

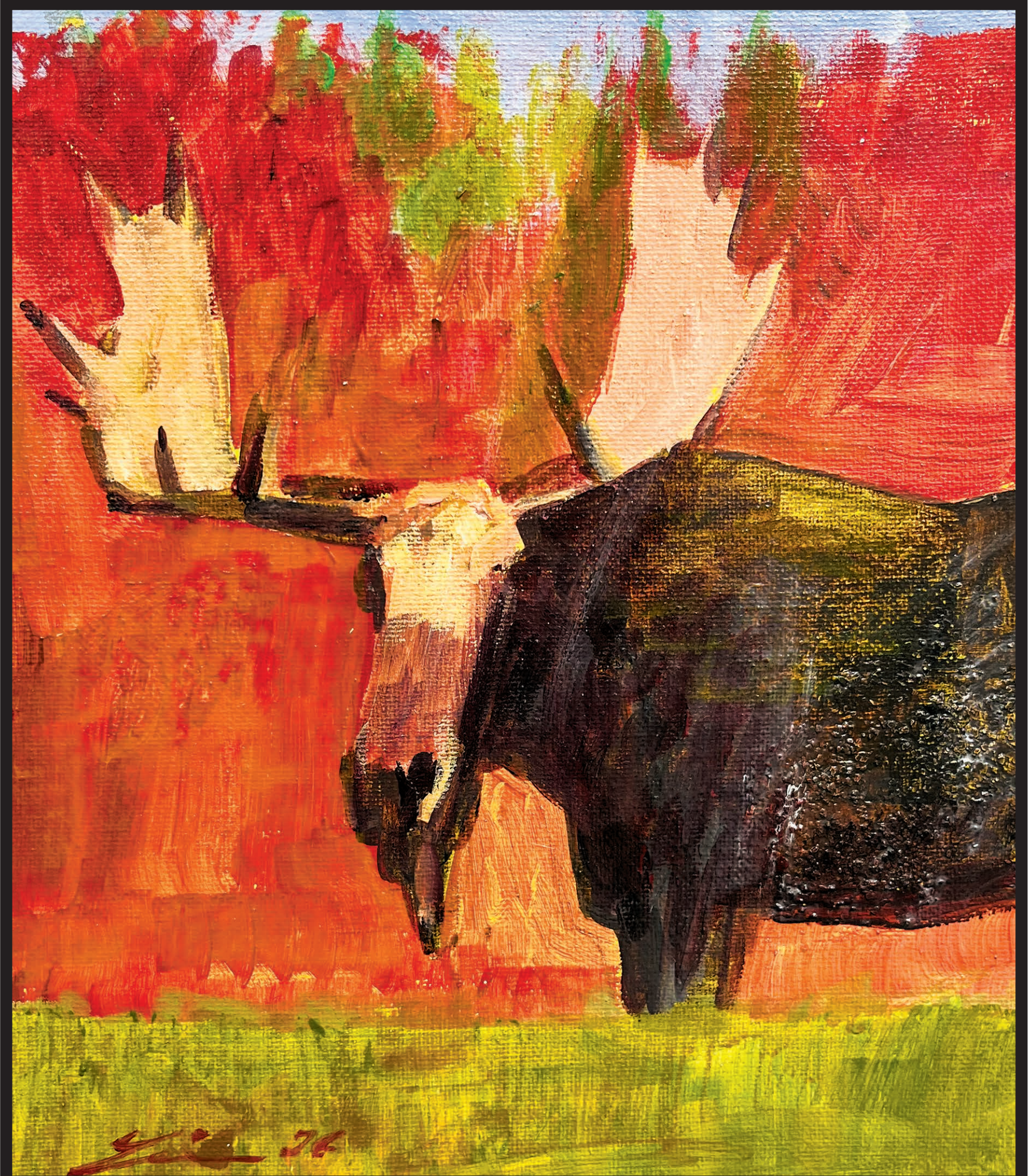
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BRANDED CONTENT

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.



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

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The line that connects us all

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Calgary's Sisters in Spirit vigil calls for justice

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For 22 years, Chantal Chagnon has helped organize Calgary's Sisters in Spirit March and Vigil, held in recognition of Sisters in Spirit Day on October 4. The annual gathering honours the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people and supports the families seeking justice.

