job really is," Mercredi said.

Chief Allan Adam of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN), who joined Mercredi at the news conference, re-iterated his previous call for the premier to resign.

"This premier is totally lost, gone, got no credibility left. She's swimming in muddy water, and she has no place to go," said Adam.

Grand Chief Mercredi indicated that he intends on writing a letter to Prime Minister Mark

Carney, asking him to initiate debate in the House of Commons on the quasi-independence referendum, as required under the 2000 Clarity Act.

Carney has previously stated that the Clarity Act doesn't apply in this case, because it's "not a binding referendum."

The act requires the House of Commons to determine whether any secession referendum would reflect the clear will of a clear majority.

Separatist organization Stay Free Alberta gathered signatures for a citizen-initiated referendum asking directly if Alberta should become an "independent state."

ACFN, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation (SLCN) and the Blackfoot Confederacy challenged the petition in court, arguing it should have never been approved without consulting First Nations in Alberta.

Justice Shaina Leonard of the Court of King's Bench in Edmonton agreed that the government had a duty to consult with First Nations prior to approving a petition that could set in motion a process that would impact the Treaties, concluding that the petition "must be quashed."

Premier Smith has pledged to join Stay Free Alberta's appeal of Leonard's "troubling ruling."

She announced the indirect question as "another way to hear from Albertans while we wait for our legal appeal to be heard."

"It's a non-binding referendum to have a referendum. It makes absolutely no sense," said Mercredi.

Smith has also mused about gauging other premiers' support to re-open the Constitution to amend section 35, which enshrines the rights of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples, which she argued "was never intended to remain open-ended or to be redefined by the courts in a way that creates new and expanding rights with each new decision."

"We reject that characterization entirely and call on you to retract it without qualification," wrote Mercredi in his letter to the premier.

"Your suggestion that Section 35 should be amended because its judicial interpretation is inconvenient to your political objectives is not a defensible legal position. It is an attack on the constitutional architecture of Canada and signals an intention to subordinate the rights of First Nations to the preferences of a provincial government."

At the press conference, Mercredi said Smith's "talk about opening up the Constitution to remove our rights is a human right issue."

"The lack of understanding from this premier is absolutely disgraceful," said Chief Sheldon Sunshine of SLCN, who also spoke.

"We're here to tell everybody that we've had enough and when we're talking about every means necessary, we mean every means necessary – legal, civil disobedience, you name it."



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3rd annual Red Dress Powwow in Calgary a ‘phenomenal’ success, says organizer

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This year’s third annual Red Dress Powwow in Calgary saw upwards of 2,000 attendees on May 8 at the Big Four Roadhouse.

“It was phenomenal. It was just beyond expectations. The community came out and we had amazing dancers,” said Shane Gauthier of the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, which organized the event.

“Next year, we’ll need a larger venue.”

The annual event, which began in 2024, is intended to honour missing, murdered and exploited Indigenous Peoples (MMEIP).

“We knew that this is something that is needed yearly and throughout the year, really. When we’re looking at the impact of missing, murdered and exploited Indigenous Peoples, it’s year-round, 24/7, not just once a year. But we should always be mindful, and be thinking of them and the families and the healing and honouring them,” said Gauthier.

To organize the event, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre brought together a committee of Elders, staff and community members, who ensured that the planning process was grassroots.

While the plight of MMEIP is solemn, Gauthier said that a celebratory powwow is an important part of the “healing of the community.”

From the grand entry to a video montage of MMEIP and the powwow dance itself, the purpose is “to commemorate and to honour people” so that “we don’t forget them,” he explained. “It’s in reverence. It’s in remembrance.”

“I think we’re getting better planning-wise – the run of the show, the agenda, just streamlining everything ... As you put on large events every year, it just gets more fine-tuned,” he added.

Gauthier said it’s “super important” to host powwows, which are open to anyone to attend, in urban centres like Calgary, since that’s where the majority of people live.

“It’s a safe space for all people to come together and celebrate Indigenous culture. These should happen in urban settings and on reserve,” he said. “Everywhere, we should have more of them.”

Calgary Mayor Jeromy Farkas and provincial Indigenous Relations Minister Rajan Sawhney both attended the powwow.

“Ending violence requires more than policies; it requires community, culture and education,” said Sawhney in a May 8 news release.

“Events like the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary’s 3rd Annual Red Dress Pow Wow play an important role in honouring those who are missing, supporting families and survivors, raising awareness and helping build safer futures for Indigenous women, girls and two spirit plus people.”



The third annual Red Dress Powwow in Calgary brought over 2000 people together to honour missing, murdered and exploited Indigenous Peoples and celebrate Indigenous cultures. Photo supplied.

The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC) is proud to announce \$2.1 million in federal funding to expand our *Ahmahto’siim-ahkoohmsi (Smudge Vow)* a program developed and guided by Elders rooted in culture, healing, and community.

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Shane Gauthier and Native Women’s Association of Canada President Josie Nepinak.



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Forward Summit participants propose Indigenous workforce solution

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The question of how to prepare Indigenous students for the workforce was the subject of a May 14 panel at the Forward Summit, an annual event that brings together Indigenous leaders, entrepreneurs and industry to chart a path towards reconciliation.

The roundtable discussion, entitled “Urban and Remote Indigenous Workforce Solutions,” occurred at the Grey Eagle Resort and Casino on Tsuut’ina Nation in Treaty 7.

The speakers consisted of Assiniboine College director of Indigenous engagement Kris Desjarlais; Keelie Goodstriker, a student in the University of Alberta’s Aboriginal Teacher Education Program; Blood Tribe Employment and Skills Training director Levi Little Moustache; and Kesley Davis, the manager of Indigenous communities at data analytics firm Esri Canada.

Desjarlais, a city councillor in Brandon, Man., from Cowessess First Nation, touted “high-flex models” of education and job training as a means of accommodating Indigenous students and encouraging their participation in the workforce.

Assiniboine College does this through its community-based job training program, which sends instructors to remote communities to offer relatively quick job training in specific roles that are needed in the community.

“Sometimes that might mean adapting a program that’s not accredited, but it’s a program that’s desperately needed,” explained Desjarlais. “We can pivot and potentially accredit it later.”

He added that “technology has definitely helped” the college offer more flexible

programming options.

Goodstriker, who worked as a probation officer before pursuing education, said that training must be based both on community needs, as well as fields where Indigenous people are underrepresented.

“When I started my schooling to become a probation officer, there wasn’t a lot of opportunity directly in my community,” said Goodstriker, a member of the Blood Tribe in Treaty 7.

“There’s not a ton of Indigenous representation in the education system, so that’s how I came to the conclusion of being a teacher.”

The notion of going to school and then figuring out if there’s employment in the field must be “reversed,” she said.

Goodstriker said that students should instead be asking: “What does my community need? What is missing? What do we need more representation in?”

Little Moustache, who is also a Blood Tribe member, said that the most important metric for job training is “long-term success,” as opposed to “just getting them employed.”

His First Nation’s training and skills program begins with culture and language training to create a “solid foundation” that enables a student to “withstand any storms throughout their life.”

Davis agreed that students need to be regarded as more than just employment figures, proposing the use of a happiness or wellness index to determine student success.

“Are people’s lives better, are communities better and stronger? Is the world in a better place? To me, that’s what it’s about,” he said.



"Three Riders at Dawn" by Linus Woods. Available for purchase at wakinagallery.com

Little Moustache noted that there’s often few job opportunities on reserves, which he suggested could be resolved through partnerships between First Nations, municipalities and post-secondary institutions.

“There’s different departments doing different aspects of training, but if we can bring those partners together, then it can kind of alleviate that lack of opportunity,” he said.

This requires a desire to engage in genuine partnerships with First Nations communities, Little Moustache added.

“At the end of the day, a partnership is what that organization or company is going to do for the community, not just come in and make their money and then be gone,” he said.

Desjarlais noted that one of the most impactful changes at Assiniboine College was the introduction of its peer-mentoring program in 2019. He boasted that 98 per cent of peer mentors completed graduation.

A key factor he identified in Indigenous students overcoming barriers to their success is culture.

“The lion’s share of students that we see are marginalized. It still holds true, but we see the ones that have strong connections to their culture be so much more successful,” he said.

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Thank you, Hai, Hai, Masi Cho.

Premier schedules referendum question for Oct. 19

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Hours after NDP MLAs' proposal to engage in consultation with First Nations before proceeding with an independence referendum was voted down in committee, Premier Danielle Smith announced a referendum on whether there should be a future independence referendum for October.

Both developments provoked harsh words from First Nations leaders.

On Thursday May 21, Smith hosted an address to the province on her personal YouTube page, in which she announced that she will add another referendum question to the suite of nine questions focusing on immigration restrictions and provincial powers already scheduled for Oct. 19.

