

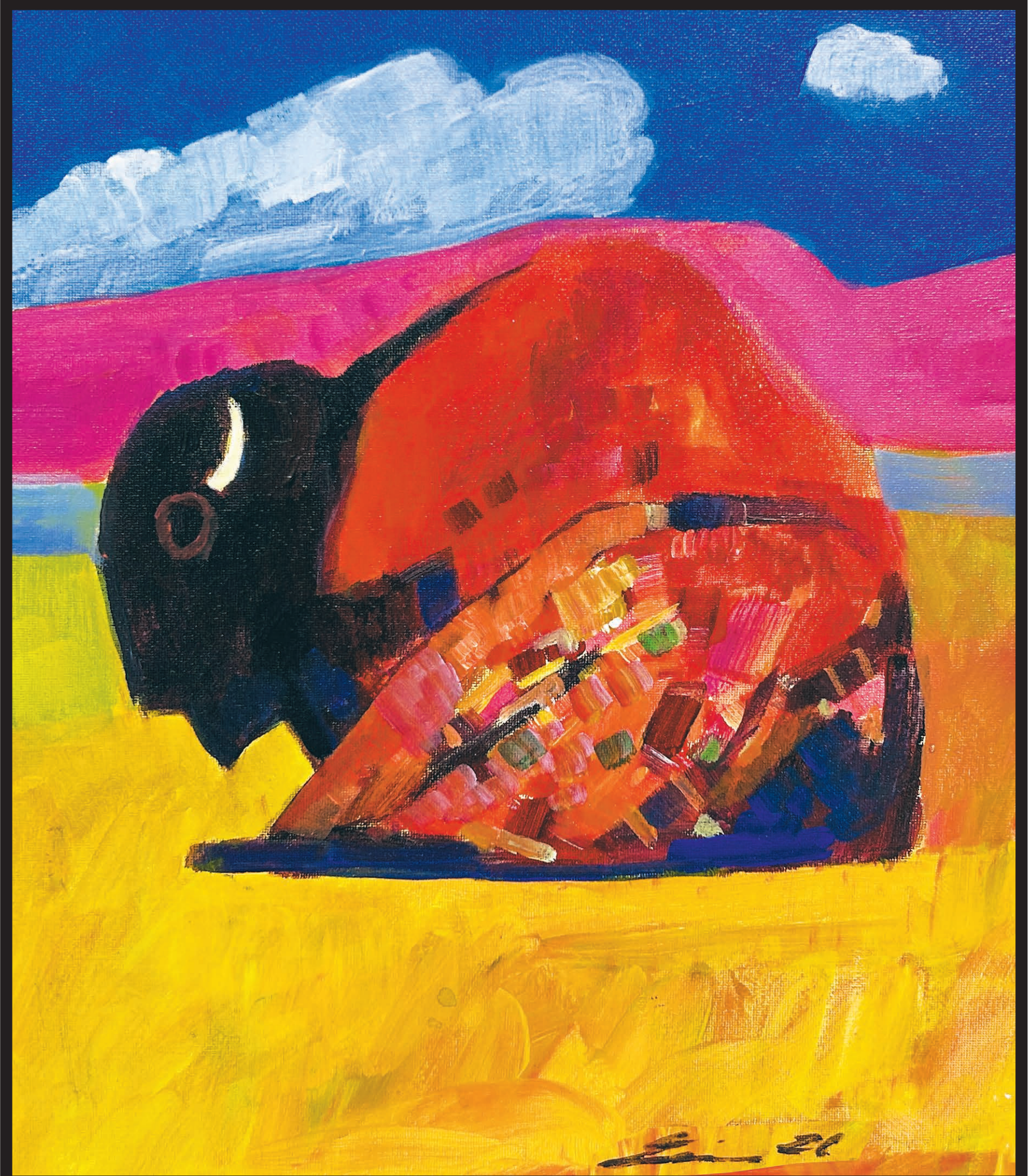
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Empowering Indigenous educators to strengthen culture, language and belonging

In the lead up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a unique college program is empowering Indigenous educators to strengthen culture, language and belonging in remote Alberta communities

Sherry Duncan's classroom is thousands of kilometres wide, stretching from the east of the province in Frog Lake to Horse Lake on Alberta's western border. "The students are spread so far across Treaty 8 that I drive more than 10,000 kilometres over the course of 10 days when I visit every childcare site during student practicums," explains Sherry. This year, the award-winning Métis educator and Treaty 8 Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) program lead is overseeing the largest-ever cohort of Indigenous students enrolled in NorQuest College's unique ELCC certificate and diploma program.

The first-of-its-kind program, a partnership between NorQuest College and Treaty 8, sees

Indigenous students take virtual delivery courses while working in childcare facilities in their home communities. The students, who range in age from their 20s to over 60 years-old, eagerly share the importance of being able to teach culture, language and belonging to children in their remote communities.

For those who are part of the program, each graduate feels like another step towards fulfilling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action number 62 "...to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms."

"It's so important to have educators from our community teaching our children," explains

Veronica, a second-year diploma student. "We integrate our culture into every lesson. Students learn Cree words for colours, animals, letters, and the seasons. They hear Cree stories and music. They see that the educators know and respect their local customs, medicines, and culture, and that helps to ground them and gives them a sense of belonging."

"We learn our culture too," chimes in Miranda Desjarlais, a mom of eight and

grandmother, as her fellow classmates nod along in agreement. "Our generation was sort of a lost generation. Our parents endured the residential school system, and we didn't get the chance to learn our culture from them. Now, I feel like we are bringing back our culture for both our children and ourselves."

The importance of the program is felt by all who participate in it, explains Sherry Duncan. "The program brings in students who aren't typical post-secondary students. One of my students has nine children and lives in a remote community. She started as an academic upgrading student, and this year, she will be graduating with a diploma. I can't think of any other program where a success story like that would be possible. The program is special because it meets the students where they are in life. Students don't have to move to a large city; we connect remotely throughout the semester. If a student needs a little more time to hand in an assignment because one of their children was sick, or they had to take an extra shift at work, we make allowances for that, and they catch up the next week. Our program is also unique because our students have a 100% employment rate following graduation."

Sherry's pride in the program goes beyond the personal successes of her students. "I celebrate the incredible achievements of my students, many of whom are graduating from college after years away from school, but more than that, I know that each of my students is making a difference in their community. They are educating and advocating for hundreds of students. Their impact will be generational."

For more information visit norquest.ca.

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A large cohort of Indigenous students are enrolled at NorQuest College's unique ELCC certificate and diploma program.

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AFCC's Smudge Vow Program celebrates land-based cultural camp

The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC) is proud to celebrate a significant milestone for its Smudge Vow Program following the successful completion of the program's first-ever land-based cultural camp, held July 31 to August 3, 2026, at Heartening Valley Wilderness Retreat.

For four days and three nights, participants came together with Elders, cultural facilitators and a drummer for an immersive experience centred on culture, ceremony, community and connection to the land.

The inaugural camp represents an important expansion of Smudge Vow's culturally grounded approach to healing and community support, taking participants beyond workshops and meetings and creating opportunities to learn, reflect and build relationships on the land.

"This first camp represents exactly what Friendship Centres are about - creating safe, culturally grounded spaces where people can reconnect with culture, community and one another," stated Shane Gauthier, CEO Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary. "There is tremendous strength in bringing people back to

the land and creating opportunities for Elders to share teachings with the next generation. We are incredibly proud of our Smudge Vow participants, our Justice team, our Elders and everyone who helped make this historic first camp possible."

Traditional stories and teachings were shared throughout the gathering, including teachings about the spiritual guardians of the territory and the importance of respecting the forests, waters, medicines and beings that call the land home.

As evenings settled over the valley, the drum brought participants together around the fire. Songs, stories and laughter became an equally important part of the experience - a reminder that healing can be found not only through ceremony and reflection, but through joy, friendship and belonging.

"The participants arrived as individuals

and left as a clan," observed AFCC Justice Coordinator Kasey Blackwater. "This camp showed us what becomes possible when people are given the opportunity to reconnect with culture and land in a safe and meaningful way. The land received us, the Elders guided us, and the drum called us home."

The success of the inaugural camp marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for Smudge Vow. AFCC intends to continue strengthening culturally grounded and land-based opportunities that support healing, identity, belonging and community connection.

"This is only the beginning," Gauthier added. "AFCC continues to grow because we listen to community and create programming rooted in culture. We want people to know that culture is alive, healing is possible, and there is always a place for you at the Friendship Centre."

In addition to the Smudge Vow Program, The Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC) provides a variety of culturally grounded programs, services and supports for Indigenous people and families in Calgary and the surrounding region.



The growing role of Alberta's Friendship Centre Movement

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For more than 70 years, Friendship Centres have been a vital part of Indigenous community life across Canada. What began as a grassroots response to the challenges Indigenous people faced while moving into urban communities has grown into a network of organizations providing health, wellness, education, cultural connection, food security, and advocacy supports.

For Jeannette MacInnis, Interim CEO of the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (ANFCA), it is time for greater recognition of the work Friendship Centres provide every day.

"We got to stop being so humble and start drumming our drum and owning the moccasins that we walk in, because Friendship Centres do amazing work all across this province to uplift Indigenous people, and specifically urban Indigenous people," MacInnis said.

The Friendship Centre movement began in the mid-1950s as Indigenous people increasingly moved into urban areas and created spaces where they could access support, community connection, and culturally relevant services. Over generations, Friendship Centres have evolved into frontline organizations responding to the changing needs of Indigenous communities.

MacInnis's journey into leadership has been shaped by decades of advocacy and community development. Born in Alberta, MacInnis is Nakoda Sioux from her mother's side. Her career began in international community development, focusing on supporting women and children impacted by conflict.

After returning, MacInnis began working with the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres as Director of Health and Ending Violence Initiatives. During nearly a decade in that role, she worked with 25 Friendship Centres throughout British Columbia, developing strategies, programs, and partnerships.

"I worked there for almost 10 years working a lot with the government on different policies and legislation, developing projects and managing projects," she explained.

When she returned to Alberta in 2018, MacInnis thought she was leaving the Friendship Centre movement behind. "I thought I would get away from the Friendship Centre movement, but once you're in the Friendship Centre movement,

it's really hard to leave it," she said.

Her work with ANFCA has focused on advocacy, government relations, communications, and strengthening partnerships to better

support communities. "From a provincial perspective, our role is to support our 21 Friendship Centres and the communities they serve," MacInnis said.

Friendship Centres continue to expand their services as communities face new challenges, explained MacInnis. She emphasized that they support a diverse range of people, including First Nations, Métis, Inuit, status and non-status Indigenous people, as well as others seeking

Continued on page 19

Dolly's Legacy Lives On

The passing of Dolly Parton has touched millions, but her extraordinary legacy will live on through generations of children.

For more than six years, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary has proudly partnered with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to provide free monthly books to local children from birth to age five.

Since 1995, the Imagination Library has gifted more than 300 million books worldwide and over five million across Canada. Its Canadian collection proudly includes books written and illustrated by First Nations, Inuit and Métis creators.



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BRANDED CONTENT

FortisAlberta expands its wildfire prevention efforts with new public safety measures

Extreme wildfire conditions are becoming more common across Alberta, with recent years seeing an increase in both the frequency and scale of wildfire activity. While the risks are a growing concern, there is positive work underway to help reduce the risk.

FortisAlberta takes a proactive approach to wildfire safety

FortisAlberta’s wildfire preparedness efforts combine advanced technology, real-time awareness of local conditions and coordination with local authorities. This approach supports year-round wildfire mitigation measures, including regular inspections, vegetation management around power lines, early-warning technology to detect issues and infrastructure upgrades to improve resilience in wildfire-prone areas.

In rare cases, if conditions such as strong winds, low humidity and dry vegetation create extreme wildfire risk, FortisAlberta may implement a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) as a last resort safety measure. A PSPS involves temporarily turning off electricity in targeted areas where operating power lines could increase the risk of wildfire during these extreme conditions.



Although a PSPS event would be a rare occurrence, it’s important that individuals and businesses are aware and prepared.

If conditions warrant, we will notify customers and coordinate with municipalities and emergency partners. We would also leverage social media to help warn residents and businesses that we will be shutting off power.