A Cree-Métis woman from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Chagnon has witnessed the movement grow from a relatively quiet initiative into an annual reminder that the violence and exploitation affecting Indigenous families remain ongoing concerns. "It's become a huge reminder every single year that this is a problem, this isn't going away. We're not going away," Chagnon said.

Sisters in Spirit began as an initiative of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). In its early years, attendance was limited, and the issue received little public attention. Chagnon said the work of advocates and families has helped bring greater visibility to the lives affected by violence and the ongoing search for justice.

Over the years, the vigil has honoured women, girls and Two-Spirit people, while also recognizing men who have been taken and loved ones who have experienced exploitation. Chagnon said the annual gatherings have become an opportunity to advocate for families across Canada who continue to seek answers and accountability.

For Chagnon, one of the central concerns is whether the justice system treats Indigenous women's lives with the seriousness they deserve. Even when cases reach court, she said, proceedings can be dismissed or the consequences for perpetrators can seem inadequate.

"I think a lot of the time we say we're striving for justice, but sometimes even though the perpetrators have been brought forward in a court of law, those cases get thrown out or dismissed, or the consequences for those actions are just like a slap on the wrist. And we've seen this time and time again, where it seems like Indigenous women's lives aren't as valuable as our settler counterparts," Chagnon said.

She said advocacy must also challenge the systemic issues affecting Indigenous people across institutions, including social services and health care. Chagnon connected the ongoing struggle for justice to the lasting effects of colonization, which she said took power away from Indigenous women.

"Colonization was the one thing that really started to take the power away from our women. And now it's the time that we need to step forward and start taking those voices back, start really honouring and calling people to task," she said.

Chagnon also wants people to look beyond statistics and recognize the individuals and families behind each missing or murdered person. News reports can reduce lives to numbers, she said, while vigils create space to remember that every person had a story, relationships and loved ones left to cope with grief.

"A lot of the time we hear these stories in the news and on the media, but it makes it sound like these women are statistics. It makes it sound like these girls and two-spirit people are just statistics. So when we do events like this, it reminds us that there's a story. There's a life. There's a family. There is, you know, pain and anguish and hope for justice for these women behind those numbers," Chagnon said.

The first few gatherings drew approximately 60 people, she recalled. As the event gained momentum, more people began attending, learning about the cases and finding ways to support Indigenous women and families. Chagnon said the growth has reflected a greater willingness

among community members and allies to stand alongside families and advocate for change.

For those who have lost loved ones, gathering with others who understand their grief can also offer a sense of belonging. Chagnon said the vigils remind families that they are not alone and that their loved ones have not been forgotten.

"This is why I think it's so imperative to keep walking and keep creating these vigils across the year to remind nations and to remind people that they're cared for and they're loved. Their stories matter. They're women and they're girls and they're two-spirit people. Their family members matter," she said.

Chagnon believes the responsibility to create change extends beyond an annual march or vigil. She encourages Canadians to read the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, alongside the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and consider how they can put those recommendations into practice in their communities, schools, homes and workplaces.

The two sets of recommendations overlap in important ways, she said, giving individuals, institutions and governments concrete steps they can take to address systemic problems. Chagnon believes consistent, everyday action can contribute to broader change.

"These are manageable items, and I think when



Calgary Sisters in Spirit vigil. Photo by Albert Woo.

we do one little thing every day, we can make a massive difference," she said.

Ultimately, Chagnon wants Indigenous women and girls to know that they are valued, loved and deserving of justice. She said families should not have to live with unanswered questions after a loved one goes missing or is murdered.

"There's so many women that have gone missing or been murdered, and their families are left to pick up the pieces, but without any answers and without any justice. And I never want that to happen to another family," Chagnon said.

Her message also extends beyond Indigenous communities. Chagnon said women must stand together across backgrounds to challenge the rhetoric and attitudes that devalue them, protect future generations and ensure that their voices are heard.

For Chagnon, the purpose of Sisters in Spirit is ultimately about connection, remembrance and collective responsibility: ensuring that families are supported, that the lives behind the statistics are honoured, and that the call for justice continues long after October 4.