The question is: "Should Alberta remain a province of Canada or should the Government of Alberta commence the legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada?"

Smith emphasized that she intends on voting in support of remaining in Canada, citing Prime Minister Mark Carney's retreat from various policies she objected to, including an oil and gas emissions cap and clean electricity regulations.

Last week, Court of King's Bench Justice Shaina Leonard quashed a separatist referendum petition drive, agreeing with Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Blackfoot Confederacy's argument that the government needed to consult with them before the chief electoral officer approved the petition.

In her address, the premier re-iterated previously expressed criticism of Leonard's "troubling decision."

"This ruling fundamentally misinterprets the nature of the duty to consult, which was never

meant to prevent citizens from making their voices heard through a democratic process," Smith said.

The premier added that her government intends on appealing Leonard's "incorrect ruling," a process which she acknowledged "will take many months, possibly years."

She portrayed the new referendum question as "another way to hear from Albertans while we wait for our legal appeal to be heard."

"Because this proposed referendum question does not directly trigger separation, but if successful would ask Alberta's government to commence the legal process necessary to hold a binding referendum on the matter, the recent court ruling would not be applicable," said Smith.

'The beginning of the end of Treaty'

After Smith's announcement Chief Billy-Joe Tuccaro of Mikisew Cree First Nation in Treaty 8 issued a statement calling the premier a "traitor and a separatist," which noted that First Nations haven't received "even an invitation to the table,"

"The question announced today is intended to be the beginning of the end of Treaty," Tuccaro said, referencing a "manufactured UCP separatist crisis."

Smith concluded her address by cautioning "against the trap of using division and demonization tactics."

"The Premier talks about hatred and vilification," said Tuccaro, "but she opened up a world of hate on First Nations and continues to do

so by attacking independent Courts for siding with us, Treaty and the constitution.

"Her words are meaningless."

Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Chief Sheldon Sunshine issued a brief statement in response to the additional referendum question, characterizing Smith and the UCP as "undemocratic, authoritarian, and willing to bend to the whims of a loud, angry minority."

"First Nations have been sounding the alarm bell for months now. Danielle Smith continues to trample on Treaty, and continues to damage the economy and reputation of the province in order to stay in power," wrote Sunshine.

"It's time for others to join us in fighting for our rights, the rule of law, and a functioning democracy."



Committee debates Forever Canada petition

On Wednesday May 20, a Select Special Citizen Initiative Proposal Review Committee met to discuss what to do with the Forever Canada petition spearheaded by former deputy premier Thomas Lukaszuk.

The pro-federalism petition, which obtained 438,568 verified signatures, asks: "Do you agree Alberta should remain in Canada?"

Stay Free Alberta, the organization behind the pro-independence petition drive, claims that it collected 300,000 signatures. These haven't been verified due to a stay Justice Leonard ordered on counting separatist petition signatures until she issued her decision, which ultimately rendered the number of signatures moot.

Unlike the separatists' petition, which was a constitutional referendum proposal, Forever Canada submitted a policy proposal, giving the government the option of debating the petition in

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Happy National Indigenous Peoples Day, to all our relations.

ALBERTA'S NEW DEMOCRAT CAUCUS

Bryce Morin: Representation really does matter – we're still here, and our stories are alive

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Bryce Morin has emerged as a powerful voice in Indigenous theatre through his role as Danny in the hit production *Bear Grease*, a reimagined musical that centres Indigenous storytelling, humour, and identity on stage. For Morin, the work is more than performance – it is purpose, representation, and cultural continuity.

Morin said he was first drawn to *Bear Grease* while working alongside co-creator Cloud in education, who shared the vision for the project. The concept immediately resonated with him.

"I was instantly drawn to the idea of this alternate universe where colonization never happened," he said. "It was a chance to share our stories, our songs, our humour."

He added that growing up, he rarely saw Indigenous people represented on major stages, making the production deeply meaningful.

Morin described the creative process as rooted in cultural reclamation and storytelling. "Decolonization was a process, I guess, that we had in mind, and it's flourished since then," he said.

Taking on a character inspired by Danny Zuko, Morin said he focused on grounding the role in his own lived experience and worldview. "I tried to ground him in our world," he said. "I leaned into rez humour, natural confidence, but also heart."

He explained that he also drew from his own personality to shape the character. "I kind of took a little bit from my own self too, you know, just the swagger and whatnot, but Danny, a lot like me, we're just big softies."

For Morin, the process of indigenizing the role felt natural, blending humour, spirit, and authenticity into the performance.

Morin credits his upbringing in Enoch Cree Nation with shaping every part of who he is as an artist and storyteller. "Growing up in Enoch shaped everything about me, really," he said. "Culture, community, storytelling – that was just everyday life."

He shared that being around the drum, ceremonies, and community teachings helped him develop a grounded sense of identity that he carries into his performances. "That keeps me grounded everywhere I go," he said.

Before acting, Morin said music was his first creative language. He began singing and drumming at a young age, deeply connected to ceremony and community life.

"That was part of our everyday ceremonies," he said. "The drumming and the singing was a big part of our ceremonies. So naturally singing would be my first love. That's where I found my voice."

He also recalled his older brother introducing him to rap music on cassette tapes, which led him to start creating his own songs at just five years old. "I've always had an affinity towards film and acting," he added. "Once I stepped into that world, everything else fell into place."

Morin hopes *Bear Grease* continues to inspire



Bryce Morin and cast in "Bear Grease." Photo supplied.

Indigenous youth and audiences alike. "I hope it inspires our people, continues to inspire our people, and empowers our youth to show them that anything is possible if you're willing to put in the work," he said.

He praised the dedication of the cast and crew, describing them as deeply committed artists constantly refining their craft. "We're the hardest working Natives I know," he said. "Even when we're not on stage, we're working on other crafts. We're always plugging away at it, just making the show that much better."

At the same time, he hopes non-Indigenous audiences walk away with a deeper understanding of contemporary Indigenous identity.

"We're still here, and our stories are alive,

Continued on page 21

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Oday'mín Daze transforms Edmonton park into an Indigenous-led celebration of multicultural talent

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On May 30, Oday'mín Park in downtown Edmonton was transformed into a vibrant cultural gathering place through Oday'mín Daze 2026, a new Indigenous-led festival series designed to bring life back to the downtown core by celebrating cultural activities, local talent, musicians, artists, entrepreneurs, and community organizations. The event marked the first of five summer activations that organizers hope will become a lasting fixture in the city's cultural landscape.

Created through a partnership between Kakio Productions Inc., Association Teepee Treats, and the Urban Indigenous Collective Society, the initiative is supported by a \$100,000 City of Edmonton grant aimed at activating public spaces. Rather than a single event, Oday'mín Daze consists of five activations throughout the summer, each intended to transform Oday'mín Park into a welcoming hub where Indigenous and multicultural communities can gather through music, art, food, and family programming.

The festival also reflects the City of Edmonton's broader efforts to bring renewed energy to the downtown core through arts and entertainment programming. By creating an Indigenous-led gathering space that embraces multicultural participation, Oday'mín Daze contributes to a growing movement to make downtown a more vibrant and welcoming destination for residents and visitors alike.

The next Oday'mín Daze is scheduled for July 27 at Oday'mín Park, with additional activations planned through the summer before the series concludes with a two-day celebration in September.

For event director and producer Dallas Arcand, the festival is about much more than entertainment.

"We applied to the City for a grant that was made available to downtown businesses, and we were approved for \$100,000," Arcand said. "The grant is for us to activate a public city park, and the park we chose was Oday'mín Park, right across the street from Kakio Studio Café."

Although the grant may sound substantial, Arcand explained that it is divided across five separate events, leaving roughly \$20,000 available for each activation.

"\$100,000 may sound like a big amount, but over five events it works out to roughly \$20,000 per event," he said. "Around 25 to 30 per cent gets eaten up by production alone, just to hire the production company, bring in the stage, equipment, and sound technicians. We tried to spread it around as best as possible, making sure the community benefited and that different groups received a piece of it."

Part of that funding also helped create a welcoming atmosphere in the park through the installation of teepees and gathering spaces that reflected Indigenous culture.

At its core, Arcand says Oday'mín Daze is about activating public space while creating opportunities for artists and community organizations.

"It's just about activating the public space and bringing all our artists and community partners forward," he said.

The May 30 event featured 12 hours of continuous programming, running from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. The day opened with words from local Elder Edward Lavallee before welcoming the Abraham Lake Singers and Dancers to the stage. Inuit throat singers also performed, creating a program that celebrated Indigenous traditions while inviting broader cultural participation.