Denis Andre, Manager, Land Environment & Sustainability at FortisAlberta



This advanced notice helps residents and businesses prepare, particularly customers who rely on medical devices that require electricity. To stay informed, update your contact information with the retailer that issues your utility bill.

A community approach to wildfire mitigation

“Preparing for wildfire risk is a shared responsibility,” says Lorena Charest, Crisis and Wildfire Communications Strategist. “Staying ready helps everyone. Steps such as keeping devices charged, assembling an emergency kit and staying informed about wildfire conditions and potential power outages can make a meaningful difference.”

Alberta’s provincial government advises individuals to take proactive steps to build wildfire resilience for their properties and be prepared.



Clear dead wood, pine needles, debris and firewood within 1.5 metres of your home to reduce wildfire risk.



Stay informed about local conditions and update your contact information with the retailer that issues your utility bill.



Build an emergency kit with water, non-perishable food, a flashlight, radio, medications and important documents.



Have an evacuation plan for your household, including pets and livestock.



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.

This is intended for general information only.

What connects us all
can help protect us all.

For more information on PSPS and how to stay safe this season, visit fortisalberta.com/psps

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These images are for illustrative purpose only. Remember to keep a safe distance away from power lines. For more information visit fortisalberta.com/safety

Otipemisiwak Métis Gov’t asks Town of St. Paul to restore its original name

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



OMG Secretary of Culture Grant Lacombe

The Otipemisiwak Métis Government (OMG) has asked the Town of St. Paul to return to its original name of St. Paul des Métis, but one of its secretaries says the town has only responded through media reports.

“I just wanted to have a discussion right from the very start, and it’s not happening,” OMG secretary of culture and harvesting Grant Lacombe told *Alberta Native News*.

The original St. Paul des Métis community was established by the Canadian government in 1896 as a Métis agricultural settlement overseen by the Catholic Church.

In 1908, the church asked the federal government to open the community up to French settlement and the government opened it up to general homesteading. By the time the town was incorporated in 1936, ‘des Métis’ had been dropped from its name.

“The history of St.-Paul-des-Métis mirrors the larger story of the Métis in Alberta — a people who helped build this province, only to be repeatedly pushed to the margins by government decisions,” wrote OMG president Andrea Sandmaier and Lacombe in an Aug. 11 *Edmonton Journal* opinion piece.

Restoring the town’s original name, they added, might “not return the lost land or undo the harm caused when others had controlled Métis homes and futures, but it will restore the truth.”

This issue is personal for Lacombe, who originally hails from St. Paul and has deep familial ties to its Métis community.

Lacombe is a descendant of Father Albert Lacombe, the Oblate Missionary who originally requested that the land become a Métis agricultural community, as well as the great great grandson of Laurent and Eleanor Garneau, one of the first families to settle St. Paul des Métis.

He recalled in an interview that he grew up hearing stories from his family about the town’s Métis origins.

The town’s name “should have never changed,” Lacombe told this newspaper. “The time has always been right ... Why not now?”

The OMG is also asking the town to install a traditional wooden Red River cart at one of the entrances to the municipality to honour its Métis heritage.

The cart, which was traditionally used for transporting furs and hunting materials, river crossings and shelter, is “one of the pillars of our cultures and traditions,” Lacombe explained.

According to the *Municipal Government Act*, a municipal government can request a change to its name, but the ultimate decision rests with the province.

The OMG first wrote to St. Paul Mayor Glenn Anderson and town council in May to request the name change, which town council accepted as information – a formal gesture that doesn’t commit the government to any action.

Two additional correspondences from the OMG went unanswered.

“I’ve heard more from media,” Lacombe told

this newspaper. “I have not had one conversation with the mayor and town council. No return of my letters. Nothing.”

A Town of St. Paul spokesperson didn’t acknowledge a voicemail requesting comment for this story.

Steven Jeffery, chief administrative officer for St. Paul, told the CBC that town council didn’t direct administration to reach out to the OMG.

But he said the municipality “would absolutely be open to having representatives from the Métis Nation to meet and discuss this initiative further with council so that everyone can have the same understanding of the ask.”

“The Town of St. Paul prides itself on being an inclusive community and we would like to learn more about the Nations’ plans so that we can work together toward a common goal,” Jeffrey added.

Lacombe said this is precisely what he wants.

“It shouldn’t take three letters to get this type of question out there and responded to,” he said. “I’m really hoping that they contact us, so we can have a discussion eye-to-eye at the table.”

NOTICE OF VOTE



Otipemisiwak
Métis Government

This Fall, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government will be holding the following District Council Elections and District By-Elections.

- District Councillor** elections will be held for Calgary Nose Hill Métis District.
- Sub-District Councillor** by-elections will be held for Jasper House Métis District in the Edson Sub-District and Jasper-Grande Cache Sub-District.
- A **Youth Councillor** by-election will be held for Jasper House Métis District.

From **October 26, 2026 to November 3, 2026**, eligible Métis Citizens will have the opportunity to vote by one of the following methods:

- IN-PERSON VOTING**
Polling stations will operate throughout Alberta from 8 AM to 8 PM during the voting period.
Exact dates and addresses of polling locations are yet to be confirmed, and will be posted at **MetisElectionsAB.com**
- MAIL-IN VOTING**
A mail-in ballot will be sent to each Citizen who is eligible to vote. If you don’t receive a mail-in ballot, or need a replacement, visit **MetisElectionsAB.com** to request one.
- ELECTRONIC VOTING**
You can vote online at any time during the vote period. More details will follow about where and how to vote electronically.

To learn more about the vote, including the process for nominations or how to request voting assistance, visit **MetisElectionsAB.com**



Roxanne Carriere, Chief Electoral Officer, Otipemisiwak Métis Government

Notice issued on August 12, 2026



The chiefs and leaders of Treaty 6 First Nations gathered last month to commemorate the 1876 signing of Treaty 6.

Treaty No. Six at 150 years: A Living Relationship that Goes Beyond the Written Words

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For four days in August, Fort Carlton Provincial Historic Park became a place of ceremony, culture, dialogue and gathering as Treaty 6 Nations and their citizens marked 150 years since the historic agreement was first made.

Held August 20 to 23, 2026, the Treaty 6 150th Commemoration brought together First Nations leaders, Elders, youth, families, governments and visitors on the same land where Treaty 6 was first signed on August 23, 1876. The organizers described it not simply as an anniversary, but as an opportunity to honour the Spirit and Intent of Treaty and consider its continuing responsibilities.

For Dr. Kathy Walker, Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan, the gathering represented the affirmation and strengthening of the Treaty relationship.

"It was so incredible to see so many Nations and their citizens, as well as non-First Nations

citizens and partners, come together to honour Treaty 6 as a living relationship at the place where the first negotiations were held," Walker said.

"The hope of leadership, planners and organizers was that it would be a truly, one-of-a-kind, historic experience for everyone who attended."

The event was led by the Treaty 6 Nations with active involvement of many Nations and their leaders, youth, elders and citizens. The Office of the Commissioner and Pemiska Eco-Tourism, an enterprise of Beatty's & Okemasis First Nation, shared the coordination of programming and logistics for the event.

Walker said the Office of the Treaty Commissioner's mandate is to strengthen the Treaty relationship and create common understanding through research, education and forums bringing Treaty partners and citizens together.

The gathering reflected that mandate through youth, Elders, women's and Chiefs' forums, a Wîtaskêwin dialogue, traditional ceremonies, medicine walks and land-based programming. The official agenda also included a Village of Nations, the original Treaty 6 parchment, Treaty forums, leadership discussions, hand games, cultural performances and a commemorative ceremony.

"The gathering was grounded in ceremony, the land, culture and nations' sharing their Treaty histories and reflections on the past, present and future of Treaty 6," Walker said.

"There was a kêtê-ayak or Elders forum, a youth forum, a women's forum, and also a Chiefs' forum where important Treaty dialogues took place."

The Wîtaskêwin dialogue created space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to discuss what it means to live together on the land. Youth were also given opportunities to learn directly from the land.

"The youth had workshops on things like a crash course on Treaty," Walker said. "The youth also asked for medicine walks, so we had a couple of people who took them on medicine walks around the area, and then also medicine walks were available to anyone else who wanted to take part in those."

An Elders' tent focused on another critical question: how knowledge can be carried forward.

"Led by our director of education, Elaine Sutherland, we had a discussion amongst the Elders in the Elders' tent on basically what kind of supports they needed to ensure that they're transmitting the knowledge that they have, to future generations."

"And that was a really, really great discussion that will continue to unfold with action behind it," Walker added.

Continued on page 15

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- Siksikáí'powahsin (Blackfoot),
- Dënesųłinë (Dene),
- Michif (Michif),
- Nehiyawak (Plains-Cree),
- Îyethka (Stoney),
- Sakâwiyniw pekikskweywin (Woods-Cree).



Starting September 21, 2026, find your designated voting place by scanning the QR code and entering your Nation or residential address.

Barrier-free access is provided at voting places where possible. For more information visit elections.ab.ca/accessibility

Be referendum ready

In this referendum, electors will be asked to vote on 10 questions. Nine questions require a “Yes” or “No” response. One question asks electors to choose between two options. It is recommended to review the questions beforehand at elections.ab.ca.

You have three ways to vote:

- 1. Vote during Advance Voting** from October 13 to 17, 2026, at an advance voting place in your electoral division.
- 2. Vote on Election Day, October 19, 2026** at your designated voting place.
- 3. Request a special ballot** and vote by mail.*

***If you are unable to vote during advance voting or on Election Day, or if you prefer to vote by mail, special ballot is available to all eligible voters.** To vote by mail, visit specialballot.elections.ab.ca. Completed special ballots must be returned by mail and received by Elections Alberta by 5:00pm on October 16. The deadline to request a special ballot is September 25, 2026.

Royal Alberta Museum returns 77 artifacts to Fort McKay

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



Photo courtesy Royal Alberta Museum

The return of 77 archaeological artifacts to Fort McKay First Nation began with something that can be easy to overlook in a museum collection: the records. While reviewing documentation connected to objects held in its Archaeology Collection, the Royal Alberta Museum discovered that a group of artifacts originally collected during an archaeological excavation in the 1970s had been recovered from land located on the Fort McKay reserve. That discovery changed the legal status of the objects.

Under Alberta's Historical Resources Act, archaeological artifacts discovered in Alberta, except those found on federal lands, are protected and become part of the province's archaeological collection. But artifacts found on First Nation reserve land do not fall under that legislation.

As a result, RAM determined that the Fort McKay artifacts were legally the property of the Nation. The museum then contacted Fort McKay First Nation and began working with the community to arrange their return. To date, 77 artifacts have been returned, with arrangements underway for the remaining objects.

Meaghan Patterson, Executive Director of the Royal Alberta Museum, said the distinction is straightforward: "Archaeological artifacts found on reserve land do not fall under the Alberta Historical Resources Act, and therefore remain the property of the nation."

For Fort McKay, the significance of the return extends beyond the number of objects involved. The artifacts include stone tools, and other materials left by people who lived in the region over many generations and thousands of years.

Rather than determining how those objects should be displayed or interpreted, RAM says those decisions now belong to Fort McKay.

The return raises a larger question about the thousands of Indigenous archaeological objects

held by museums and institutions. Could other collections contain artifacts that were also collected from reserve lands and therefore legally belong to the Nations from which they originated?

RAM says it cannot speak for other organizations in Alberta. However, Patterson said ensuring appropriate cultural care and stewardship of Indigenous belongings is a priority for the museum. "If we discover that there are other archaeological objects in our collection that were collected on reserve lands, similar to the circumstances of the objects that are being returned to Fort McKay, we would get in touch with the relevant First Nation to arrange a return."

That statement places particular importance on provenance – the historical record documenting where an object came from, when it was collected and under what circumstances. In the Fort McKay case, those records ultimately provided the information necessary to determine that the objects did not belong to the province.

The museum's discovery also demonstrates why historical documentation matters when dealing with Indigenous cultural belongings. An artifact may have been sitting in a collection for decades, but its presence in that collection does not necessarily determine who legally owns it.