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Reconciliation begins with understanding our Treaty relationships

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

"You can't respect something if you don't know what it is," said Indigenous Anglican priest Travis Enright, reflecting on the role of education in reconciliation. A member of James Smith Cree Nation in Saskatchewan and rector of St. Faith's Anglican Church in Edmonton, Enright said reconciliation means more than remembering the history of residential schools. It also means helping newcomers understand their relationship to the land, teaching young people about Treaty and ensuring Indigenous communities could tell their own stories.

An Orange Shirt Day and Truth and Reconciliation gathering took place Saturday, September 26, at the Borden Park Band Shell in Edmonton. The event brought together ceremony, cultural performances, storytelling and a community barbecue, creating space for people to learn about Indigenous experiences while celebrating cultural resilience and survival.

"I think it's a story of empowerment," Enright said. "It's a story of understanding that new Canadians keep on coming in, and we can control the narrative of our story around the residential school experience for Indigenous populations."

For Enright, reclaiming that narrative does not mean minimizing the atrocities committed in residential schools. Instead, it means ensuring Indigenous people are not defined solely by trauma but also recognized for their strength,

persistence and continued presence. "The story is that horrific things happened in these residential schools," he said. "But the story that can come out of this is that our people are resilient. We're still here, and we will continue to animate our story to our generations to come."

Enright also wants newcomers and people who have lived in Canada for years to understand the history through the experiences of children. He said sharing stories could help people see the human impact of residential schools while recognizing Indigenous communities' ability to shape how their histories were remembered. "That this genocide happened to children," he said, emphasizing the importance of helping people connect with that history.

The gathering began with a Pipe Ceremony led by an Elder, followed by storytelling and cultural performances featuring traditions from different Indigenous nations. The program included drumming, dancing and stories of survival, resistance and persistence. Performers from the Amazon and other Indigenous nations participated, reflecting the diversity of Indigenous cultures and experiences.

"If we are a four-direction people, and we know that this land is meant to be hospitable to all peoples, then we have to hear the stories of different nations," Enright said.

A community barbecue, featuring 300 hamburgers available on a first-come, first-served basis, rounded out the gathering. Enright said the event was intended to educate while giving people an opportunity to come together through culture, storytelling and community.

"If you're uplifted and you're motivated, then you care more," he said. "And so if this event is about caring and expressing a story, then that's kind of the mechanism that we want to do that in."

For Enright, the long-term goals extend beyond a single day of cultural performances. He wants newcomers to understand that arriving in Canada means becoming part of an existing Treaty relationship, bringing responsibilities to learn about its history, the land and Indigenous peoples.

Enright said newcomers become "treaty people" when they arrive on the land. Understanding that relationship requires education about the treaties and the responsibilities that came with them. "There is an educational

Carving for sale



"Two Polar Bears on Ice"

original soapstone carving by Anthony Antoine. It measures 8" in length, 5" in width and 3" in height. Weighs 4 lbs. Available on exhibit and for purchase at wakinagallery.com

component to that," he said. "There is a historical relationship part of that. There is understanding what it means to be in relationship with the land specifically."

That relationship, he said, should not be understood simply in terms of what people received from the land. "You're not just coming here to take from the land, but you're here to contribute to the fullness of what it means to be a person of treaty," he said. Enright describes Treaty as a relationship based on living together in "balance and benevolence," adding that people could not respect a relationship they did not understand.

He said education needs to reach younger generations so children can recognize their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples and understand the shared relationships that connect them through Treaty. "How then do we educate in a way that will affect the young minds?" he asked. "So that's why we start off with children."

"If children can see themselves as contributors to treaty, then they will be contributors to Indigenous populations," Enright said. He hopes that understanding will also help young people recognize the histories behind residential schools and the child welfare system, rather than judging Indigenous people without understanding the experiences and policies that shaped their lives.

For Enright, reconciliation involves more than acknowledging painful history. It also means uplifting Indigenous communities, supporting their right to tell their own stories and helping future generations understand their responsibilities to the land and one another. The September 26 gathering brought those goals together through ceremony, cultural expression and storytelling, emphasizing that Indigenous people remained here, continued to carry their histories forward and had the right to shape how those histories were understood.



Reverend Travis Enright

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Note: Special ballots must be received by mail at Elections Alberta by 5:00pm on October 16.