Attendance remained steady throughout the day, with local vendors benefiting from the crowds. Teepee Treats served food on site, while



Everyone had a great time at the first Oday'mín Daze event held on May 30 in Edmonton. The next event will be held on July 27. Photo by Dallas Arcand.

other community entrepreneurs sold refreshments, including lemonade and iced coffee.

Arcand, who produced the festival alongside Brittany Witford, said one of the event's primary goals was to create opportunities for local musicians and performers.

A major feature was an open-mic stage where community members could step up and perform alongside the festival's house band, Tiger Coffee, featuring Dennis, Nikki, and Ryan. The group, known for hosting weekly jam sessions at River City Revival House, backed performers throughout the day.

Arcand also performed several songs himself, while featured artists included Sebastian Barrera and Bianca Isabella, both of whom showcased original music.

"We set up the stage as an open mic stage for anybody that wanted to play or share their music," he said.

The performances extended beyond music. A local poet also shared spoken word pieces with the audience, while local politician Jodi Stonehouse was among those who addressed the crowd.

While Indigenous culture remained at the heart of the festival, Arcand said organizers intentionally created a program that reflected Edmonton's diverse urban community.

"The event was Indigenous-hosted, but we didn't want all of the content to be exclusively Indigenous," he said. "We wanted it to reflect the multicultural nature of our community."

Community partnerships also played a significant role in the event's success. Soberhood Edmonton and the Crazy Indian Brotherhood were among the organizations that came out to support the festival, helping provide a reassuring presence throughout the day and assisting organizers in maintaining a welcoming environment for everyone attending.

Families and children were another important focus. A dedicated kids' area featured performances by Métis hoop dancer Olivia Flows, while Dallas Arcand Jr. entertained younger audiences with children's music. Artist Lance Cardinal created an interactive art zone, giving youth and families an opportunity to participate creatively rather than simply observe.

"We created a kids' area so there was something for families and children to experience as well," Arcand said.

Looking ahead, organizers hope Oday'mín Daze will continue to grow as momentum builds over the summer. Five activation events are planned in total, each intended to bring renewed energy to Edmonton's downtown core

while celebrating culture, creativity, and community connection.

"We're planning activations each month, and then in September we're looking at a two-day event," Arcand said. "Hopefully by then, we can attract some more sponsors and funding."

Arcand also expressed gratitude for the support the festival has received from both the municipality and the public.

"We would like to thank the City of Edmonton and the community for their support," he said. "We look forward to sharing more Oday'mín Daze events with everyone."

As Oday'mín Daze continues throughout the summer, organizers hope the festival will become a lasting part of Edmonton's evolving downtown landscape. With five activation events planned, the series not only provides a platform for Indigenous and multicultural artists and performers but also supports broader efforts to revitalize the downtown core through arts, culture, and community engagement.

For Arcand, the festival demonstrates how Indigenous leadership and community partnerships can help shape the future of Edmonton's public spaces – bringing together music, art, family activities, local businesses, and cultural expression in a way that welcomes everyone.

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Denis Andre, Manager, Land Environment & Sustainability at FortisAlberta



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Keep devices and medical equipment charged and check on neighbours who may need help.



Follow Alberta Wildfire fire bans and restrictions. When permitted, fully extinguish firepits and burn barrels.

Visit alberta.ca/wildfire-preparedness for more.

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New children's book honours the Cree teachings of a môsôm

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A new children's picture book titled *okiskinwahamâkêw* – meaning “teacher” in Cree – is set for release soon, offering a deeply personal reflection on Cree language, land-based learning, and the teachings passed down through generations.

Created by Tammy Rae Lamouche, the book is rooted in childhood memories and the lasting influence of her late môsôm, whom she describes as one of her most important teachers.

“This book is inspired by how my môsôm was one of my greatest teachers,” Lamouche said. “Some of my most cherished memories are of spending time with him on the land, learning our Cree language, listening to stories, and taking in the teachings he shared.”

Those experiences, she said, shaped not only her understanding of language and culture, but also how she views learning itself. For Lamouche, education is not limited to formal classrooms or structured lessons, but is deeply connected to relationships, land, and lived experience.

“He taught me that learning doesn't only happen in a classroom – it happens through relationships, through the land, and the language,” she said.

Much of the book draws from those early teachings, including time spent observing the land, listening to stories, and learning through presence and patience. The work reflects a worldview where knowledge is carried through experience and shared between generations rather than simply written or taught in isolation.

Lamouche said the book is also a way to honour her môsôm, Rayman, along with the many other grandparents, Elders, and knowledge keepers who continue to guide families and communities through teachings that are both practical and spiritual in nature.

“This book is my way of honouring him and the many grandparents, Elders, and knowledge keepers who help guide us,” she said. “It speaks to the importance of language, culture, connection, and the teachings that are passed down from one generation to the next.”

While *okiskinwahamâkêw* is a children's picture book designed for early learners, Lamouche said its message is not limited by age. Instead, she hopes it resonates with anyone who has been shaped by the guidance of a teacher, family member, or Elder.

“While it is a children's picture book geared toward early learners, its message is really for anyone who has been shaped by the love and guidance of a teacher, Elder, or family member,” she said.

At the heart of the project is a commitment to Cree language revitalization. Lamouche said choosing to write the book primarily in Cree was intentional and reflects her broader advocacy for strengthening language use among younger generations. “I've always been a big advocate for language revitalization, especially with Cree,” she said. “I've incorporated a lot of Cree into my songs, but this is the first time I've published something that's based on a story.”

She said language is central to identity and connection, and she hopes the book helps readers engage with Cree in a meaningful and accessible way. “It was important to have it in Cree because anybody that's reading this, I want them to be able to connect,” she said.

The idea for *okiskinwahamâkêw* has been developing for years. Lamouche said she first created an early version of the story as a class project during post-secondary studies. The assignment received strong feedback, which encouraged her to revisit and expand the idea into a full publication.

“I already had this story in mind for a long

time,” she said. “It was actually for a class project, and it was very well received. I thought, ‘I really want to be able to share this story.’ That's where it all started. That's where it was ignited.”

Over time, the project grew from an academic exercise into a fully developed children's book informed by her work in early childhood education, language learning, and community-based research. Much of her professional focus has been on early learners, who she describes as especially receptive to language acquisition.

“A lot of our language work is focused on early learners because children are like sponges,” Lamouche said. “They're at a stage where they can absorb and retain so much information, including language.”

Her work includes developing songs, learning tools, and activities that encourage movement, repetition, and play as methods of strengthening language learning. She also works as a consultant in early childhood education and has incorporated these approaches into her academic studies.

Lamouche said *okiskinwahamâkêw* brings together her creative, academic, and cultural work into a single project grounded in personal experience and community teachings.

The book is a collaboration with illustrator Omar “Panda” Ornelas Cervantes, who brought the story to life through visual design and illustration. Cree translations were completed by Lamouche, Chris Lamouche, and L. Dale Laboucan, and the book is published by



Indigenous Dawn.

The primary text is written in Cree and includes a QR code that allows readers to hear the story narrated in the language. An English version is also included to support accessibility and encourage broader engagement with Cree language learning.

Lamouche said this bilingual approach was intentional, ensuring the book could serve both fluent speakers and those still learning.

“We also wanted to be mindful of those who may not speak the language yet,” she said. “Our hope is that it can serve as a resource for language learners while encouraging more people to engage with, celebrate, and hear the beauty of the Cree language.”

Now in its final stage of production, *okiskinwahamâkêw* is expected to be released soon, offering what Lamouche hopes will be both a teaching tool and a lasting tribute to the knowledge shared by her môsôm and other Elders.



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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. Best wishes and safe travels to all the summer festival participants. Have a great time!