The Fort McKay artifacts were part of RAM's Archaeology Collection. That collection is separate from the museum's Indigenous Collection, which is stewarded by RAM's Indigenous Engagement team.

The distinction is important because the return of the Fort McKay artifacts does not represent a plan to remove older Indigenous objects from the museum and simply replace them with contemporary items.

RAM's Archaeology Collection continues to grow through archaeological work conducted in Alberta. At the same time, the Indigenous Engagement team works directly with Indigenous communities to collect contemporary stories and

objects through donations, commissions and purchases from individuals. Patterson emphasized that the two collections have different purposes and stewardship models.

The museum has also worked with Indigenous communities for decades to return sacred objects to active ceremonial use through the First Nations Sacred and Ceremonial Object Repatriation Act, legislation passed in 2000. That process, known as FNSCORA, applies to sacred and ceremonial objects within RAM's Indigenous Collection and is separate from what happened with the Fort McKay artifacts.

In the Fort McKay case, the central issue was not a repatriation application under that legislation. It was ownership.

For Indigenous communities, the return of cultural belongings can carry meaning that goes far beyond their material value. Stone tools, animal remains and other archaeological materials can provide connections to ancestors, territory and the generations of people who lived on the land long before the modern province of Alberta existed.

In Fort McKay, the Nation will now determine what happens to the returned objects. Rather than a provincial institution deciding how objects connected to Fort McKay's history should be interpreted or presented, the Nation has authority to determine their future.

The return also illustrates the importance of examining collections through the lens of Indigenous ownership and jurisdiction. For decades, museums and archaeological institutions have accumulated objects through excavations, donations, purchases and other means. But as historical records are revisited and relationships between institutions and Indigenous Nations continue to evolve, questions about provenance and ownership can take on new significance.

In Fort McKay's case, the answer emerged from the museum's own records. The artifacts had been collected during an archaeological dig in the 1970s. Decades later, a review of the documentation revealed that the excavation had taken place on reserve land.

Once RAM recognized that the Alberta Historical Resources Act did not apply, the museum contacted the Nation. Seventy-seven artifacts have now made their way home. The remaining artifacts are expected to follow as arrangements are made between the museum and Fort McKay First Nation.

For Patterson and RAM, the process demonstrates the importance of continuing to examine the museum's collections and working directly with Indigenous communities when questions about ownership and stewardship arise.

For Fort McKay, it represents the return of objects connected to generations of people who lived on the land – objects that, according to the museum's own determination, belonged to the Nation all along.

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Miss Queen Treaty 6, speaks out against online bullying and hate

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At 22, Jonessa Strawberry, Miss Queen Treaty Six 2026, is using her regional title to raise awareness about online bullying, racism, Indigenous mental health and the importance of cultural connection.

Born and raised in Hinton, Alberta, Strawberry is a member of O’Chiese First Nation and the first-ever Miss Queen Treaty Six. Her journey through pageantry has become much more than holding a title. Through advocacy, cultural reconnection, youth engagement and her workbook *Rooted and Empowered*, she is encouraging young people to understand who they are, where they come from and how they can contribute to their communities.

“I’m your first-ever Miss Queen Treaty Six,” Strawberry said. Personality Pageants Canada is not primarily about conventional beauty standards, she explained. “Ultimately, it’s not a beauty pageant. It’s a personality pageant. It’s not based on beauty standards or societal standards. It’s based on your personality, advocacy and platform.”

She previously competed in Miss Queen Teen Alberta in 2024, becoming Miss Queen Teen Central Alberta. That experience helped shape her advocacy around social media and Indigenous mental health.

“When I first won Miss Queen Teen Central Alberta, I focused my platform on social media and Indigenous mental health because I saw a lot of the ups and downs of what people go through on a reserve,” she said.

Although Strawberry was raised in a town rather than on reserve, she moved to O’Chiese First Nation at about 14 or 15 and experienced the effects of intergenerational trauma during her teenage years. “I saw the racism people face because we have a couple of towns nearby, and unfortunately, I’ve seen it in my teen years,” she said. “It really does affect the teenagers and young people.”

Her concerns about online bullying are reflected in national data. Statistics Canada has found that approximately one in four Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 experienced cyberbullying, while the rate among First Nations youth living off reserve was 34 per cent, compared with 24 per cent among non-Indigenous youth.

“Small-town racism and online bullying are issues that need to be talked about,” Strawberry said. “When youth are on social media and young people are online, that’s all they see.”

Her response has been practical. She has created resources addressing Indigenous mental health, community involvement, local helplines and cultural connection. Her platform has now evolved into *Empowered by Culture and Rooted by Wellness*, alongside her workbook *Rooted and Empowered*.

“My workbook is based around learning and connecting with your people. It’s based on connecting with yourself and getting to know yourself,” she said. “I aim these workbooks towards everybody. There are coloring pages in there for youth, so parents can buy these books and sit down with their kids.”

She has also shared the workbook with educators and communities. At the Samson Powwow, she gave away four copies and used proceeds from selling earrings to purchase more. “With the earrings that I sold, I bought more books,” she said. “I plan to do another giveaway of those in another community that I go to.”

For Strawberry, pageantry itself has been transformative. “When I first went into pageantry, I wasn’t confident in myself. I didn’t know how to talk to people. I didn’t know much about advocacy or platform,” she said. “Pageantry shaped my life now and who I am and what I do. It’s such a grounding thing for me in my

daily life.”

She describes the pageant community as a supportive network where participants uplift one another despite having different platforms. “I think the community is so well-knit together where we all support and uplift each other,” she said. “We all see something in each other where we connect with each other.”

Her Treaty Six platform extends that spirit of connection to the broader Canadian relationship. “One thing I think people should really remember is that we’re both treaty people,” Strawberry said. “Treaty Six alone is about more than rights. It’s about the relationships and the shared responsibilities both parties have.”

She believes Indigenous people have a responsibility to learn from elders, understand the intentions of their ancestors, care for land and water, and carry knowledge forward. “We have to become stronger advocates who carry that knowledge forward with confidence and pride,” she said. “When our elders pass away, it’s our responsibility to do that.”

Strawberry also acknowledges that she remains a learner. “I’m reconnecting to my culture all the time, even though I feel like I’m deeply rooted. But I don’t know everything about the culture. I’m still learning,” she said. “I’m only 22 years old.”

That perspective informs how she teaches others. “I think it’s important for everybody, not just First Nations people, to welcome these people who are learning with open arms, who are trying to learn,” she said.

Ultimately, Strawberry hopes her title helps people understand that Treaty Six is not simply history. “I hope people leave with a deeper



Miss Queen Treaty 6 Jonessa Strawberry. Photo by Noella Steinhauer

understanding of Treaty Six. It’s not only a part of history. It’s a part of our present right now and our future.”

For Strawberry, Miss Queen Treaty Six 2026 represents more than a crown. “At the end of all of it, Miss Queen Treaty Six represents the strength, the resilience and the sacrifices of our ancestors,” she said. “As a member of the Indigenous community, I think there’s a deeper connection for me. It’s personal.”

Through *Rooted and Empowered*, Strawberry is turning that personal connection into a resource for others. “My workbook is not just about getting to know who you are; it’s also about getting to know your own community, going out into your own community and finding ways for yourself,” she said. “I think that’s the most beautiful thing about my workbook right now.”

Follow Jonessa Strawberry / Miss Queen Treaty 6 2026 on Instagram at @jonessaava.

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ALBERTA’S NEW DEMOCRAT CAUCUS

Kalaija Ward-Buffalo’s journey on the Powwow Trail

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Kalaija Ward-Buffalo, powwow is more than a gathering. It is a way of life rooted in family, culture, movement, creativity and the responsibility of passing traditions on to the next generation.

A mother of two, entrepreneur and member of Ermineskin Cree Nation, Ward-Buffalo has built a life that brings together her passion for Indigenous culture, regalia-making, beadwork and fitness.

“Powwow has always been an important part of my life because it keeps me connected to my culture, family, and community,” she said.

Ward-Buffalo creates regalia and beadwork through her business, @madebykalaijaward, and also operates her own online fitness training business, Training With Kalaija Ward.

“Both businesses go hand in hand,” she said. “Through my work, I love being creative, supporting and guiding others through movement, and keeping our culture alive for the next generation.”

Ward-Buffalo was introduced to the powwow circle as a young child by her mother, Joelle Ward, who is a jingle dress dancer.

“My mom introduced me to the powwow circle as a tiny tot. I loved dancing alongside her,” she said.

Growing up surrounded by family, Ward-Buffalo learned the importance of culture and tradition from those around her. Her journey as a dancer became more serious when she was 12 years old, when Karlene Cutknife mentored her in Women’s Fancy Shawl.

Cutknife taught her not only how to dance, but also the importance of caring for her regalia. “She taught me the importance of caring for my regalia and taught me that when you take care of your outfit, it will take care of you. Your regalia becomes a part of you,” Ward-Buffalo said.

Looking back, she credits her mother, family, mentors and community for helping shape her journey. “It truly takes a community to raise a dancer, and I’m grateful for everyone who has guided me along the powwow trail.”

Ward-Buffalo dances Women’s Fancy Shawl, a style she admires for its energy, movement and connection to strength and endurance. She is particularly inspired by the story of a young woman who wanted to dance Fancy and demonstrate that women could be just as strong and successful as men.

“When Men’s Fancy was introduced, people admired how fast, energetic, and beautiful the dance was,” she explained. “At the time, women weren’t traditionally allowed to dance Fancy.”

Ward-Buffalo said the story of women challenging those expectations is one she carries with pride. “I admire that story so much, and I’m incredibly proud to be a Fancy Shawl dancer.”

Powwow preparation is also a family activity for Ward-Buffalo, her partner Darrell Brertton Jr. and their children.

Healthy living is already part of their daily routine. Ward-Buffalo and Brertton strength train, go for walks and spend time outdoors. During powwow season, they add conditioning, strength training and outdoor dance practice.

“It’s honestly one of my favourite things to do as a family,” she said.

Regalia-making also gives her children an opportunity to learn. Whether Ward-Buffalo is creating regalia for her family or others, her children watch, participate and help when they can.

“Everything we do is a team effort,” she said. “We always try to include our children and teach them this beautiful way of life through our culture, traditions, movement, and the things we create together.”

For Ward-Buffalo, involving young people in cultural gatherings is essential because they are the next generation responsible for carrying those traditions forward.

Powwow continues to provide a space where families and communities can come together and where younger generations can learn from Elders.



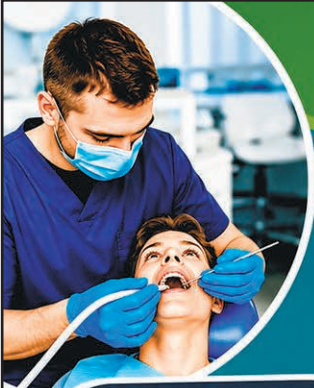
Fancy Shawl Dancer Kalaija Ward-Buffalo. Photo credit: Darrell Brertton JR.

“Powwow is important because it brings our families and communities together,” Ward-Buffalo said. “It gives younger generations a chance to learn from our Elders and carry on our traditions.”

Through dance, songs and stories, generations are able to maintain a living connection to their culture.

Ward-Buffalo also wants people watching from outside the circle to understand how much dedication goes into each performance. “I hope

Continued on page 16





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How one Métis carver built a 43-foot York Boat from memory and heritage

By John Wirth, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



Métis master carver Patrick Calihou with his historic York River Boat re-creation, which now resides at Fort Langley Historic Park.

When the decade began with forced isolation, master artisan Patrick Calihou took the solitude of a quieted world to undertake a massive historic recreation: a 43-foot “York” river boat built right in the center of Fort Langley National Historic Site. Patrick shared his perspective during an interview. Spanning stem to stern, the vessel represents the absolute maximum scale of historic fur-trade rivercraft, built with a flat bottom designed to glide across the shallow sandbars of the mighty Stó:lō (Fraser) River.

A collaborative effort that was sponsored by Fort Langley National Historic Site brought together Parks Canada and Calihou, on behalf of the Métis Nation. The finished vessel now resides at the fort as a permanent landmark. But bringing it to life required battling both nature and filling in the gaps of history.