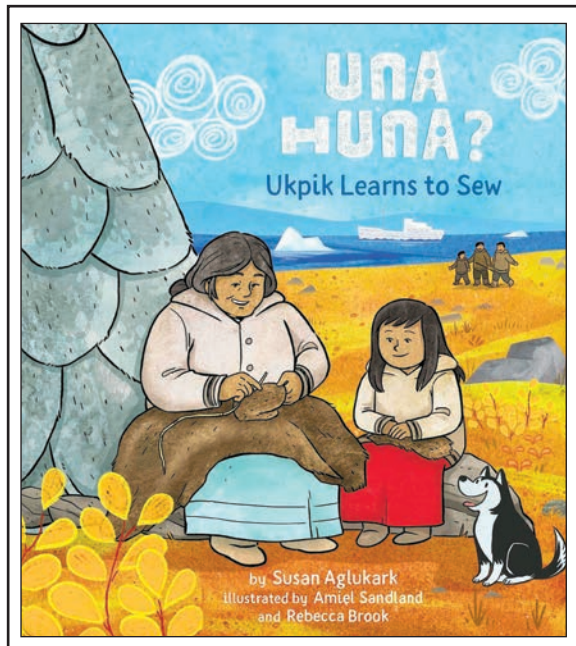
Susan Aglukark is still finding new ways to tell her story

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Susan Aglukark, a career in music has become a journey of discovery, connecting Inuit identity, cultural history and healing. The Inuk singer-songwriter and author also supports Indigenous youth through the Arctic Rose Foundation, using arts and culture to create opportunities for connection and mentorship. As she looks ahead to new music and another instalment in her *Una Huna?* book series, Aglukark reflects on her career, the importance of Indigenous-led organizations and protecting the connection between Indigenous people and the land.

Aglukark moved from Nunavut to Ontario in 1988 to start over. She released *Arctic Rose* in 1992 before signing a record deal and releasing her breakthrough album, *This Child*, in 1995. “I was about 21 at the time. A series of opportunities very quickly present themselves, and a couple of years after moving to Ottawa, I find myself with a record, the *Arctic Rose* album, and then following that was the record deal, and then our debut album, *This Child*, which got released in January of 1995, was very successful. And so, I found myself on this path of art and artist and songwriting,” Aglukark said.

Looking back, she says, staying in an industry that can be difficult to navigate is one of her greatest accomplishments. “I think at this point in my career... I’m very proud of what has occurred in terms of how the career has rolled out,” she said. Over the years, she faced moments when she questioned whether she could continue, but opportunities helped her find a way forward. “I’m very proud of that because if I hadn’t stayed, I wouldn’t have discovered discovery,” she said.



Through songwriting and artistic expression, Aglukark found a deeper purpose in her work. “As artists, we interpret, translate our creative process into what I’m very grateful for, a healing journey,” she said. She now hopes to share what she has learned with others, particularly within Indigenous communities. “My goal and my commitment now, moving forward, is to stay in my career as long as I can, but I’m also now sharing the more critical parts of what I’ve discovered and what parts of me have healed enough that I can look back and say, ‘This happened. This is possible,’ and share those possibilities with the Indigenous community,” she said.

Aglukark recently participated in the *Together for Nature* tour across southern Ontario, with Terra Lightfoot joining her for the opening show in Ottawa. She accepted the invitation because she believes Indigenous artists need to use their platforms to speak about their relationships with the land and the importance of protecting those connections. Her parents’ early lives were closely connected to traditional Inuit ways of living on the land, experiences that shaped the cultural knowledge passed down through generations. “My generation is connected to the land in that way, and we need to protect that connection because without that connection, we lose a critical piece of our Indigenous selves,” she said. During the tour, Aglukark shared songs written over the course of her career that explore what the land means to Inuit people.

Aglukark’s commitment to Indigenous communities extends through the Arctic Rose Foundation, which supports Northern Inuit, First Nations and Métis youth through arts-based programming. The organization grew out of the Arctic Rose Project, started by Aglukark in 2012. It received charitable status in 2016 and was incorporated in 2020.

One program, Messy Book, uses expressive arts to create opportunities for youth to explore creativity, build relationships and connect with mentors. More than 30 guest artists visit partner communities, while local youth help run after-school programming. Aglukark says the program recognizes mental health challenges in Indigenous communities while encouraging people to draw on their own community knowledge and strengths. “We have mental health issues in all our Indigenous communities, and we need to understand the historical context of it. But what we’re extrapolating or taking from those experiences in our communities and the environments of crisis are our ways of managing



Singer/songwriter Susan Aglukark

mental health,” she said.