<p>June 12 – 14 Pasqua First Nation Annual Traditional Pow Wow. Pasqua First Nation, SK</p> <p>June 12 – 14 Canoe Lake Cree Nation Traditional Powwow Canoe Lake Cree Nation, SK</p> <p>June 18 4th Annual Mini Traditional PowWow Regina, SK</p> <p>June 19 – 21 Williams Lake First Nation's Traditional Pow Wow. Williams Lake, BC</p> <p>June 19 – 21 Flying Dust First Nation Treaty Days Flying Dust First Nation, SK</p> <p>June 20 Treaty 6 - 150th Commemoration Fort Battleford National Historical Site, SK</p> <p>June 20 – 21 Mikisew Cree Nation Treaty Days Fort Chipewyan, AB</p> <p>June 20 – 22 National Indigenous Peoples Day Fort Edmonton Park, AB</p> <p>June 26 – 28 Saddle Lake Cree Nation Pow Wow Saddle Lake, AB</p> <p>June 26 – 28 Siksika Nation Fair Siksika Nation Fairgrounds, AB</p> <p>June 26 – 28 Kamloopa Powwow. Kamloops, BC</p> <p>June 27 – 28 Muskeg Lake Cree Nation 33rd Annual Traditional Veteran's Powwow Leask, SK</p>	<p>June 27 – 28 Grande Prairie Traditional Pow Wow Evergreen Park, Grande Prairie, AB</p> <p>June 30 – July 2 Red Pheasant Competition Pow Wow Red Pheasant Cree Nation, SK</p> <p>July 1 Tatanga Day Traditional Powwow Buffalo Meadows Park, SK</p> <p>July 3 – 5 Bonaparte BC Pow Wow. Bonaparte, BC</p> <p>July 3 – 5 Alexis Nakota 49th Annual Powwow Glenevis, AB</p> <p>July 3 – 6 Mosquito Grizzly Bears Head Lean Man Battleford, SK</p> <p>July 3 – 12 Calgary Stampede. Calgary, AB</p> <p>July 4 Red Deer Two Spirit Pow Wow Pioneer Lodge, Red Deer, AB</p> <p>July 4 – 5 Bordon Park 2nd Annual Traditional 2 Spirit Pow Wow Borden Park, Edmonton, AB</p> <p>July 8 Lead by Example Powwow Chestermere, AB</p> <p>July 10 – 12 Enoch Cree Nation Competition Powwow Enoch, AB</p> <p>July 10 – 12 Whitebear First Nation Pow Wow White Bear First Nation, SK</p>	<p>July 10 – 12 Squamish Nation Youth Pow Wow North Vancouver, BC</p> <p>July 14 – 15 Sweetgrass Traditional Pow Wow Sweetgrass, SK</p> <p>July 16 – 19 Back to Batoche Festival. Batoche, SK</p> <p>July 17 – 19 Onion Lake Celebration. Onion Lake, SK</p> <p>July 17 – 19 Kainai Powwow & Celebration Red Crow Park, Standoff, AB</p> <p>July 17 – 19 Peepeekisis Cree Nation Powwow Peepeekisis, SK</p> <p>July 17 – 19 Ermineskin Cree Nation Powwow Maskwacis, AB</p> <p>July 21 – 23 Big River First Nation Powwow Celebration Big River Nation, SK</p> <p>July 22 – 26 TsuuT'ina Annual Celebrations TsuuT'ina Nation, AB</p> <p>July 23 – 25 Zagime Anishnebek Powwow Fort Qu'Appelle, SK</p> <p>July 24 – 26 57th Annual Thunderchild Championship Powwow and Game Tournament Thunderchild, SK</p> <p>July 28 – 30 2026 Youth Teepee Summit. See ad page 11. Northeast River Valley Event Centre, Edm., AB</p> <p>July 29 – 31 Yellow Quill Traditional Pow Wow Yellow Quill First Nation, SK</p>
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Lac La Biche, AB

July 31 – August 2

Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation's
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July 31 – August 2

Beaver Lake Cree Nation
Annual Competition Powwow
Beaver Lake Cree Nation, AB

July 31 – August 2

Muskoday Traditional Powwow
Muskoday First Nation, SK

August 3-5

Woodland Cree First Nation Treaty Days
Woodland Cree Recreation Grounds, AB

August 7 – 9

Waterhen Lake First Nation
Traditional Powwow. Waterhen Lake, SK

August 7 – 9

Pheasant Rump Nakota Nation Powwow
Kisbey, SK

August 7 – 9

Vyper Reclaiming Youth
4th Annual Contest Pow Wow. Mission, BC

August 7 – 9

Samson Cree Nation Pow Wow
Bear Park, Maskwacis, AB

August 7 – 9

Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation Powwow
Ministikwan, SK

August 7 – 9

Driftpile Cree Nation's Annual Powwow
Driftpile, AB

August 11 – 13

Cowessess First Nation Traditional Pow Wow
Cowessess First Nation, SK

August 12 – 16

Piapot Traditional Powwow
Paiapot First Nation, SK

August 14 – 16

Frog Lake First Nation 2025 Powwow
Frog Lake, AB

August 14 – 16

Piikani Nation Celebration & Pow Wow
Brocket, AB

August 14 – 16

Chief Kahkewistahaw Pow Wow Celebration
Kahkewistahaw, SK

August 17

Cold Lake First Nations Pow Wow
Cold Lake, AB

August 18 – 22

Treaties 1-11 Gathering. TsuuT'ina Nation, AB

August 19 – 20

Siksikaitsitapi Powwow at Whoop-Up Days
Lethbridge, AB. See ad page 14.

August 20 – 23

Treaty 6 - 150th Commemorative Event
Duck Lake, SK

August 21 – 23

Ochapowace Cree Nation Annual Powwow
Ochapowace, SK

August 24 – 28

50th Annual Elders Gathering
Vancouver Convention Centre, BC

September 4 – 6

Heart Lake First Nation 22nd Annual
Competition Pow Wow 2025
Lac La Biche, AB

September 4 – 6

Flying Dust First Nation Pow Wow
Meadowlake, SK

September 11 – 13

Stalew Pow Wow
Langley Events Centre, Langley, BC

September 19 & 20

4th Annual Powwow & Artisan Expo
Lethbridge, AB

October 3 – 5

National Indigenous Cultural Expo
Edmonton Expo Centre, AB

October 9 – 11

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Teen Girls – 13-17 (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy)

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Junior Girls – 7-12 (Traditional, Jingle, Fancy)

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Thousands rally across Alberta as labour and Indigenous leaders unite against UCP

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On May 29, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) held a province-wide Day of Protest against the United Conservative government, with thousands of people attending demonstrations across 15 municipalities.

Speaking to attendees after a march through downtown Edmonton, AFL president Gil McGowan noted the media interest that the protests have generated, noting common questions from journalists.

“They asked me what are we protesting, and I said, ‘All of it.’ And then they asked who is protesting, and I said, ‘All of us,’” McGowan exclaimed to applause.

Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation (SLCN) was one of more than a dozen speakers at the rally.

Introducing Sunshine, McGowan recognized “that when it comes to fighting back against this crazy idea of pulling Alberta out of Canada, a leadership role has been taken by the Indigenous community.”

“We have responsibilities to our Indigenous brothers and sisters. They stood up for themselves, but in standing up for themselves, they’ve stood up for all of us,” said McGowan.

SLCN was one of five First Nations that challenged an independence referendum petition in court in April, alongside Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Piikani Nation, Siksika Nation and the Blood Tribe.

Court of King’s Bench Justice Shaina Leonard quashed the petition in a May ruling, which argued that the provincial government had a duty to consult with First Nations before approving a citizen-initiated referendum petition that, if implemented, would impact their Treaty rights.

As a result, Premier Danielle Smith has scheduled a referendum on whether to initiate the “legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada” for Oct. 19.

At the rally, Chief Sunshine slammed the government’s “manufactured division.”

“For more than 150 years, First Nations people have stood up for our rights, our lands, our waters and our children. We have defended Treaties through every generation. We have defended in the face of broken promises, political gains and governments that thought they could ignore us,” he said.

“The only difference now is that we have more people across Alberta that are feeling what our

people have endured for generations.”

The fight to uphold Treaty rights, added Sunshine, could “be a defining moment in our shared history.”

The SLCN chief noted an ongoing “relentless attack on Treaty by all levels of government, particularly the UCP government, a pattern of disrespect that continues even while the courts uphold Treaty rights.”

“First Nations people know the story all too well. Our people have lived it. We have carried it for generations, and we are done pretending that this is normal,” said Sunshine. “This is not just about policy, this is about honour.”

He concluded his remarks with a call and response, with the audience repeating each sentence: “We are still here. We’re still standing. We’re still speaking. And we will not be silenced.”

There were also speeches prior to the march from Centennial Plaza, including one from Cree and Sioux Elder Taz Bouchier.

Bouchier described the provincial government with a Cree word.

“‘Wihtikow’ in my language means a spirit that’s trying to take everything, at every corner, every way, they will take every shape and form to come and steal from the people everything that they have,” she said.

“So Wihtikow is now living in the province of Alberta under the name of Danielle Smith and the UCP, and they must go.”

In a statement to media, Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Immigration spokesperson Hunter Baril attacked McGowan as a “failed NDP leadership candidate.”

McGowan ran for the Alberta NDP leadership in 2024, but



Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation speaks at a May 29 Edmonton rally as part of the Alberta Federation of Labour’s province-wide Day of Protest.

dropped out before the final ballot.

“While Gil is focused on political stunts, our government will continue its work to keep Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family,” said Baril.

Several NDP MLAs, including First Nations MLAs Brooks Arcand Paul and Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse, joined deputy party leader Rakhi Pancholi as she spoke on stage after the march.

“We are the party of every single Albertan who’s been told that they don’t fit in, that they’re not good enough, and they don’t have what it takes. We are the party that says you are worth it, you are valuable, and we will stand up for your human rights today and everyday,” said Pancholi.