Patrick recalls that the hardest part of bending the hand-hewn planks, soaked overnight and steamed all day, wasn’t the risk of steam burns, but the relentless race against time and the freezing weather.

“It was wintertime when we were doing this, so it was cooling off faster than it normally would,” Patrick reflects. “It’s like everything was against us. And we were using the wood harvested today, not the old-growth timber our ancestors would have used. These trees are young, grown within our own lifetimes.”

The long beams that are produced today are different because they do not have the same wood grain pattern that an old growth forest would produce. Because of this, young timber has different strengths and often breaks more easily under the same conditions.

In essence, recreating the boat was significantly more difficult than it ought to have been.

Pat’s struggle was deeply personal. His great great-grandfather, Micheal Calihou, made his living building these exact vessels, and his great-granduncles piloted them.

“That was a significant part of my family’s life,” Calihou says. “My grandma’s dad and his dad were building those York boats and paddling them, and I grew up not knowing that.”

When Patrick and his team hit dead ends during construction, they found that preserved historical documents were missing key measurements. This was a common practice in the fur-trade era to protect trade secrets from competitors. With no living experts to consult, Calihou relied on ancestral memory.

“We were literally screaming out my great-grandfather’s name: ‘I know you did this, and it

won’t work! Why isn’t this working? Help me, give me the answer!’ ... There was no one for me to call that was alive,” Calihou recalls. “We just literally pulled the answers out.”

For Calihou, every piece of timber is an act of cultural reclamation, proving that five generations of family history can be brought back into the light.

“If I didn’t do this stuff, all this would have been forgotten,” Calihou says. “It wouldn’t have been put in that book with the reconciliation for education. That’s a pretty big deal to have them honoured – five generations of my family.”

Patrick has formed such a genuine relation with the people employed with the fort that he is now involved with major renovations, carefully replacing the termite damaged wood of the fort itself.

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Georgina Lightning trailblazing community advocate, dies at 63

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Indigenous community and the film and media world are mourning the passing of Georgina Lightning, a respected Cree filmmaker, screenwriter, actor, producer and advocate for Indigenous storytelling.

Lightning’s passing was publicly confirmed by her daughter, actor and musician Crystle Lightning, on social media. Her family is grieving this profound loss, and their privacy is being respected during this difficult time.

Born July 4, 1963, Lightning was a member of Samson Cree Nation. Over a career spanning more than three decades, she worked as an actor, director, producer and screenwriter while becoming a strong advocate for Indigenous representation and Indigenous control of storytelling.

Lightning is perhaps best known for *Older Than America*, the 2008 feature film she wrote, directed and starred in. The film explored the impacts of residential schools and intergenerational trauma and was inspired, in part, by her family’s experiences.

The film brought significant recognition to Lightning as a filmmaker. In 2007, she was named one of *Filmmaker Magazine’s* 25 New Faces of Independent Film. In 2010, she received the White House Project EPIC Award for Emerging Artist. *Older Than America* also received numerous honours at film festivals.

Her acting career was recognized nationally as well. In 2021, Lightning received a Canadian Screen Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress in a Drama Series for her performance in the CBC series *Trickster*.

Beyond her own career, Lightning worked to create opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers, actors and storytellers. Her work reflected a longstanding commitment to Indigenous representation and to ensuring Indigenous people had greater control over how their stories were

created, produced and shared.

Lightning’s connection with *Alberta Native News* continued into 2026.

On March 4, Alberta Native News published an interview with Lightning titled “Story Is the Resource: Georgina Lightning on Building Alberta as the Indigenous Film Capital of the World.”

In that conversation, Lightning discussed her vision for developing Alberta into a global hub for Indigenous-owned film and media. She spoke about story ownership, economic development and creating sustainable opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers across Treaty 6, 7 and 8 territories.

Lightning told *Alberta Native News*: “These are Alberta workers, and we’re trying to make Alberta the Indigenous film capital of the world.”

She also emphasized the importance of Indigenous communities owning and developing their own stories rather than simply serving as locations for productions controlled elsewhere.

That March interview now stands as a recent record of Lightning’s vision for the future of Indigenous film and media in Alberta.

Lightning’s funeral will take place on September 16, 2026, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the River Cree venue.

The gathering will provide an important opportunity for family, friends, colleagues, artists, community members and those whose lives she touched to come together and honour her life and legacy.

The timing carries particular significance for the Indigenous community. September 16 was also the date planned for Walk a Mile in a Ribbon Skirt Day in Edmonton, an event Lightning had supported over the

years. Her presence and encouragement had been meaningful to the event and to many of the community initiatives she supported.

With her funeral taking place that day, September 16 becomes an especially meaningful opportunity for the community to come together, pay respects and remember the remarkable contributions Lightning made throughout her life.

Lightning’s passing represents a significant loss to Indigenous film and media and to the many communities she supported throughout her career.

Her legacy lives through the stories she brought to audiences, the opportunities she helped create for Indigenous artists and filmmakers, and the generations of Indigenous storytellers she inspired.

Her work also reflected something larger than a film career: a belief that Indigenous people should have the opportunity to tell their own stories, control those stories and build sustainable careers within the industry.

At this time, we extend our deepest condolences to Crystle Lightning, Cody Lightning, William Lightning, her family, friends, colleagues and everyone who knew and loved Georgina.

We will honour her contributions to Indigenous film, culture, storytelling and community while respecting the privacy of her family as they grieve.

Rest in Peace, Georgina Lightning.

Georgina Lightning

1963–2026

May her legacy continue through the stories, artists and communities she helped uplift.



Cree filmmaker, actor, producer and community advocate Georgina Lightning passed away last month at age 63. She was passionate about Indigenous storytelling.



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The RCMP and a changing relationship with Treaty 6

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For 150 years, the relationship between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Indigenous peoples has been intertwined with the history of Canada itself. That history is complicated. The institution now known as the RCMP began in 1873 as the North-West Mounted Police, created by the federal government as it extended Canadian authority into the West. The force marched westward in 1874, establishing posts and detachments across territory that was already home to First Nations and Métis peoples. For Treaty 6 First Nations, that history cannot be separated from the Crown's broader relationship with Indigenous peoples. Treaty 6 was entered into in 1876 at Fort Carlton on August 23, at Chief Beardy's campsite on August 28 and at Fort Pitt on September 9. The Office of the Treaty Commissioner describes Treaty 6 as a living covenant between peoples, grounded in promises of mutual benefit and shared prosperity. The 150th anniversary in 2026 therefore represents more than a historical milestone. It is an opportunity to examine what the treaty relationship means today – including for institutions that historically acted as agents of the Crown. For the Saskatchewan RCMP, that reflection is now being expressed through participation in Treaty 6 commemorations and through an effort to change how officers understand and work with Indigenous communities. S/Sgt. Cliff Joanis of Saskatchewan RCMP Indigenous Policing Services said Saskatchewan RCMP members were involved in several aspects of the Treaty 6 commemorations. “At Fort Carlton, we participated in the carrying of the treaty bundle and subsequent pipe ceremony to

open the commemoration,” Joanis said. The Saskatchewan RCMP also provided security during the viewing of the original Treaty 6 parchment and assisted Indigenous Services Canada and Beardy's & Okemasis Cree Nation during treaty days and annuity payments. Saskatchewan RCMP Commanding Officer A/Comm. Robin McNeil and Central District Commander Superintendent Brent Olberg also participated in the closing ceremonies. For the RCMP, participation in those ceremonies is part of a relationship it now describes in terms of respect, responsibility and coexistence. “The relationship signifies an ongoing commitment from the RCMP to work with our Indigenous communities founded on respect, responsibility, and co-existence,” Joanis said. “It is an invitation to work alongside First Nation communities we police to strive for healthy and safe communities.” But such a relationship cannot be understood without acknowledging where the institution came from. The NWMP was created during a period of rapid Canadian expansion, and the police became an important instrument through which federal authority was established across the West. The



Assistant Commissioner Robin McNeil and Superintendent Brent Olberg, viewing the original Treaty 6 parchment.

organization eventually became the Royal North-West Mounted Police in 1904 and merged with the Dominion Police in 1920 to create the modern RCMP. Over the decades, its responsibilities expanded from a western mounted force into a national police service providing federal, provincial, territorial and municipal policing. Its history with Indigenous peoples, however, includes some of Canada's most painful chapters. RCMP officers were involved in enforcing government policies connected to residential schools. Between 1933 and 1996, RCMP officers were appointed as truant officers under the Indian Act and were responsible for enforcing school attendance and returning children to residential schools. The RCMP itself acknowledges this history. The Force also acknowledges its role in the enforcement of the pass system, which restricted

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NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION



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Alberta’s Treaty Chiefs oppose Alberta separation

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Alberta’s government is facing pushback from Treaty 8 Sovereign Nations after updating its Alberta Day statement to remove reference to Indigenous Peoples.

“The removal is deeply troubling,” said Grand Chief Trevor Mercredi in a Sept. 1 statement. “Treaty 8 Sovereign Nations and all First Nations across Alberta have always been part of the history, present and future of this province. Our Nations are not a footnote to Alberta’s story.”

At 10 a.m. that morning, Alberta’s government sent out a news release in English and French for Alberta Day, an unofficial holiday which celebrates the province’s founding in 1905.

“We recognize the Indigenous Peoples whose enduring connection to and stewardship of this land continues to shape Alberta. Over generations, people from many backgrounds have strengthened our communities through hard work, innovation, entrepreneurship, and a shared belief in opportunity,” the statement read.

Just before 11 a.m., the government sent out an updated version of the statement, which removed the reference to Indigenous Peoples, adding a general reference to people of “many backgrounds.”

“Generations of Albertans from many backgrounds have helped build our province through hard work, innovation and a shared belief in freedom. Their legacy can be seen in the strong communities, thriving industries and quality of life we enjoy today,” the updated version read.

“Alberta Day is a celebration of that legacy as well as our rich history, heritage and community spirit. It is also a chance to recognize the values that unite us, take pride in the role Alberta has played in Canada’s success and look ahead to the opportunities before us.”

Grand Chief Mercredi called the change to the statement especially concerning as the government pursues policies that trample on Treaty rights, including the possibility of a binding referendum on Alberta independence.

“At a time when First Nations people are facing increased hostility for standing up for Treaty, the government should be affirming our place and history prior to Alberta’s story, not erasing it,” said Mercredi.

“Respect for First Nations must be reflected in the government’s words, actions and relationships.”

Asked by a journalist to explain the change, a government bureaucrat said the update “was issued in error,” and that the original statement would be on the government’s website.

“We apologize for this error and any confusion that it may have caused,” they added.

Meanwhile, Alberta Treaty Nations and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) are continuing to speak out against the upcoming referendum question that relates to the possibility of Alberta separation.

Earlier this summer, The Annual General Assembly of the AFN passed a landmark resolution to protect Treaty Rights from threats posed by a separatist movement in Alberta. The emergency resolution was put forward by

Sunchild First Nation and Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations Grand Chief Joey Pete and Proxy Chief Matthew Coon Come, Cree Nation of Nemaska, Quebec. It states that no province has the legal authority to alter, diminish, or extinguish Treaty Rights or the constitutional relationship between First Nations and the Crown.

Alberta Chiefs from Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 8, Blackfoot Confederacy, Treaty No. 7 and the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) came together on July 13th for a historic meeting marking their first formal gathering. During discussions about separatist threats to Treaty Rights, Chiefs from Quebec shared their experience responding to previous provincial separation efforts and highlighted the importance of asserting First Nations as distinct rights holders. Treaty First Nations from Alberta emphasized that any proposal to separate Alberta from Canada would directly affect First Nations’ rights, lands, territories, and future, and therefore cannot proceed.

A news release issued by the Treaty Chiefs stated that “since taking office, Premier Danielle Smith and the current Government of Alberta have undertaken a coordinated political agenda to advance Alberta’s autonomy from the Government of Canada and normalize Alberta’s possible separation while failing to recognize or engage First Nations as Treaty Rights holders whose rights and interests would be fundamentally affected by such constitutional change.”