Painting, dance, songwriting, writing and beading provide opportunities for creative expression, cultural connection and mentorship. The foundation also operates *Kamajiit*, an Inuit youth leadership development program incorporating cultural and creative activities, mentorship and practical support. Aglukark discussed plans to expand the program’s work with young adults in her region. “It utilizes a process I’ve developed where we support each other, and we utilize expressive arts as well to encourage us to connect with our capacity as we pursue our lives in our environments for a better future in our environments or in our communities,” she said.

Aglukark’s work as a singer-songwriter, author and mixed-media artist has helped her reconnect with Inuit history and the experiences of previous generations. “My generation, again, we’re born to the last generation of Inuit who can claim they come from – their parents come from – the old ways,” she said. Through artistic expression, she has explored her family history and developed a deeper understanding of her identity as an urban Inuk. “Through the arts, I was able to dig deeper into who they were, and find a new sense of purpose and pride in that,” she said.

Her children’s series, *Una Huna?*, follows a young Inuk girl named Ukpik and explores cultural change and the experiences of earlier generations. The first book, *Una Huna? What Is This?*, was published in 2018, followed by *Una Huna? Ukpik Learns to Sew* in 2022. Aglukark is working on the third instalment. “Ukpik explores the time between my parents and my grandparents on the land, and when they were slowly being placed into settlement life, and the things that were new to them in that period,” she said. Her 2025 memoir, *Kihiani: A Memoir of Healing*, co-written with Andrea Warner, reflects on her life, career and journey toward healing.

Aglukark continues to develop new creative projects while supporting Indigenous communities. Her five-song EP, *Disco Ball*, is planned for early 2027. Its lead single, “For You,” was delayed while she sought a new distribution partner, according to *Nunatsiaq News*. She is also continuing her work with the Arctic Rose Foundation and preparing the third *Una Huna?* book, which she calls a Christmas story.

For Aglukark, the next chapter remains rooted in discovery and sharing what she has learned. “I wake up so excited, and I can’t wait to get back to whatever that next discovery is going to be,” she said.

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‘WaaPaKe’ asks families to confront the weight of intergenerational trauma

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Vancouver-based Cree filmmaker, writer and academic Dr. Jules Arita Koostachin has spent much of her career using storytelling to explore Indigenous identity, family, healing and the lasting effects of colonialism.

In a conversation with Alberta Native News, Koostachin reflected on the making of her documentary *WaaPaKe (Tomorrow)*, the weight of intergenerational trauma and the difficult conversations Indigenous families must sometimes have in order to begin healing.

For Dr. Jules Arita Koostachin, making *WaaPaKe (Tomorrow)* meant asking a deeply personal question: Who are we without the trauma we inherited?

The documentary explores the effects of residential school trauma across generations, focusing on the children of Survivors and the ways they have grown up carrying experiences they did not personally live through, but have nevertheless inherited through their families.

“I think for me, the centralized question for this film was, Who am I without her trauma?” Koostachin said. “I kept that in mind. I didn’t tell anybody that. It was just something, like I said, it’s a centralized question, like a thesis question. But yeah, who are we without their trauma?”

That question grew out of what Koostachin sees as a gap in academic research about the experiences of Survivors’ children. While considerable attention has been given to Survivors and the direct effects residential schools had on them, she believes there is still much to understand about what happened to the generations who grew up alongside that trauma.

“I don’t think there’s enough scholarship yet. I don’t think we’ve unpacked it,” she said. “I feel like we haven’t even scratched the surface in terms of being their children.”

For Koostachin, the lack of conversation is not simply an academic issue. It is something she has experienced within her own family and community. That became one of the reasons she wanted to make a film that could create space for people to talk about experiences that are often difficult to bring into the open.

“I don’t think we’ve had a lot of conversation within our homes or communities, being the children of Survivors,” she said. “So I feel like what motivated me in terms of making this film, is allowing that conversation to transpire. I know it’s really hard to create safe spaces, but to kind of ignite truth, in a way, to talk about what it’s like to be raised by Survivors and the impacts of intergenerational trauma.”