Other speakers included Canadian Labour Congress executive VP Siobhan Vipond, who is also the VP of labour for the federal NDP, CUPE Alberta president Raj Uppal, 2SLGBTQ+ activist Marni Panas, Friends of Medicare executive director Chris Gallaway and Public Interest Alberta executive director Bradley Lafortune.

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Ben Calf Robe Powwow unites culture with community

Article and photos by Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Powwow season has finally arrived in central Alberta's Edmonton region. By mid-May, two of Alberta's earliest powwows had already come and gone. The first was held on May 2 & 3, hosted by the Enoch Cree Nation near Edmonton at their River Cree Resort and Casino in The Venue facility.

The second one, held exactly one week later, on May 9, was the Ben Calf Robe Annual Traditional Powwow at Edmonton's Commonwealth Recreation Centre, just a short distance north of the city's downtown area. Both Powwows were extremely well attended and very successful events.

The Ben Calf powwow kicked off with an amazing Grand Entry complete with colourful eagle staffs and flags. The host drum, Blackstone, was fired up and so highly energized, they had almost everyone in the audience dancing along in their spots. With veteran emcees Elmer Rattlesnake and Hal Eagletail guiding their journey along the carpeted flooring, the flag bearers were followed by respected Elders, veterans, militiamen, policemen, special dignitaries and leaders of varying organizations and educational institutions. MLAs Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse, Brooks Arcand-Paul and Janis Irwin followed along as did the chief of police Warren Driechel, Edmonton Mayor Andrew Knack, the Powwow organizer Betty Letendre and more. The remaining two-thirds of the Grand Entry consisted of hundreds of dancers in their finest colourful and intricately designed regalia that many of them had worked on producing all through the long winter months.

Once the lengthy entourage had completed their entry, an opening prayer was delivered and introductions were made to acknowledge the welcome participation of all the officials, leaders and dignitaries. Some select individuals also offered greetings and well wishes to the entire crowd.

Mayor Knack was visibly delighted, acknowledged the incredible past successes and efforts of the sponsoring Ben Calf Robe Society, the hard work of the staff and volunteers. "This is



The Grand Entry at the Ben Calf Robe Powwow

one of the best events we have every year," he stated matter-of-factly. He concluded by affirming that, "Edmonton City Council is committed to supporting this event."

NDP MLA Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse also spoke up, praising the work of the society, thanking and welcoming all the people attending while ensuring them, "We love you." After encouraging visitors to enjoy their day and get involved, she excitedly added, "Let's party! Let's dance!"

And dance they did – by the score, they emptied their chairs to get in the mix and show their stuff! How colourful, how wonderful!

People danced, people shopped, people visited and everyone had a great time. To honour the mothers in attendance and to commemorate Mothers Day, at the event, volunteers were seen scurrying all over the arena and lovingly handing out potted flowers with warm hearts, gentle hands and smiling faces. Recipients of the kind gesture were absolutely delighted.

Powwow organizer Betty Letendre informed

Alberta Native News that the powwow really is a superb medium that brings together "people and community, and culture and community." She emphasized that she really wants "our younger generation to get involved with it."

This particular powwow first started in 1982 and "even during COVID, we still dropped by and did ceremony at the Clarke Stadium," the former location for the powwow, she explained. Additionally, they get a lot of requests to expand to two days and to have 'specials' (i.e. naming ceremonies, powwow dancer initiations, etc.). They've already had some discussions along those lines, but more discussion is required, she added. In time we'll know more, so stay tuned.

The Ben Calf Robe powwow attracted 27 drums, 500 dancers and perhaps a few thousand or more visitors.

All the best and stay safe on this summer's powwow trail everyone!




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Powwow organizer Betty Letendre during the Grand Entry.

Happy National Indigenous Peoples' Day

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Blue Jean Jacket Day calls for action on murdered and missing Indigenous People

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On June 6, Blue Jean Jacket Day was held at Edmonton City Hall as part of ongoing efforts to raise awareness and bring community visibility to the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous people. The gathering aimed to honour families, elevate lived experiences, and strengthen public understanding of the crisis.

Blue Jean Jacket Day is growing as a grassroots awareness movement focused on bringing national attention, coordination, and funding to the crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous people across Canada.

The initiative was co-founded by Cameron Alexis, Band Councillor for Alexis First Nation, alongside Stephanie Harpe. Both say the movement was created to highlight gaps in advocacy and to bring forward the often-overlooked reality facing Indigenous men, women, and 2SLGBTQ+ people.

Stephanie Harpe said the idea behind the movement came from years of advocacy work focused on Indigenous men and boys. “Blue Jean Jacket Day was founded by myself and Cameron Alexis,” she said. “He had been doing a lot of awareness for our men and boys for a long time. As a former RCMP officer and someone who has done private investigations, he was the one seeing a lot of the files of our men and boys. The numbers were very, very high, and people weren’t talking about it.”

Harpe said the goal was to ensure Indigenous men and boys are included in conversations about violence and disappearance.

“We wanted to advocate for our men and boys and make sure that they are important and included,” she said. “In Alberta, we have hundreds of them. Our men go through a lot of things on their own, and we really want to encourage them to be more connected and communicating, and to normalize their feelings. We want wellness for them.”

She added that in some regions of Alberta, the numbers are especially alarming.

“In some of the hardest-hit areas, the numbers of murdered and missing Indigenous men have surpassed women,” she said.

Harpe also noted the movement’s growth since its inception. “It took us three years – this is our fourth annual. Last year, before Blue Jean Jacket Day, it went international. It’s now an international movement. It’s all over the world.”

Cameron Alexis said the initiative was born out of years of work in conferences, forums, and research focused on Murdered and Missing Indigenous People (MMIP).

“The Blue Jean Jacket Day movement was

created as a result of several conferences, forums, and workshops,” he said. “Through those sessions and the research that came out of them, we learned there are an equal number – if not more – of murdered and missing Indigenous men as well.”

He said advocacy has not always reflected the full scope of the crisis. “We also realized there has not been enough advocacy for Indigenous men and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community who have gone missing or been murdered,” he said.

Alexis, a retired police officer, said his experience gave him direct insight into the system. “As a retired police officer, I’ve been involved in many cases where I was entering missing persons into the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) system,” he said. “Now I’m on the other side of that work – as a community leader advocating for initiatives like Blue Jean Jacket Day alongside my friend Stephanie Harpe. It’s about ensuring these people and their families are not forgotten.”

He said the movement is about raising awareness across what he called the “Canadian mosaic.”

“Far too often, Indigenous people go missing or are victims of violence, and there isn’t enough awareness or attention given to these tragedies,” he said. “That’s one of the reasons we started this initiative.”

Alexis said the goal is to move beyond awareness into coordinated action. “We would like to see a national forum for Murdered and Missing Indigenous People, along with a coordinated support system for families,” he said. “That’s part of what we hope to build through Blue Jean Jacket Awareness Day.”

He said the movement is gaining momentum. “It’s still in its early stages, but it is gaining national attention,” he said. “Every community has a story. Every family is impacted. This is happening everywhere, and it’s not isolated.”

However, he said funding remains a major barrier. “Much of this work is not funded by provincial, federal, or First Nation organizations,” he said. “We’ve seen non-profits created to address this issue, but without funding



“Sneaking Around” by Linus Woods. Available for purchase at wakinagallery.com

they struggle to continue. Volunteers can only go so far.”

Alexis also pointed to concerns around unidentified remains. “There are Jane Does and John Does who are buried without names or answers,” he said. “In many cases, there is no funding available to exhume them or identify who they are.”

He said stronger support from governments and industry is needed. “We would like to see provincial and federal governments, and even private industry partners, fund this initiative,” he said. “We need a systematic approach – coordinated searches, stronger databases, and proper infrastructure.”

Alexis emphasized that the crisis is ongoing and urgent.

“This is still happening,” he said. “People are going missing off streets and rural Alberta roads, whatever the case may be, and we need to create awareness that we are people and we need to survive too.”

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Indigenous youth discuss technology, economic reconciliation and female empowerment

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While youth represent the future of Indigenous leadership, Joel Gamache says that when it comes to economic reconciliation, their voices need to be heard now.

Gamache is the senior manager of national Indigenous youth in STEM programs for Actua, an organization dedicated to educating underrepresented youth in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

He moderated a May 13 panel of Indigenous youth leaders at the Forward Summit at Grey Eagle Resort and Casino on Tsuut'ina Nation, entitled "Passing the Torch: Indigenous Youth Shaping the Future Economy."

"We believe it is critically important that Indigenous youth begin to have conversations at the economic reconciliation table, to set the stage for the future to foster meaningful partnership between industry and Indigenous communities," said Gamache, who is Red River Metis but lives in Okotoks, about 50 km south of Calgary.