The emergency resolution passed by the AFN formally calls upon all federal and provincial governments to uphold the honour of the Crown and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – ensuring that any constitutional or political process that may affect First Nations proceeds only through respectful government-to-government engagement with the free, prior, and informed consent of the affected First Nations.

“Nations from across the country have expressed their solidarity with Treaty First Nations in Alberta in opposing this threat. First Nations rights are not negotiable and continued cooperation among First Nations will be essential in protecting Treaty Rights for future generations.”

Treaty 6 leadership is urging its members to vote in the upcoming Alberta election. “Our treaties are living agreements. Voting is one way we protect our Treaty relationship and make our voices heard,” states a post on the website.

Treaty 6 is asking its members to “vote option 1 - to remain in Canada,” continues the post. “And vote no on the nine other questions.”

“Treaty No. 6 represents a continuing relationship with the Crown and Canada. The decisions being made in this referendum matter to Treaty people, our Nations and future generations. Our voice needs to be heard. Our people need to vote.”

Treaty 6 cont. from p 6

Nations Coming Together

Walker stressed that the commemoration was First Nations-led. “I have to say that this gathering was really led by a core group of Treaty Six Chiefs.” Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, Mistawasis Nêhiyawak and Beardy’s and Okemasis were among the Nations playing a central role in the development of the commemoration. Stoney Knoll was also part of the core group of Nations that approached the OTC to support the event.

Walker identified the OTC’s role as providing a big role in terms of project management and coordination, while Pêmiska Eco Tourism was a key partner.

Sturgeon Lake, Chakastaypasin, Muskoday, Mosquito Grizzly Bear’s Head and Lean Man, Muskeg and Whitefish Lake were also actively involved in planning. In addition, Chakastaypasin, James Smith Cree Nation and Peter Chapman contributed through their Unity Ride, with 19 horses travelling for three days toward Fort Carlton.

“There were just so many nations that contributed and showed up on the day of and put up their tipis and really made the event what it is,” said Walker. Four Alberta Treaty 6 Nations – Cold Lake, Whitefish Lake, Kehewin and Beaver Lake – also attended.

The participation of Nations from across Treaty 6 reinforced the gathering’s broader purpose: unity, strength and a shared relationship extending beyond provincial boundaries.

Treaty Beyond the Written Document

For Walker, understanding Treaty 6 requires looking beyond the written document. “Treaties are part of our shared history,” she said. “They are foundational to how we’re supposed to relate with

one another.” “But it’s also important to understand that Treaties go beyond any written document. They are the oral histories. They come from ceremony. They come from relationships with Creator and the living earth. So any written text must be interpreted within this broader context.”

Walker explained that treaty-making began through ceremony and the Pipe, reflecting a sacred understanding of the relationship. “All treaties, well, treaties one to eleven, were started with ceremony. They started with the Pipe.”

“And the significance of that is that treaties are regarded as sacred covenants, because they weren’t just between the Crown and First Nations. They were also covenants witnessed by the Creator...And the spiritual aspect of treaties is still very much alive today and is still foundational to how we understand treaties.”

Walker said understanding treaty-making requires understanding the doctrines, laws and traditions that shaped First Nations perspectives. “You have to understand all of the doctrines that go into nêhiyaw understanding of treaty making, or other Plains nations,” she said. “It takes a whole lifetime to really understand all of the doctrines, because what we’re really talking about is, you know, nêhiyaw tâpisiinowin, like an entire worldview.”

She pointed to Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan, which she described as an outline of core doctrines that guided treaty-making, and recalled Elder Jimmy Miyo of Moosomin.

“He said, ‘You cannot begin to understand the treaties unless you understand our cultural and spiritual traditions and our Indian laws.’”

That understanding also informs Walker’s explanation of wîtaskêwin, which she describes as a land-sharing relationship oriented toward peace, friendship and harmony, and pimâtisowin, connected to life, culture and the continuation of Indigenous ways of living.

“When the First Nations were making treaty, they were trying to ensure the life of all creation.”

“And so treaties were supposed to help ensure life – all life in creation, but also that the life of the nations themselves continued in terms of our ways of life.”

“So the continuance of pimâtisowin or life is fundamental under treaty.”

Oral Histories and Spirit and Intent

Walker said First Nations oral histories provide an essential perspective on what treaty-making meant. “When you look at the oral histories, there was never this intent to cede or surrender land. It was really about sharing land to the depth of a plow with newcomers...That’s really important because it shows there’s differences in



Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan
Dr. Kathy Walker

perspective.” She said bridging those perspectives remains an important part of Treaty education. One of the things that the gathering is trying to bridge is that gap, right, so that everybody knows the truth about our shared history.

That goal was reflected in the commemoration’s official focus on the Spirit “and Intent of Treaty and its continuing implementation. Organizers also stated that the gathering should contribute to substantive discussion around outstanding Treaty obligations and Treaty implementation.

Bringing History Home

One of the most significant elements of the gathering was the return of the original Treaty 6 manuscript to Treaty territory. The 150-year-old document was displayed at Fort Carlton, giving Treaty citizens and visitors an opportunity to see the original parchment. The OTC reported that it was the first time in 150 years that the original Treaty 6 text had returned to Treaty 6 territory.

The original Treaty bundle was also present, and the ceremony surrounding it became one of the gathering’s most powerful moments. Governor General Louise Arbour participated as the representative of the Crown.

For Walker, the significance ultimately came down to people. “For me personally, there were so many memorable moments. Overall, I thought it was a really memorable and powerful gathering, in terms of just the amount of people that showed up.”

More than 5,000 people attended over the four days, Walker said.

“If you were there, you felt such a great positive energy.



The original Treaty 6 parchment was on display at the gathering.



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Métis Elder Nora Cummings shares her stories in a new memoir

By ANNews staff

Born and raised in Saskatchewan, Nora Cummings is a respected Métis leader who helped found the Métis Society of Saskatchewan 11 (now called Gabriel Dumont Local 11) and the Saskatchewan Native Women’s Association. She is a lifelong advocate for Métis women, children and families and remains active in her community.

In her moving memoir, published recently by University of Regina Press, the trailblazing Métis activist and leader shares her remarkable life story. Raised on a road allowance in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, she credits the leaders and guiding figures in her family – particularly its matriarchs – for educating her as a *pchit fee* throughout her adolescence, even while she faced daily harassment from racist teachers at her school.

Raising her own young family in Saskatoon, Nora drew on the resilience, kinship, and pride the *li vyeu* (Elders) in her family had instilled in her, and these values helped her mobilize her urban Métis community at a time when Indigenous women’s voices were seldom heard. She was a leader in her community who ran for city council, and became an advocate on the national scene as demands for Indigenous women’s rights were building momentum in the 1970s.

Drawn from a series of interviews between Cummings, now a respected *li vyeu*, and Métis historian Cheryl Troupe, who contributes a thoughtful foreword and epilogue, this memoir

offers a rare glimpse into the genesis of the local resistances that became a national movement demanding reconciliation. At its heart is *enn pchit fee Michif*, whose determination created a better life for herself and her Métis community.

Early in the book, Nora explains her reasons for writing her memoir. The first reason she mentions is because “it is important for our young people to hear our stories. I want people to know how I was raised and about the people who raised me.” She wanted to share some of the lessons that she learned growing up Michif.

A second reason is because she wants people to know where she comes from and “what it was like for our people living in the city in the early days. It wasn’t easy.”

She also wanted to share some stories of the families she grew up around. “They were hard working people,” she writes. “Even though many didn’t have a formal education, they were smart people with important stories to share.”

One more reason that Nora mentions is that she wanted “others to know about the work that our people did in building the city of Saskatoon and making it better, not just for Métis people but for all Indigenous people in the city.”

Nora’s book is a breath of fresh air, written in an easy to read and easy to understand style. She successfully meets all her reasons for writing and more. Hers is a quiet but important voice, and her story contains valuable life lessons.

As Cheryl Troupe writes in the foreword, it is



Nora Cummings and her daughter Judy Elliott, ca 2019.

like sitting with your grandmother in the kitchen, drinking tea and hearing her stories. “It is both a personal story and a collective history of her family, her community and her lifelong commitment to social and political activism.”

In telling her story, Nora quietly underscores the important role that women played in the history of the Métis Nation in Saskatchewan.

“This deeply compelling work foregrounds the strength, leadership, and enduring impact of Métis women through the life of Nora Cummings,” writes Sarah Nickel, Professor of History, University of Alberta.

“Richly researched and beautifully written, it challenges dominant narratives of Métis political history while offering an accessible and emotionally resonant account of resilience, kinship, and community activism. An important and timely contribution to Indigenous and feminist scholarship.”

Kalaija Ward-Buffalo cont. from p 10

they see how much work and dedication goes into what we do,” she said.

Behind the few minutes a dancer spends in the circle are hours of training, practice, sewing, beading and preparation. “All of that preparation comes together where we are able to express ourselves in just a few minutes on the dance floor.”

For Ward-Buffalo, that pride does not end when the dancing stops. “We dedicate our lives to this way of being, and we are beyond proud of who we are, even outside of the powwow circle,” she said.

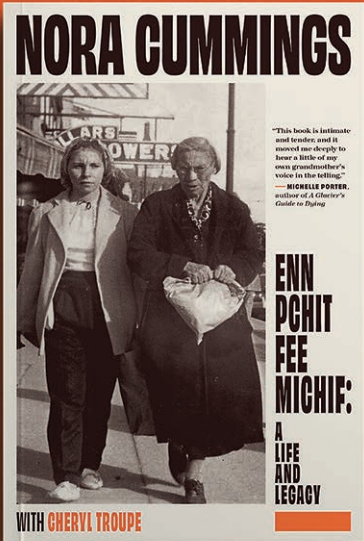
Her greatest hope is that her children and future generations will continue to carry that same pride. “I pray my children and future generations continue to carry that pride with them,” she concluded.



Fitness is very important to Kalaija Ward-Buffalo and her family. Photo credit: Sincerely Tova Studio



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Or email admin@wjlegal.ca



From a little box of beads: How Chloe Buffalo reclaimed independence

By John Wirth, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Chloe Buffalo is the founder of Van Isle Bead Supply, she is an artist, and beadworker from Samson Cree Nation based in British Columbia. Her mission is simple: remove barriers that prevent Indigenous people from accessing their artistic heritage.

“That was my problem when I started beading,” she says, pointing to a box of high-quality dentalium on her table. “I feel like this is such an expensive box for one, right? I wanted to make it easy and accessible to as many people as possible.”

Her journey to building that accessible space meant plunging into the unknown. After graduating high school, she left the reserve alongside her mother to pursue higher education, holding onto hopes for a stable future without fully knowing what lay ahead.

“It was a huge adjustment,” She recalls. “So when I first moved out here, I was with my mom. I had just graduated high school and she wanted me to get out of the Rez – for the both of us.”

Both mother and daughter were accepted into university, though Chloe’s initial path required a pivot. “I applied to Vancouver Island University in the Bachelor of Arts program,” she says. “I did it for a year to realize that it wasn’t for me. But I’m glad that I did that, because I wouldn’t be where I am today without it.”

With grit and determination, Chloe pivoted toward a path that directly supported her entrepreneurial ambitions.

“I’m graduating with my business diploma in accounting,” she says proudly. “I started school when I started the business, so the business grew with me as I learned in school.”

While her business knowledge came from the classroom, her artistic foundation traces back to her late kokum (grandmother), who first taught her to create with her hands.

“My grandma was the one who taught me to bead, but I kind of just left it at that,” Chloe says. “And then she passed away when I was 18, and I lost all that connection to my culture.”

Before that loss, her kokum passed down a rich legacy of handiwork and tradition.

“Even sewing – I made a lot of pillows as a kid

for whatever reason,” she says with a smile. “My late kokum used to make star blankets and moccasins.”

Looking back, Chloe recognizes the depth of the cultural gift her grandmother gave her. A strong foundation that would eventually guide her back to her roots.

“You don’t appreciate it as much when you were a kid, right?” she reflects. “Until you look back and realize you were really lucky.”

Following the loss of her grandmother and the move west, Chloe found herself navigating both a new environment and the life-altering transition into motherhood. Following the birth of her first son, she faced the heavy weight of postpartum depression – a period that ultimately pushed her back toward her craft.