She sees *WaaPaKe* as a starting point for that conversation, particularly because the people speaking in the film are not discussing the subject from a distance. They are speaking about their own lives as children of Survivors.

“I think that’s what *WaaPaKe* does. It’s firsthand interviews with people who are children of Survivors just to talk about how it’s impacted us, because they are our parents,” Koostachin said. “I just wanted to create a platform, and I think that’s what the film did. It was a very personal piece, an important piece, I think an important conversation starter.”

Starting that conversation, however, does not mean it will be comfortable. Koostachin said families can sometimes avoid difficult discussions because they do not want to hurt the people they love. But she believes avoiding those conversations can also prevent healing.

“You have to talk about it. You have to kind of pull the Band Aid off in a way, and it stings. But that’s how healing starts,” she said. “You can’t just ignore the fact that all of this has transpired within our families.”

That tension became particularly personal when Koostachin’s mother watched the film. Making a documentary about family trauma meant confronting the possibility that the people closest to her could feel hurt by what she had created.

“In terms of healing, I know for me it was really hard when my mom watched the film because I was scared,” she said. “I was really worried about her being offended, because as their kids, we’re raised to take care of them in a way.”

That sense of responsibility continued to shape how Koostachin viewed the film after it was released. She said she



Filmmaker Jules Arita Koostachin

still worries about whether people will consider her insensitive or believe she should have protected her mother rather than explored her own experience. At the same time, she has reached a point in her life where she feels those conversations cannot continue to be avoided. “I’m going into my fifties now, and it’s just kind of like, well, we do need to talk about it,” she said.

For Koostachin, that need has also been complicated by loss. Since the film was made, she said, she has lost both a younger brother and an older brother. Her foster brother was also found frozen in the streets of Ottawa several years ago. Those experiences have left her questioning what healing means when grief and trauma continue to affect families and communities.

“It’s like, has healing occurred?” she said. “With all that loss happening in our families and communities and suicide, we still have a long way to go, I think. Do we have the tools? Sometimes. Do we have the resources? Sometimes.”

Those questions also speak to the limitations of filmmaking. Koostachin sees both as ways of opening conversations and giving people information, stories and creative outlets, but she

Continued on page 11



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Datacentre protest rally in Edmonton emphasizes Indigenous rights

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

More than 100 people gathered outside the Legislative Assembly building in Edmonton on Oct. 4 to protest the provincial and federal governments’ permissive approach towards building AI data centres.

Elder Taz Bouchier opened the rally with a land acknowledgement before tying the proposed 7.5-gigawatt Wonder Valley data centre near Grande Prairie’s potential water usage to the oil industry’s plans to release treated tailings fluids into the Athabasca watershed.

“When did people lose sight of how valuable water is to living? When money came into play. That’s all these data centers are about,” said Bouchier.

Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation is challenging the province’s decision to award a water license of 24-million cubic metres to the Municipal District of Greenview for Wonder Valley without consulting the Treaty 8 First Nation, which relies on the Smoky River for its water.

At the protest, Chief Sheldon Sunshine outlined a series of “very basic questions” he has for data centre proponents, including whether existing rules are sufficient “for the size and scale of what is being proposed” and whether there are sufficient water protections.

“What happens to our communities when these projects operate for decades? What happens to the land? What happens to the water? What happens to the wildlife? What happens to the air quality? What happens when multiple projects are operating in the same region? And perhaps most importantly, where is the assessment of the cumulative impacts?” Sunshine asked.

“We can’t look at every project at one time and pretend the others don’t exist. We have to look at the whole picture.”

As first reported by online news outlet *Canada’s National Observer*, Environment Alberta has exempted Wonder Valley from an environmental assessment.