The panel, according to Ganache, consisted of "three remarkable Indigenous youth, young leaders who are already helping shape conversations around economic reconciliation, leadership, technology, safety and community."

'Stop using shortcuts for cultural knowledge'

Sydney Payne, a member of the Metis Nation of Ontario, is studying history at Western University in London, Ont., and intends on going to law school.

Her remarks focused on the role technology can play in reconciliation, for good and for ill, which was also the tenor of a separate roundtable on Indigenous leadership in artificial intelligence.

Payne cautioned against an over-reliance on AI in the classroom, which she's experienced firsthand, leading to a high school teacher conveying inaccurate information about Indigenous spirituality.

"The tool went beyond just missing a few details," explained Payne. "Instead, it provided complete misinformation, generalizing all Indigenous people into one group with identical practices."

She added that the teacher denied there was a

water crisis, simply "because the algorithm said so."

"These digital shortcuts used in classrooms create a negative feedback loop, in which students are getting flawed information and graduate ready to carry that misinformation into the workforce," said Payne.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action 92 calls on corporate Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and educate staff and employees on Indigenous history and law.

"If a leadership team relies on an automated summary of a community's history, rather than learning from us directly, they aren't actually informed," said Payne.

"They risk entering negotiations without understanding the specific history of land displacement or the treaty rights of the people that they're looking to engage with."

She noted a vast disparity between the number of companies that are committed to reconciliation and those that actually have long-term partnerships with Indigenous communities.

"Real education requires a depth that technology can't currently replicate," said Payne.

She urged corporate leaders in attendance to take "three specific actions that move us towards a more equitable economy."

Firstly, to "stop using shortcuts for cultural knowledge" by refraining from using AI-generated content about Indigenous issues unless the content has been "verified by a member of this specific community being discussed."

Next, Payne said companies must use technology that adheres to the principles of OCAP, referring to Indigenous ownership, control, access and possession.

Finally, firms should seek certification under



Forward Summit youth panelists were Joseph Wolfleg, Desirae Tailfeathers, Sydney Payne and moderator Joel Gamache.

the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business' Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations.

Seeing with two eyes

Joseph Wolfleg, an artist from Siksika Nation who resides in Calgary, emphasized the importance of "two-eyed seeing," a concept pioneered by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshal, who sought to integrate traditional Indigenous and Western knowledge.

"At its core, it's about seeing a situation from not just one perspective but two. It's separate, but together, respecting and recognizing different viewpoints without trying to blend them into one," explained Wolfleg.

He noted that two-eyed seeing has a counterpart in the English term 'sonder,' both of which "describe the profound feeling of realizing that everyone – every cashier, every driver and every stranger – you pass on the street is living a life as vivid and complex as your own."

"It's the awareness that their thoughts, feelings, memories and experiences are just as real and significant as yours, even though you only see a fleeting glimpse of them," said Wolfleg.

Taking this approach to communication can help facilitate economic reconciliation, he added.

Continued on page 22



Celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day

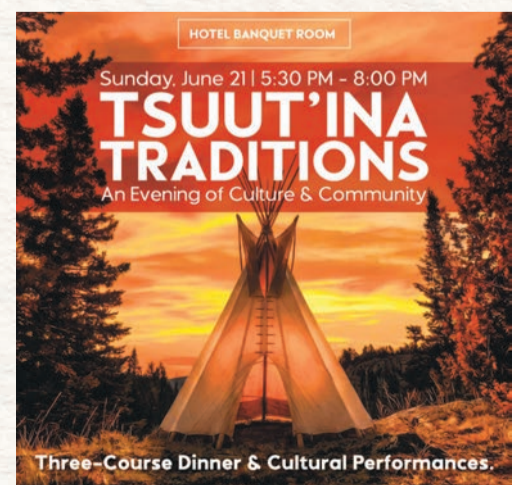
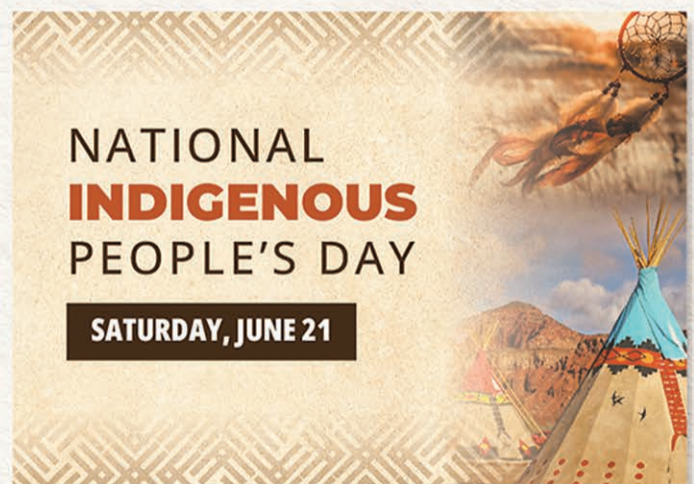
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More than a crown: Entrepreneur uses Mrs. Canada platform to champion economic reconciliation

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Indigenous entrepreneur Crystal Janvier-Romaniuk, competing in the Mrs. Miss Ms. Canada pageant is about much more than wearing a crown. It is an opportunity to amplify a message she has spent years building through her work: that financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and generational wealth are essential tools for Indigenous self-determination and economic reconciliation.

A proud member of Cold Lake First Nation, Janvier-Romaniuk was raised between northern Alberta communities connected to Treaty 8 territory, including her mother's home community of Driftpile Cree Nation. She says those early experiences shaped her determination and inspired her commitment to helping Indigenous families build long-term financial security.

At just 18 years old, she began attending the University of Alberta with her 10-day-old son, becoming the first person on either side of her extended family to pursue a university education. Balancing motherhood, financial hardship, and the challenges of adapting to city life, she says those early years taught her resilience.

"I didn't want to be another statistic," she said. "I realized no one is going to make your life better except for you."

Janvier-Romaniuk went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and a Master of Science in Public Health from the University of Alberta before completing an Executive MBA through Simon Fraser University's Beedie School of Business.

Today, she serves as CEO of Sundance Enterprises Ltd. and founder of Sundance Wealth Management, an Indigenous-owned, women-led initiative focused on financial literacy, investment education, and creating pathways toward generational wealth for Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients alike.

For more than a decade, Sundance Enterprises Ltd. provided consulting services within Alberta's oil and gas and skilled trades sectors before expanding into Indigenous business consulting, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, and economic development initiatives.

Through her Entrepreneurship 101 workshops and consulting programs, Janvier-Romaniuk says she has helped hundreds of Indigenous entrepreneurs launch and grow their own businesses.

"My platform is Indigenous reconciliation and closing the gap – the poverty gap within our people," she said. "It's really about breaking generational cycles of poverty and building generational wealth for our people."

Her work is deeply rooted in her own lived experience. Growing up, she remembers periods of significant financial hardship that shaped her understanding of how poverty can affect families for generations.

"There were times when we literally had no food in the house," she said. "That creates a poverty mindset."

Today, much of her advocacy focuses on financial literacy, home ownership education, entrepreneurship, and helping Indigenous communities understand how to navigate systems that can create long-term stability.

"You only need five per cent down to buy a first home," she said. "If I could teach young people how to build credit and save that, everything changes."

She believes financial education should be viewed as a form of empowerment, giving Indigenous youth and families the tools to create opportunities that previous generations often did not have access to.

"I want Indigenous women and youth to know that you can be a successful business owner, build generational wealth, and blaze a trail on stage in the pageant world," she said.

Her leadership and community impact have earned her numerous recognitions, including the Esquao Award for Leadership in Social Development, Simon Fraser University's Community Impact Award, and two Women of Purpose Awards honouring her support for Indigenous entrepreneurs and business leadership.

She has also shared her story through the IndigiConnect Podcast and campaigns with Alberta Women Entrepreneurs highlighting Indigenous innovation and leadership.

For Janvier-Romaniuk, the Mrs. Miss Ms. Canada pageant has become another avenue to inspire and create opportunities for others.

She says entering the pageant world has unexpectedly expanded both her personal journey and her community work.

"When we applied for this, I had no idea," she said. "But it's spurred so much growth."

That growth has extended beyond the stage. Inspired by the connections and visibility the pageant has created, Janvier-Romaniuk is organizing and hosting an Indigenous business networking event on June 18 in partnership with Colliers and ATB. The event will bring together Indigenous entrepreneurs, business leaders, and community partners to build relationships, strengthen networks, and showcase Indigenous-owned businesses.

She hopes the gathering will encourage collaboration while highlighting the innovation and resilience of Indigenous entrepreneurship across Alberta.