“When I started beading, it started as more of a purpose because at that time, I just had my first son and I was going through postpartum depression.”

She shares. “I was just finding purpose again in adjusting to being a new mother.”

Rebuilding that artistic connection was a long process of gathering the fragments of what her kokum had taught her years earlier.

“It took a long time – I moved from Alberta to BC, and finally I picked it up again from the just the littlest knowledge I could remember and I started growing off of that,” she says.

While sewing star blankets and moccasins was in her blood, practical constraints forced her to adapt. Beading offered an accessible, low-barrier entry point during a period of quiet recovery.

“I picked up beading because I thought it would be easier,” Chloe recalls. “I didn’t have a sewing machine or the room for it. I liked my little beads that fit into a little box, you know? You can bring it wherever you go.”

What began as a portable coping mechanism in a small space soon transformed into a foundation for personal healing.

“I’ve finally found my independence,” she reflects. “Throughout my life, it felt like I was



Chloe Buffalo and Van Isle Bead Supply at a market.

always depending on someone for something. When I realized I might have to rely on others again, it triggered severe anxiety because I had no control over the situation. But once I took control of those areas, my happiness naturally fell into place.”

With a solid business foundation under her feet and a thriving beadwork operation, Chloe is looking toward her next creative evolution. Beading opened the door to financial and personal freedom, but her first artistic love is still calling her back. “Sewing has always been on my heart because that’s what came naturally,” she says. “I’d love to get completely back into it, even though this is what I do. Beading gave me the access to do basically anything I wish. It’s all available to me.”

Chloe Buffalo’s story is powerful because it wasn’t for money, that came after. It was about reclaiming agency and power over her life, honouring her grandparents, and blazing her own path. What started in a small box of beads flourished into a life defined by freedom and purpose.

“It’s my business, and I’m just happy and grateful that I can do all these things. It’s been half vacation and half work. It feels really nice to experience this level of inner empowerment, something I’ve never had before.”

To order supplies, learn from or be part of Chloe’s growing community, visit her on Facebook at Van Isle Bead Supply. She maintains an active group page of more than 6 thousand beadworkers online. She also frequently has market stalls in Indigenous market halls, recently in Maskwacis, Alberta and Duncan, Vancouver Island, BC.

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Saddle Lake invokes Treaty 6 to establish safe haven for gender-affirming care

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Saddle Lake Cree Nation is asserting its Treaty 6 and inherent jurisdiction over health care by establishing a safe haven for gender-affirming care on its reserve lands and territories – a move Dr. James Makokis says could have implications far beyond transgender health.

The Nation announced the initiative Sept. 9, 2026, exactly 150 years after Treaty 6 was agreed to at Fort Pitt.

For Makokis, a family physician and member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation, the timing was significant. “We knew immediately when these laws were announced in February of 2024 that they were a violation of not only our peace and friendship treaty, but our medicine chest,” he said.

Saddle Lake’s announcement comes in response to Alberta legislation restricting gender-affirming medical care for transgender and gender-diverse youth.

The Nation says any Albertan will be able to access gender-affirming care on Saddle Lake Cree Nation reserve lands and territories, while existing health services for Saddle Lake citizens will remain protected.

Makokis said the decision is rooted in the Nation’s responsibility to protect its people and in its interpretation of the Treaty 6 medicine chest promise.

The Medicine Chest as a living treaty commitment

Makokis said Treaty 6 needs to be understood through the worldview and oral traditions of the Cree people who entered into the agreement in 1876. At the time, Cree leaders did not speak English. They spoke nēhiyawēwin, and Makokis said the oral understanding of the treaty must be considered alongside the written version preserved by Crown representatives.

He argues that the medicine chest promise was never intended to freeze access to health care in the year 1876. Makokis described the medicine chest kept by the Indian agent as a symbol of Western medicine available to First Nations people at the time.

“That symbol would evolve into the future because it represents Western medical healthcare and Western medicine,” he said.

In Makokis’s interpretation, the treaty commitment therefore extends to modern medical services, including pharmaceutical drugs, procedures, health professionals, medical supplies and equipment. He said that understanding includes gender-affirming care.

“That also includes gender-affirming care, which includes, puberty-suspending medication. It includes hormone replacement therapy. It includes services and access to clinicians and packers and binders and all of those things that gender-diverse people need,” he said.

Makokis also pointed to the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits program, which he said demonstrates that some medications associated with gender-affirming care are already covered through federal health benefits.

His position is that a provincial government cannot restrict a federal treaty-related health benefit. That is a legal interpretation that could ultimately be tested through negotiations or the courts.

For Makokis, Treaty 6 is not simply a historical document. “It’s really important for our people to realize and recognize our treaty rights and how they’re powerful tools and shields for us to

utilize that our ancestors envisioned over 150 years ago,” he said.

Protecting Two-Spirit people and transgender youth

The announcement is also grounded in Saddle Lake’s understanding that Two-Spirit people have always been part of Cree society.

Makokis said Two-Spirit people occupied an established and respected place within Cree communities before colonization and that their presence is not a new phenomenon.

He described Alberta’s restrictions as an attack on a segment of the population and said Saddle Lake leadership viewed it as their responsibility to protect their citizens.

The Nation has also extended that protection to non-Indigenous Albertans seeking care.

Makokis said Saddle Lake is developing ceremonies for Two-Spirit and transgender youth that recognize the transition from youth into adulthood and form part of the community’s broader Cree health and wellness system.

A potential breakthrough in healthcare licensing

While gender-affirming care is at the centre of Saddle Lake’s announcement, Makokis says another part of the initiative could have much broader consequences for health care across Canada.

The Nation is developing what he describes as a model allowing Canadian-trained health professionals to practise within Saddle Lake’s jurisdiction without having to obtain multiple provincial licences.

Makokis said the approach could eliminate one of the major barriers facing First Nations communities trying to recruit doctors, nurses, pharmacists and specialists.

“If there is a physician or a nurse or a pharmacist from Ontario who are just as equally competent to practice within their scope of practice as they are in Alberta, that we are eliminating the barriers, the jurisdictional barriers, for them to have a license within Alberta,” he said.

Makokis said provincial regulatory colleges have the ability to establish agreements and memorandums of understanding that can facilitate professional mobility between jurisdictions.

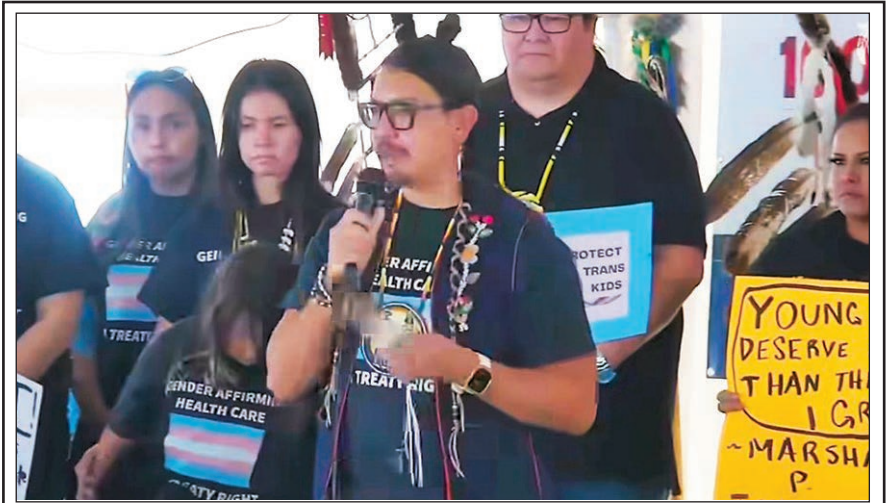
In his view, Saddle Lake’s model could therefore establish a precedent for what he describes as pan-Canadian licensure of health professionals.

“That’s exactly what Saddle Lake Cree Nation has done,” he said.

Makokis compared the concept to federal health systems, where health professionals can work across provincial boundaries under a federal system.

He said the model could be particularly important for remote First Nations communities that struggle to attract physicians and other health professionals.

“Any reserve land and chief and council who choose to pursue and adopt this model can immediately have the ability to attract specialist physicians, primary care physicians, health



Dr James Makokis at the historic Saddle Lake Cree Nation announcement. Screenshot.

professionals that they have trouble recruiting physically to their areas,” he said.

Makokis said Saddle Lake has already received inquiries from physicians and nurses interested in learning how they could work within the model.

If adopted by other First Nations, the approach could potentially expand access to health professionals well beyond gender-affirming care.

A virtual-care hub

Saddle Lake is also looking at ways to ensure its existing health system is not overwhelmed by people travelling from outside the community.

Makokis said the Nation plans to establish a virtual-care hub on reserve lands so non-Indigenous Albertans can access services remotely.

Virtual care, he said, would allow Saddle Lake to extend access without placing the same pressure on its physical health infrastructure.

He pointed to existing virtual gender-affirming care providers as examples of how the model can work.

Preparing for a legal challenge

Saddle Lake is also preparing for the possibility of a legal challenge.

“Obviously, you know, we’re anticipating a legal challenge potentially with the Alberta government,” Makokis said.

A GoFundMe campaign organized by Makokis, titled Saddle Lake Cree Nation Treaty Health Legal Defense Fund, has been launched to support the legal and implementation work surrounding the Nation’s assertion of Treaty health rights.

The fundraiser says donations will support legal counsel and potential litigation, development and implementation of Saddle Lake’s Health Law, Treaty legal research, responses to potential government challenges, regulatory and professional legal advice for health professionals, expert evidence, and possible court applications, interventions and appeals.

Makokis said the legal costs should not fall on Saddle Lake citizens simply because the Nation is defending what it considers to be treaty rights.

He said the fundraiser has already received support from non-Indigenous people around the world.

A history of resistance

Makokis placed Saddle Lake’s actions within a much longer history of resistance to injustice.

He pointed to examples including Rosa Parks and the civil rights movement, the Underground Railroad, the Stonewall uprising and the takeover of Blue Quills Residential School by Indigenous people in the 1970s.

For Makokis, resistance has historically been necessary when governments or institutions restrict the rights and freedoms of marginalized communities.

He said Saddle Lake’s current position is about

Continued on page 20

Friendship Centre cont. from p 3

support. As needs continue to grow, Friendship Centres have become involved in areas such as food security, education, health prevention, and emergency response.

One of the fastest-growing areas of service has been food security. MacInnis explained that while food programs were not originally a primary focus for many Friendship Centres, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased demand.

“Our Friendship Centres are heavily involved in food security,” she said. “That is not a space that they thought that they would ever walk in, but since COVID, it has increased exponentially.”

According to MacInnis, Friendship Centres across Alberta provide approximately 300,000 points of food security supports annually through programs such as meal services, food hampers, restaurant gift cards, and community food banks. This work demonstrates how Friendship Centres continue adapting to community needs while supporting overall wellness.

A major priority for ANFCA has been ensuring Friendship Centres remain safe spaces for everyone. Across Alberta, Friendship Centres signed a safe space declaration designed to strengthen inclusion and support for community members, including 2SLGBTQ+ relatives and survivors of gender-based violence. “That ensured that all of our 2SLGBTQ relatives were walking into a safe space and knew they were going to be supported,” MacInnis said.

She believes safety and belonging must be at the centre of all community services. “It doesn’t matter where you’re from, you should be in a safe space when you walk into a Friendship Centre,” she said.

MacInnis also wants Friendship Centres recognized for their role during emergencies and disasters. “I really want them to be acknowledged as frontline responders in the emergency and

disaster area,” she said. During wildfires, floods, and evacuations, Friendship Centres often become places where people access food, mental health supports, cultural connection, and community assistance. “When they evacuate, that’s where they go. They go to a Friendship Centre in a community, especially our First Nations and Métis settlement people,” MacInnis explained.

She believes this work must be recognized within emergency management systems. “They need to be acknowledged for that,” she said.

MacInnis is also advocating for greater recognition of the role Friendship Centres play within healthcare. “I’m a big advocate for social prescribing,” she said.

Social prescribing connects people with community supports that address social, emotional, and cultural needs alongside medical care. MacInnis believes Friendship Centres have been practicing this approach for generations.

“Social prescribing is the new terminology, but really based on the Indigenous value and tradition of providing all the supports that an individual needs on their wellness journey,” she explained.

From Elder programs and addiction recovery supports to nutrition programs and health education, Friendship Centres provide services that support the whole person. “There’s things that Friendship Centres do on that healthcare journey that they’re not acknowledged for,” she said.

Looking ahead, MacInnis believes the future of Friendship Centres depends on continued investment in youth, Elders, and community leadership.

ANFCA supports youth engagement through initiatives such as the Provincial Emerging Adults Committee and the Rise Up leadership program. “There’s lots of great things that are happening with Rise Up to support youth to be the best that they can be, from leadership skills to



Jeannette MacInnis is Interim CEO of the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association.

volunteering, and to feeling supported and that their interests are acknowledged,” MacInnis said.

She also highlighted the importance of Elders’ guidance through ANFCA’s Elders Wisdom Circle. “They are our knowledge holders and knowledge keepers that keep us on track,” she said.

For MacInnis, the future goal is clear: Friendship Centres must be recognized for the essential role they already play. “I want our centres, Friendship Centres, to be acknowledged as the frontline serving agencies that they are in all aspects of health and well-being,” she said.

After more than seven decades of service, MacInnis believes the story of Friendship Centres deserves to be better known.

“I should walk into a room and say Friendship Centres, and people go, ‘Oh yeah, we know about them.’ And we’re not there yet.”

Weather doesn't dampen the Edmonton Folk Fest spirit



Rain or Shine, the Edmonton Folk Music Festival is one of the best summer festivals that Edmonton offers. The relaxed atmosphere, the exceptional performers, the spectacular hill and the Indigenous component of the festival are always highlights. Pictured above are Aysanabee and Blue Moon.

The journey ahead

We're on a journey to reconciliation. We strive for an inclusive future with Indigenous interests and knowledge integrated into our business to create sustainable outcomes for generations to come. We're listening, learning, collaborating and adapting to create change. Because when we step up and meet the challenges of today, tomorrow is on.

New title pushes for Truth, so that Reconciliation can take place

By ANNews staff

A new title published by University of Manitoba Press – *Truth before Reconciliation: Confronting Residential School Denialism* – bravely examines the rising epidemic of Residential School denialism. As expressed by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: “Without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation.” This is unfortunately the state of our nation.

The TRC’s Final Report, released in 2015, is the outcome of many years of research and rigorous scholarship by hundreds of academics across Canada. More than 5 million documents from governments, churches, and schools, hundreds of secondary sources, and the testimonies of over 6,000 residential school Survivors informed the Commission’s work.

Despite six volumes evincing the genocide, some Canadians choose to deny, downplay, and disparage these findings in a battle for public memory waged in popular media and across social media platforms. Denialists do not refute the existence of the schools or that abuse happened. Rather, they cherry-pick and distort facts to minimize the harms done to Indigenous communities as they seek to turn reconciliation into a partisan issue and preserve national myths of benevolence.

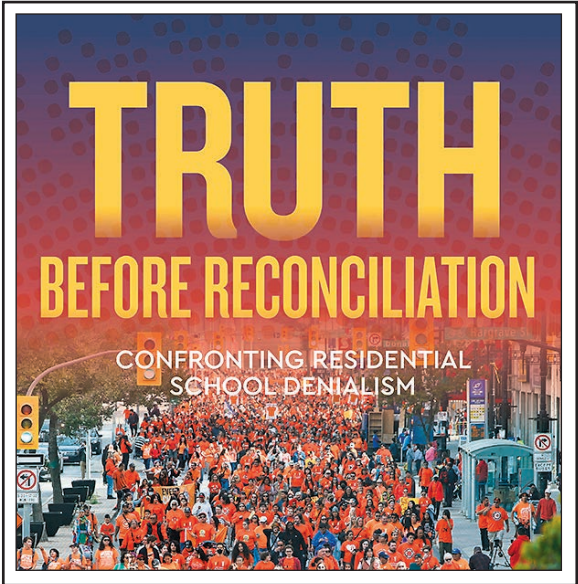
Countering soundbites with substance, Sean

Carleton and Niigaan Sinclair, along with a team of expert historians, educators, Survivors, archivists, and archeologists, analyze the genesis, methods, and consequences of denialism; push back on denialist claims; and highlight some of the primary sources and peer-reviewed scholarship that denialists ignore or misrepresent. Importantly, they also document the harms denialists have inflicted on Survivors and communities.

Embedded in the lived experiences of Survivors and supported by the evidentiary record, *Truth Before Reconciliation* is a valuable tool to help develop the historical and information literacy needed to identify and combat denialism and anti-Indigenous racism as we collectively build a more honourable future for all.

“This incredibly urgent collection defines and analyzes Indian residential school denialism, explains why it is on the rise, maps its techniques and networks, and offers practical, legal, archival, pedagogical, and public history responses,” states Indigenous Rights activist and University professor Pam Palmeter. “*Truth Before Reconciliation* rises to the monumental task of helping Canadians differentiate between rage bait and fact.”

Sean Carleton and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair take a comprehensive look at the problem and seek solutions and strategies to developing



true reconciliation. Carleton is a settler historian and associate professor in the departments of History and Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba. His award-winning research examines the history and political economy of schooling and settler capitalism in Canada.

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair is Anishinaabe (St. Peter’s/Little Peguis) and a professor at the University of Manitoba where he holds the Faculty of Arts Professorship in Indigenous Knowledge and Aesthetics in the Department of Indigenous Studies. Niigaan is also an award-winning writer, editor, and activist who was named to the “Power List” in 2022 by *Maclean’s* magazine as one of the most influential individuals in Canada.

Saddle Lake cont. from p 18

more than one group or one medical issue.

“When these instances of dehumanization and the removal of individual freedoms affects one group, then it will always extend and affect a larger group,” he said.

He also emphasized that communities have the ability to act rather than simply wait for governments to respond.

“It’s really important for people to remember that they have agency, that they have the ability to do something,” Makokis said.

The immediate focus of Saddle Lake’s initiative is gender-affirming care and the protection of Two-Spirit and transgender people.

But Makokis believes the larger story could ultimately be about Treaty jurisdiction, Indigenous health governance and the movement of health professionals across provincial boundaries.

He hopes other First Nations will consider the model and work collectively to expand access to health care throughout their territories.

For Saddle Lake, the announcement represents an assertion of treaty rights. For the broader

Canadian health system, it could become an experiment in whether First Nations jurisdiction can help overcome some of the regulatory barriers that have long made it difficult to deliver health care in underserved communities.

And for Makokis, it is a continuation of the responsibility he believes was embedded in Treaty 6 150 years ago.

For information on the Saddle Lake Cree Nation Treaty Health Legal Defense Fund visit gofundme.com/f/saddle-lake-cree-nation-treaty-health-legal-defense-fund?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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—The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

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University of Manitoba Press

William Singer III receives the Lieutenant Governor’s Award for preserving Blackfoot knowledge

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For more than four decades, William Singer III has used art, education, land-based learning and cultural teachings to help preserve and strengthen Blackfoot knowledge. Now, that lifelong commitment is being recognized with one of Alberta’s significant cultural honours.

Singer, also known by his Blackfoot name Api’soomaahka (Running Coyote), has been named the 2026 recipient of the Alberta Museums Association’s Lieutenant Governor’s Award. The award recognizes his “profound commitment to artistic excellence and the preservation and vitality of Blackfoot culture.”

The award will be presented Sept. 23 at the Alberta Museums Association’s 55th Anniversary Gala and Leadership Awards Ceremony at the Wyndham Edmonton Hotel and Conference Centre.

For Singer, the recognition came as a surprise. But the award also reflects what has become one of the central purposes of his life: ensuring knowledge is passed forward.

“My goal is to teach not only my people but the broader community about Blackfoot history and culture,” Singer said. “Indigenous knowledge and culture is part of the fabric of Alberta and Canada. It is important to pass knowledge on and for others to understand Blackfoot culture and history.”

Singer is a member of the Kainai Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy and is a fluent speaker of his language. The Alberta Museums Association describes him as an accomplished artist and illustrator with more than 40 years of experience. His work has been deeply influenced by the Blackfoot worldview and by his experience as a residential school survivor.

“With that, it just made it much more stronger to work at preserving our culture, regardless of the fact that we had to all endure a residential school and how a lot of that erased our culture, sort of to the point where it was going on the verge of extinction.”

For Singer, cultural preservation is not limited to artwork hanging on a wall. It begins with the land. He credits the late Blackfoot artist and educator Everett Soot as an important mentor in his development.

“I was a chauffeur for about three years,” Singer recalled. During that time, Soot introduced him to a way of understanding the land that would influence his work for decades. “One day we were driving, and he told me that our original diet consisted of roots, berries, barks, and shrubs.”

The conversation changed the way Singer looked at the landscape around him. “That’s what

really got me interested in learning about the land and how it really sustains us,” he said.

He began looking more deeply at the relationship between plants, health, food sovereignty and cultural knowledge. “My father and my family, all have various degrees of plant knowledge. I was an assistant to my father. He was a pipe carrier. And so when we smoked a pipe, after we were done, he would start talking to me and sharing some teachings, and it just started to build from that.”

The knowledge, he said, is inseparable from the land. “Plants are really important to our health and our well-being. And the more that we forget and neglect this knowledge, the more we fall away from our culture and our history. Because plants and the land are basically the root of all of our culture.”

Singer is now taking that knowledge into classrooms, workshops and land-based education. “If you do not know the plants and their history, you cannot do anything else in terms of actually living a life, or even being a part of society and ceremony,” he said.

Singer began growing sweetgrass and other culturally important plants, eventually establishing what is now known as Nappy’s Garden and a seed bank. “It was created to grow and restore the plants that are very important to us, especially sweetgrass, because it’s widely used in our ceremonies and as medicine.”

But the work quickly expanded beyond a single plant. Singer said that when sweetgrass disappears from an area, other plants that grow alongside it can disappear as well. “The work that is being done has increased now beyond sweetgrass,” he said, pointing to plants including wild bergamot, wild peppermint, yarrow and wild turnip. “These are important plants that are a big part of our history and our culture. And most of them actually are connections to the cosmos.”

For Singer, plants are not simply biological resources. They are part of a much larger cultural and spiritual relationship. “When we use our plants in terms of ceremony or medicine, especially sweetgrass,” he explained, “the smoke goes up into the air, and it goes up into the sky



William Singer III has been named the 2026 recipient of the Alberta Museums Association’s Lieutenant Governor’s Award. Photo by Lethbridge Polytech.

beings, or what we call the spirit beings or star beings.”

He connects those teachings to the stories and knowledge carried through generations.

Singer’s work has also included advocacy and activism, including his involvement with Idle No More. He said those experiences taught him that protecting Indigenous lands and waters requires action beyond raising awareness.

“For me, it taught me to take action,” he said. “As a collective, you know, a lot can be done, but as an individual, for myself, what I stood up for at that period of time was for the protection of our land and our waters.”

That includes the plants that depend on those lands and waters. “But it takes a lot more than just standing there with a sign. You have to take action, [with] the initiative to do it.”

For Singer, one of the most important forms of action is education. He teaches preschool children, incorporating plant knowledge, seed collection and propagation into their learning. “The best way to move ahead is to teach our younger generations, because that’s how it always has been,” he said.

“Right now they’re learning how to be horticulturists, how to collect, how to clean seeds, how to propagate them, and then the end result is that they use and consume those plants.”

Singer sees the children as the future caretakers of that knowledge. “The younger generation pick up on this knowledge and they retain it. And so they’re the future generation who are going to be growing these plants, and at some point they’ll be consuming these plants.”

That work also connects to Singer’s teachings around food sovereignty and health. He

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The RCMP cont. from p 13

the movement of First Nations people despite having no basis in Canadian law. The system was used extensively across the Prairies, including Treaty 6 territory.

Those realities matter when discussing reconciliation.