"This pageant has really pushed me to grow in



Crystal Janvier-Romaniuk will be competing in the Miss Mrs. Ms. Canada pageant next month in Surrey BC. Photo by JC de Barry, Light of Berry Photography.

ways I never expected," she said.

While pageantry is often viewed as a competition, Janvier-Romaniuk says her greatest challenge has always been herself.

"I compete with myself," she said. "How can I grow? How can I be better?"

That philosophy, she says, reflects the same determination that carried her from being a young mother attending university with a newborn son to becoming a successful entrepreneur, business leader, and advocate for financial empowerment.

For Janvier-Romaniuk, the pageant platform is ultimately about representation. She wants Indigenous women and youth to see that they belong in every space—from boardrooms and businesses to public stages and national competitions.


"Our communities deserve to see themselves thriving in every space," she said.

The Mrs. Miss Ms. Canada national competition will take place July 22–26, 2026, in Surrey, British Columbia.

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Hip-Hop group marks debut album release at The Grindstone

By Troy Dumont, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On a warm May night at The Grindstone Theatre, Edmonton hip-hop group Bad Traditions celebrated the release of their self-titled debut album (BVD TRVDITIXNS).

The event, hosted on May 16, 2026, drew around 50 people. The venue was full, with an audience that came to hear the group's new work.

Bad Traditions brings together rapper Shawn McCarthy-Daniels, Selassie Drah, Rhia Morin, and Ned Staples, who also hosted the night. The four have been moving through Edmonton's music scene for years, collaborating even before the group was named.

"We've known each other for quite a while," McCarthy-Daniels said.

Some of those early connections were formed at iHuman Youth Society, an organization that works with marginalized young people through creative expression. McCarthy-Daniels got involved in high school, where he first met Staples and Drah.

Another thread runs through Cypher Wild, an open event produced by the Edmonton Arts Council and held at Churchill Square. This year, the event ran on Thursday evenings from May 7 to June 11, 2026, bringing rappers, dancers, and DJs together to collaborate.

With the help of these environments, it was only natural for like-minded individuals to work as a collective. Community programming serves



Bad Traditions in concert.

as a cornerstone, allowing groups like Bad Traditions to form, thrive, and produce art.

The debut album they built together does not follow a single theme, but draws on experiences growing up in the city, working-class life, family struggles, poverty, and addiction. For McCarthy-Daniels, the themes also run through his identity, and what it means to be Indigenous in Edmonton.

"It's not just my story," he said. "It's a lot of people's story."

He sees a natural connection between rap and Indigenous experience. Both are rooted in people finding ways to speak about struggle on their own terms.

That connection was clear during the first set of the night. McCarthy-Daniels recalled being approached by a woman who told him the lyrics about his father had hit close to home.

"She was in tears," he said. "She was like, when you're talking about your dad, and you're talking about your unks, I felt that."

One song that stands out to him is the album's final track, "You Say More." With Ryan Hall on guitar, the song focuses on relationships and carries a different sound from the rest of the album. McCarthy-Daniels said several members were dealing with relationship struggles when the track came together.

"We were all going through it," he said, "everyone involved put something of themselves into it."

When asked what he wanted to say to readers and future listeners of Bad Traditions, McCarthy-Daniels pointed to what is coming next. A music video for "You Say More," starring Shannon Sweeney from *Bear Grease*, is on the way.

With the debut (BVD TRVDITIXNS) now out on Spotify, Bad Traditions left The Grindstone with something to build on, bringing Indigenous culture and storytelling to the Edmonton hip-hop scene and leaving an impression on a warm May night.

More information about iHuman Youth Society is available at ihuman.org. Event details for Cypher Wild can be found through the Edmonton Arts Council.



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Iskew Health: Where wellness is rooted in cultural reclamation

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Michelle Nieviadomi, founder of Iskew Health, wellness is rooted in something deeper than fitness – it is movement as medicine, a practice of healing, connection, and cultural reclamation led by Indigenous women. Her work brings together group fitness, mental health support, and community programming in a way that reflects lived experience and Indigenous values.

Her journey began in group fitness studios in Edmonton, where she first encountered the power of shared movement.

What she loved about group fitness was that she was in the midst of other people who were battling push-ups – as she did – but also knowing that they were having the same human experience as she was. “The celebrations, the joy, but also the valley moments,” Nieviadomi said.

But alongside that inspiration was a deeper realization about belonging.

“I just felt like I didn’t belong,” she said. “And I remember that moment specifically, clear as day.”

That feeling stayed with her, especially after investing in her early fitness journey. “I remember thinking, like, I paid \$200 for this e-class pass,” Nieviadomi said. “And back then, that was a lot of money... I remember going once, and because of how I felt, I never went back again.”

That experience became a turning point – not away from wellness, but toward creating something different. “I felt like I didn’t belong,” she said. “And I felt like I don’t like how this feels, so I feel like I wanna create a safe space for...”

That vision became Iskew Health, a space rooted in Indigenous identity, healing, and community care.

Doing that also became about nurturing mental health, Nieviadomi said. “So, counseling, and also creating wellness workshops.”

Her approach integrates movement, play, and emotional wellbeing – what she describes as a natural content flow between body, mind, and spirit.

“I love that,” she said. “Like I love when I go to communities, I always will bring an aspect of play... I think people also love to play, right? So I always create games and fun times that bring out that inner child.”

This philosophy extends into her broader work with communities and organizations where she offers staff development training, Nieviadomi said.

At the centre of her practice is a commitment to indigenizing spaces of wellness and fitness – ensuring Indigenous presence, teachings, and values are visible, respected, and centred.

“So, creating an aesthetic space,” she said. “If you were to ever come to the studio... I’ve just created a welcoming environment.”

That environment includes culturally grounded elements, including affirmation cards made with kokum scarf material to honour Indigenous grandmothers.

A guiding principle in her space is *Tawâw*, a Plains Cree word meaning “you are welcome” or “there is room.”

“That Tawâw spirit, means that you’re welcome here, no matter who you are,” Nieviadomi said. “You don’t even have to be Indigenous. You are just welcome here because these are my Indigenous values to welcome you here.”

Her work is also grounded in reciprocity – recognizing that her opportunities exist because others once made space for her.

“I can only do things because people were open



Michelle Nieviadomi, founder of Iskew Health.

for me to go do,” she said.

That understanding now shapes how she builds Iskew Health – not as a solo practice, but as a collective, community-driven vision.

“It would be awesome to have, you know, four nights of Zumba,” Nieviadomi said. “But not me teaching it. I want other people. Like, I just want people to dance. I want people to come together as community.”

She is already mentoring young Indigenous women into leadership roles within fitness and wellness.

For Nieviadomi, movement as medicine is not just physical activity – it is healing trauma, rebuilding identity, and creating space for Indigenous women to lead.

Through Iskew Health, she is building a vision where Indigenous women are not only participants in wellness spaces, but creators of them – shaping environments that reflect culture, belonging, and collective strength.

For more information visit www.iskewhealth.com. Visit Facebook and insta at Iskew Health. And TikTok Michelle Dawn (Iskew Health).

Bryce Morin cont. from p 8

modern, and evolving,” Morin said. “We’re more than just the stereotypical Natives riding on horseback with leathers and feathers. We’re expansive, we’re funny, we’re intelligent, and we’re thriving – but more importantly, we’re human beings too.”

As an Indigenous performer on major stages, Morin said he doesn’t see representation as pressure, but as purpose. “I see it as purpose, you know, not so much pressure,” he said. “I just try to show up with authenticity and respect and an obligation to inspire our next generations.”

Reflecting on his career, Morin said the biggest lesson he has learned is the importance of balance. “It’s important to have balance,” he said.

“If you know where you come from, you won’t get lost.”

He added that the entertainment industry can pull artists in many directions, but staying grounded in identity and community is essential. “Personally, I’ve learned that it’s okay to still be figuring things out as you go along,” he said.

Looking forward, Morin said he is focused on expanding his work in film and television while continuing to grow as a musician and collaborator. “I’m really open to anything right now,” he said. “I’d love to step more into acting in film and TV... and just taking on roles people wouldn’t expect.”

Alongside acting, he continues to explore music and creative collaboration, while building toward future opportunities that centre Indigenous

storytelling.

Morin said the most important message he wants to leave with audiences is the power of representation and identity. “Representation, it really does matter,” he said. “We have a generation coming up who don’t even know who they are or where they come from.”

He emphasized the importance of connecting youth back to culture and community, especially in urban environments where those ties can be harder to maintain.

“To find out who you are, you gotta know where you come from,” he said. “If I can meld traditionalism into modern-day arts, that’s a small step towards identity.”