The RCMP has publicly acknowledged its historical role. Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli apologized in 2004 for the Force's role in the residential school system, followed by Commissioner Bob Paulson's apology in 2014. Commissioner Brenda Lucki apologized in 2018 to families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The institution now says that acknowledging those mistakes is necessary to building something different. "The relationship has evolved in the sense that there has been a better understanding of the meaning behind Treaty 6 and Indigenous communities," Joanis said, emphasizing that each community has its own history and culture.

That understanding has led Saskatchewan RCMP to establish Indigenous Policing Services, whose stated purpose is to help employees provide professional, proactive and culturally appropriate policing services to Indigenous people and communities. At the community level, Joanis said, officers are encouraged to consult directly with leadership to understand local policing needs rather than assuming that the same approach will work everywhere.

The Saskatchewan RCMP has also established an Indigenous Recruiting Unit intended to increase Indigenous representation within the Force. But perhaps one of the most significant changes is what happens when a new officer arrives at a First Nation.

Joanis said communities are asked to identify an Elder or Knowledge Keeper who can provide a new officer with a brief community familiarization. That process, he explained, allows the community to welcome the officer while teaching them about its history, culture,

uniqueness and challenges. It also changes who gets to define the community.

Rather than having a senior officer simply drive a new member around and introduce them to people they know, Joanis said the approach gives the community an opportunity to educate the officer directly. The distinction is important.

A police officer arriving with preconceived ideas about a community can unintentionally reinforce existing stereotypes. An officer arriving with an understanding shaped by community members has an opportunity to begin a relationship differently. "Nothing about us, without us," Joanis said.

That principle also reflects one of the RCMP's stated challenges in rebuilding trust. "Recognizing and acknowledging the strained history the RCMP has had with our Indigenous communities is a start," Joanis said. "Building trust begins with honesty, transparency, and accountability."

He compared the work of maintaining trust to polishing the original Treaty 6 medallions. "Much like the original Treaty 6 medallions made of silver, the relationship must be polished continually to keep its shine," he said. It is an appropriate metaphor for a relationship that cannot be repaired by a single ceremony, apology or program.

The RCMP says its reconciliation work is now intended to be a shared journey rather than simply a collection of initiatives. Its stated aspirations include increasing Indigenous recruitment, improving internal education about Indigenous cultures, languages, ceremonies and histories, and providing culturally responsive policing services.

The organization has also worked with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner on a Treaty Learning Journey for RCMP officers and public servants. The course addresses treaty history, culture, spirit and intent, the Indian Act, residential schools, truth and reconciliation and contemporary Indigenous issues.

For Joanis, education is one of the essential starting points. "The first step is to start understanding the truths of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples," he said. "Another crucial step is recognizing and learning about our own history with Indigenous communities."

That distinction is important. Reconciliation is not simply learning about Indigenous people. It also requires institutions to understand themselves – their history, their authority and the ways their actions contributed to colonial systems.

The RCMP now says it is committed to acting on the Truth and



Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice. Its stated goals include renewing trust, strengthening communication, improving community safety and well-being, enhancing investigative standards, developing culturally literate and trauma-informed employees and supporting Indigenous employees.

But the RCMP also acknowledges that relationships will inevitably include disagreement. "As with any relationship, communication is the key – honest, open communication," Joanis said.

The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to address it professionally through collaboration and mutual respect, he said. That may ultimately be the most meaningful measure of the RCMP's evolution.

The organization that once arrived on the Prairies as an instrument of expanding Canadian authority now operates in communities whose treaty relationships with the Crown predate the modern police service itself. The question is therefore not whether the past can be changed. It cannot.

The question is whether an institution can understand that past honestly enough to change how it conducts itself in the present. The Treaty 6 150th anniversary provides an opportunity to ask that question publicly.

At Fort Carlton, the RCMP's participation in the carrying of the treaty bundle, the pipe ceremony, treaty commemorations and closing ceremonies represents one visible expression of a changing relationship. But ceremonies are only the beginning.

The deeper test will happen afterward – in detachments, in conversations with Elders and leadership, in investigations, in responses to families, in recruitment, in community safety and in the everyday interactions between officers and the people they serve.

Treaty 6 was not simply an event that happened 150 years ago. It is a living relationship. And if the RCMP is serious about being part of that relationship today, its own history means it carries a particular responsibility: to remember what came before, listen to the people who have lived with its consequences, and continually earn the trust it asks communities to place in it.

As Joanis put it, reconciliation is a shared journey. The work, like the treaty relationship itself, continues.



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About our cover artist Linus Woods

By ANNews staff

The beautiful image on the cover of the September 2026 *Alberta Native News* is titled ‘Bison: Every Child Matters’ by acclaimed First Nations artist Linus Woods.

The image was selected this month because of the many beautiful orange hues contained in the photo in honour of Orange Shirt Day also known as National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, which takes place on September 30. The bison (buffalo) is also a symbol of survival, resilience and deep gratitude. These elements are of critical importance in the journey toward truth telling and authentic reconciliation.

Woods, who lives on the Long Plain First Nation reserve in southern Manitoba, is an artist’s artist. He loves creating art and is most himself with a brush in hand.

Woods is no stranger to Amiskwaciy Waskahikan. He has served several terms as a popular artist-in-residence at Highland Junior High School in northeast Edmonton and his art is much sought after in Alberta’s capital city.

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

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

Woods describes much of his art as whimsical, including paintings of rabbits in different scena-

rios, inspired by his natural surroundings on reserve.

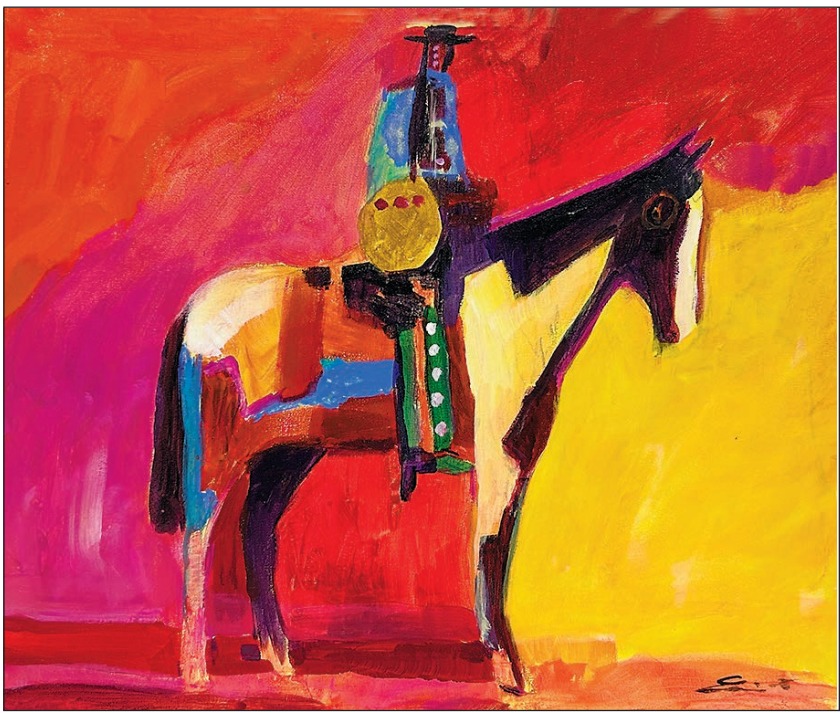
“It’s half realism and half cartoon,” he explained. “Because I paint these little, hidden characters. We used to call them spirits. I had no way to explain them to some viewers. I called them ‘little grand-fathers’ hidden all over the place. In some of these paintings, you really have to look to find a little cherry tree in there.”

Linus’s good nature and sense of humour shine through in conversation and sometimes in the titles of his art. He also has a spiritual side which comes through in his art.

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

Some of his paintings reflect his deep concerns about the impact of industry on the environment and the dwindling habitat for northern wildlife. He also loves painting aliens and spaceships.

Woods also communicates a broad spectrum of emotions in his art. In some paintings, he tells a story of movement where you can feel the speed of a galloping horse or the crashing waves of a



Hay Day Red Cloud by Linus Woods is available for purchase at wakinagallery.com.

river. In others, he conveys the still of a meadow or a cloudy sky with such detail that you immediately feel at ease.

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

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

Linus Woods’ paintings can be viewed and are available for purchase at www.wakinagallery.com.

William Singer III

cont. from p 21

challenges the idea that foods commonly associated with contemporary Indigenous gatherings necessarily represent traditional Indigenous diets.

“It’s an important part to begin to become healthy,” he said. “The plants that grew and are still growing on the land have sustained our people for thousands and thousands of years, and they were healthy people.”

For Singer, returning to the land is part of restoring a relationship with food, health and culture. “The only way that we’re going to get to that point to be healthy is to go back to the land and eat these plants and use them and put them into our bodies to become healthy.”

Singer does not see traditional knowledge and Western knowledge as mutually exclusive. Instead, he believes there is an opportunity to bring the two knowledge systems together. “Traditional knowledge is as important as the Western knowledge, and there is also a way where we can combine or we can weave together this knowledge,” he said.

He describes the land as the classroom. “Our knowledge system is the land, and that’s where it all comes from. And that’s our classroom. Our classroom is outside, as opposed to being inside four walls.”

That approach is also reflected in his work with educational institutions. Lethbridge Polytechnic has highlighted Singer’s contributions to its

campus, including the *Buffalo Winter Count Robe*, unveiled in 2023, and the *Iissksiniip (Coming to Know and Learn) Coulee Walk*, created in partnership with Singer in 2021. The walk explores traditional plants, their uses and Siksikaitsitapi creation stories.

Singer said Western technology can also be used alongside traditional knowledge to help restore plants that are difficult to propagate. “By combining it, creating these partnerships, we have a future where we can work together and have a better understanding of our knowledge systems.”

That future is ultimately what Singer says he is working toward. He wants people to understand that the plants growing across the prairie are not simply weeds to be removed. “They’re not plants to get rid of,” he said.

He sees the knowledge contained within those plants, the land and the stories as an enormous body of science and understanding. “It’s just basically giving that understanding of our knowledge system, how vast it is, how open it is, because not only does it encompass the land, but it encompasses the

cosmos.”

As William Singer III prepares to receive the 2026 Lieutenant Governor’s Award, the honour recognizes more than an accomplished artist. It recognizes a lifetime spent carrying knowledge forward.

For Singer, that responsibility remains ongoing. “It’ll take time, but we are getting there right now,” he said.

And for him, getting there means ensuring the next generation knows where that knowledge comes from: the land, the plants, the stories and the people who have carried them forward.

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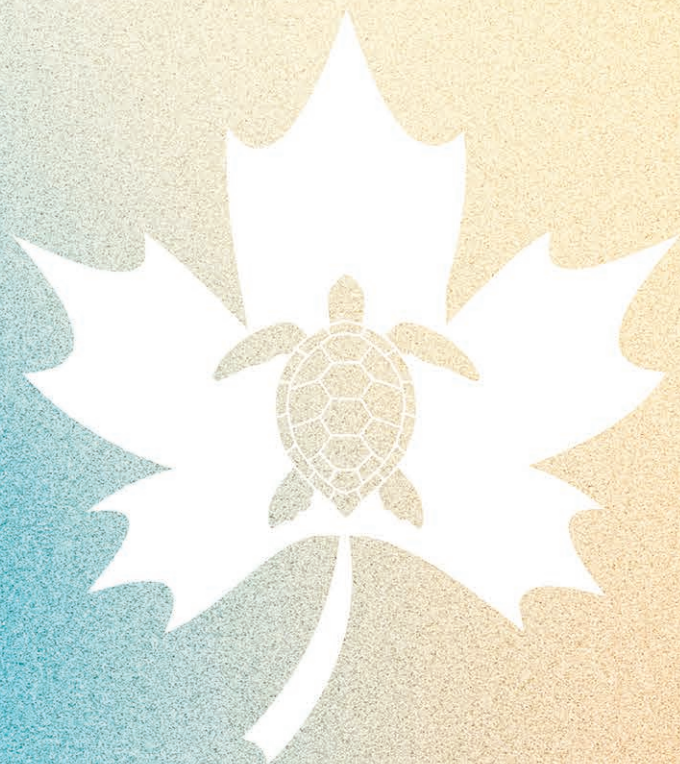
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