Happy National Indigenous Peoples' Day

MLA Shane Getson
Lac Ste Anne – Parkland
Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Corridors

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Celebrating Powwow at Enoch Cree Nation

Article and photos by Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

One of Alberta's first Powwows for the year was held on May 5-6 at Enoch First Nation's River Cree Resort and Casino in The Venue facility. Everyone had a great time!

For many of the dancers, drummers and singers, it provided the ideal opportunity to shake off some of that wintertime rust and indulge themselves in a Spring workout, leading up to the strenuous summertime powwow season.

Enoch's powwow president, Michael Arlotp-Morin, stated that their committee capped the number of drum groups at 16 and craft booths at 12 due to space considerations. As it turned out, they wound up hosting a total of 1,273 dancers as well as 2,200 visitors.

Admittedly, Enoch had some logistical issues to consider, especially space wise and Morin explained that in the future they have to look at options that would allow for increased spaces. "We invite comments or suggestions on ways to improve," he stated.

The Enoch Powwow was traditional, not competition. There is a competition powwow hosted by the Enoch Cree Nation later in the second week of July. However, there are those who prefer a traditional powwow where the dancers and drum groups are not competing for cash prizes.

The powwow operation appeared to flow quite smoothly under the experienced emcees Hal Eagletail from Tsuut'ina First Nation and Elmer

Rattlesnake from Smallboy Camp. The two gentlemen kept matters on a pretty decent road. The dancing was energetic and lively and the atmosphere was very positive.

Intertribal dances were as popular as ever with a good mix of participants wearing all sorts of colorful garments. One particular activity proved different, yet very interesting and entertaining. Reps from several different drum groups had to compose on-the-spot songs, then sing them. So, real off-the-cuff stuff. Quite engaging for the audience on hand. It also demonstrated the ability of the singers/ composers to be highly creative. Wow!

The final day also incorporated a giveaway that was primarily geared to the many young children present. It was certainly a fine gesture and it's always such a delight to see all the children's faces light up, hands outstretched all over the place to accept a most welcoming gift or two.

The powwow ran smoothly and Creator surely was looking out for a favourable and memorable event! Hiy-hiy!!

See ya all next year, or maybe at the second weekend of this July's outdoor powwow. Stay safe, enjoy!



Powwow dancing at the Enoch Traditional Powwow.





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Indigenous youth cont. from p 18

"It's not about compromising. It's about integrating," Wolfleg added. "The most innovative solutions come from this kind of cross-pollination of ideas."

MMIWG and economic empowerment

Deserae Tailfeathers is a member of Kainai Nation in Treaty 7 who works at the nearby University of Lethbridge, where she assists in developing programming that combines Western science with Blackfoot land-based traditions, with a focus on maternal health.

Her portion of the panel tied the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls's Calls to Justice with economic reconciliation, which she said "cannot exist if Indigenous women are unsafe, excluded or unsupported in the systems meant to serve them."

For Tailfeathers, the issue is "deeply personal," both in her academic work and lived experience.

She fondly remembers her upbringing on the Blood reserve, the largest First Nations reserve in Canada, describing a sense of safety.

"I felt rooted in my community, in my family and in my kinship systems," said Tailfeathers. "That safety shaped me, but when I left the reserve, everything changed."

She became a mother at 19 years old, struggling "to navigate life in the city without the support systems that I had always known."

"That safety I grew up in was no longer there. I felt isolated. I felt unsupported, and for a period of my life, I fell into addiction, not because I was broken, but because I was trying to survive in systems that were never built to keep Indigenous women safe," Tailfeathers explained.

She eventually recovered from her addiction and reembraced her Blackfoot culture and traditions.

"But not everyone gets that chance," emphasized Tailfeathers. "What I experienced isn't an individual story. It reflects the broader conditions that put Indigenous women at risk, and that's where this connects to economic reconciliation."

When discussions around economic reconciliation are narrowly focused on jobs and education, "we miss something fundamental," she added.

Ensuring that Indigenous women are able to feel safe in the workplace, and that they don't have to choose between being a caregiver and having a career, Tailfeathers said, represents the "foundation" of economic reconciliation.

"Because when Indigenous women are supported, we don't just survive. We rebuild families, we rebuild communities and traditional systems, and we rebuild economies in ways that are grounded in care, responsibility and relationships," she said.

This is about more than just Indigenous female representation. The purpose, said Tailfeathers, is for Indigenous women to "have a say in shaping the policies that affect our lives."

"There's a quote that I like to use in a lot of my work," she said, "Matriarchy isn't women on the top, it's a circle with children and those who are vulnerable in the centre."

New title brings Pacific coast stories to life with Haida Manga

By Jennifer Kovacs, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Lost Haida Manga: A Compendium by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas is more than a collection of stories – it is a brilliant display of culture that comes alive on the pages of his new book. The celebrated artist does more than write a story down or simply tell a story. He uses a bold visual genre that fuses North Pacific Indigenous icons with graphic storytelling.

Each page dramatically depicts the narrative of a story with expression, movement, and bold images. The story jumps off the page and the reader is treated to a smorgasbord of characters and actions to follow. The author uses a technique that he calls “breaking the grid” to describe the physical disruption of the visual. Each time you look at a page, you notice something new – a determined grimace, a fearful look, a mischievous glance, fervent effort and a lot of movement. The written words narrate the story in a simple form, but each page is full of images that speak volumes to depict the full expanse of the narrative.

Raised on Haida Gwaii, Yahgulanaas created the visual artform known as Haida Manga after studying Chinese brush techniques under Cai Ben Kwon. Inspired by the successful resistance to industrial logging in Haida Gwaii, he conceived Haida Manga as a graphic and literary bridge: a way to connect diverse audiences to the lived

experiences, values and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples in an unconquered land.

Through black-and-white ink works *The Lost Haida Manga: A Compendium* sets themes ranging from the impacts of colonialism, the environment, and Indigenous sovereignty in a visually stunning graphic world. The compendium brings together a curated selection of black-and-white ink works – some previously published, others newly created – exploring how a sophisticated Indigenous visual tradition can function as sequential narrative art.

Yahgulanaas’ earlier books including *Red in 2009*, *Carpe Fin* in 2019 and *JAJ* in 2023, have each received wide acclaim and his art has been exhibited in museums and galleries around the world.

Of his work, Katherine Kelp-Stebbins, professor and director of Comics and Cartoon Studies, University of Oregon says, “Demonstrating a staggering range of artistry and narrative invention, Yahgulanaas provides the reader with an experience unlike any other book...we witness the genesis of an art form as he transforms the comics grid into an ecosystem of framelines, birthing Haida Manga as a new mode of storytelling.”



From "The Lost Haida Manga: A Compendium."

William Kuskin, chair and professor of English, University of Colorado Boulder favorably compares Yahgulanaas to the great graphic novelists of our time. He writes: “Internationally recognized for his singular fusion of Haida visual tradition and comics form, Yahgulanaas stands with Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco as a major voice of resistance to fascist state power in our time – and as an artist whose work insists on the environmental conscience of the human condition.”

Provocative, experimental, accessible and deeply rooted in place, *The Lost Haida Manga: A Compendium* is essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary Indigenous art, environmental justice and the power of visual storytelling.

Premier schedules

cont. from p 7

the Legislature or sending it for a referendum.

As the petition was being debated in committee, the UCP Caucus sent out a news release claiming the committee had voted to proceed with a referendum via the Forever Canada question, which led to the meeting’s adjournment until Thursday.

The committee, which consists of four UCP MLAs and two NDP MLAs, ultimately voted to send a report to Cabinet advocating for a referendum on whether Alberta should stay in Canada, with the NDP MLAs writing a minority report.

But before that, NDP MLA Court Ellingston proposed an amendment to explicitly call on the committee to consult with First Nations before

recommending a referendum, noting how “anything with respect to First Nations” was “glaringly absent” from the motion they debated.

“The government can’t bypass the duty to consult,” said Ellingston. “We heard that from the courts last week.”

MLA Rakhi Pancholi, the other New Democrat on the committee, noted that deputy chair Sawhney, who serves as Indigenous relations minister, was silent during the amendment debate.

“We are only here now because the preferred question that the government wanted to go forward to referendum was struck down by a court for failure to consult,” she said, referencing the Stay Free Alberta petition. “Let’s not make that same mistake twice.”

Ellingston’s proposed amendment was rejected along partisan lines.

After the committee voted to recommend a referendum, Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations Grand Chief Joey Pete released a statement accusing the premier of overseeing a “separatist regime.”

“Premier Danielle Smith and her party are beholden to the separatists who put them in power. Everything they do is subservient to that debt – without consideration for laws, Treaty obligations or the wellbeing of future generations,” said Pete.

He lamented how “First Nations are once again carrying the burden of defending the Constitution of Canada while the Government of Canada remains silent.”

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