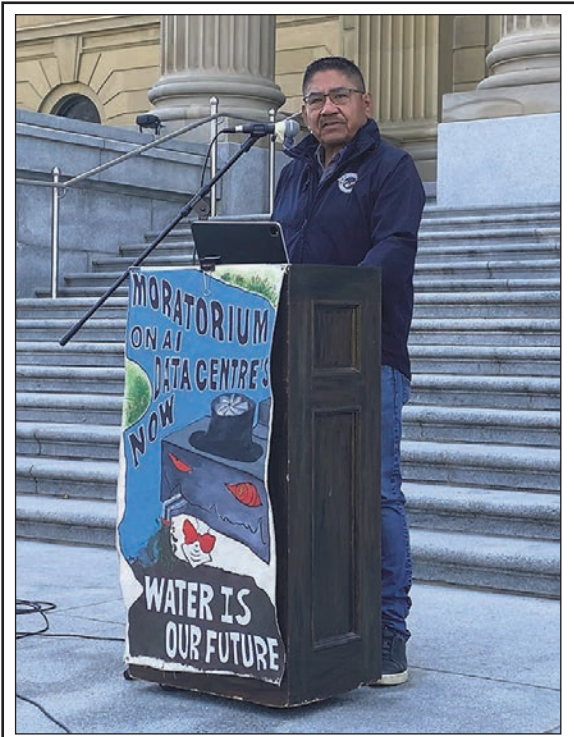
“Why are governments creating pathways to accelerate these developments before the public has confidence that the rules are strong enough? Why is the push happening so fast? What concessions are being made to attract these projects? Who negotiated those concessions?” asked Chief Sunshine.

“Those are reasonable questions. Asking them does not make us anti-development. It makes us responsible.”

He emphasized that he understands the government’s “economic strategy behind these projects,” in terms of attempting to create a new market for the province’s substantial natural gas resources.

“But economic development cannot come at any cost,” said Sunshine.

“You cannot build a new economy by putting the foundation of that economy on water that communities depend on, land that cannot be replaced, or an electrical system that people already rely on. You cannot call something responsible development simply because it creates jobs. Responsible development means understanding the consequences before



Chief Sheldon Sunshine

you build.”

Edmonton-Strathcona NDP MP Heather McPherson opened her remarks by “acknowledging that Indigenous people in this country are on the front lines of this fight, and on the front lines of so many fights that we are being asked to fight as citizens right now,” referring to First Nations’ opposition to Alberta’s separatist movement.

“We all owe Indigenous people in this province a debt of gratitude for being on the front line, protecting our sovereignty, protecting our climate, protecting our water and our land,” she added.

McPherson called it greatly “frustrating” that data centres are being fast tracked while crucial community needs are being unmet.

“We can’t build the homes that people need in this community, but we can build a data centre. We can’t build clean water facilities for people in this country, but we can build a data center,” she said. “The priority here for this government is to make billionaires wealthy at the expense of every single one of us here.”

McPherson stressed that the consequences of AI are not just environmental, referring explicitly to its use to reduce jobs and as a weapon of war.

“We’re being told it’s going to make our life better,” she said. “You tell that to the tens of thousands of public servants who are losing their jobs because [Prime Minister] Mark Carney thinks AI can do that job for them. You tell that to the Iranian schoolchildren who were bombed because AI made a mistake.”

None of the opponents of AI data centres are “against technology” or construction jobs, added McPherson.

“We’re against getting ripped off. We’re against our rights being subservient to the wealthy and the corporate people that are getting all [the benefits],” she said.

Cody Lightning brings hockey, community and raw storytelling to ‘Smudge the Blades’

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Cody Lightning, *Smudge the Blades* is more than a hockey film. It draws on the young players he coached, the Northern Alberta communities he knows, his family’s filmmaking history and the experiences that brought him back to storytelling.

The filmmaker, actor and hockey coach brought his second feature to the Toronto International Film Festival, where *Smudge the Blades* had its world premiere on Sept. 12 as part of the festival’s Centrepiece programme. On Sept. 20, it received the Best Canadian Discovery Award, which recognizes an emerging Canadian filmmaker whose first or second feature brings a distinctive voice to Canadian cinema.

The award includes a \$10,000 CAD cash prize. The TIFF jury described *Smudge the Blades* as “electric,” praising its heart and humour, its portrayal of challenges facing Indigenous communities and Lightning’s direction and attention to character.

At the centre of the film is the Treaty 6 Blades, an Indigenous U18 hockey team in Northern Alberta that is forced out of its league and must salvage its final year of eligibility in a rough Northern Alberta country league. Local zamboni driver Willie Gladue, played by Lightning, steps in as coach.

The fictional team is rooted in Lightning’s more than seven years of playing and coaching hockey, including his time working with young players in Enoch. Many of the film’s characters were inspired by players he knew.

“So much of the blends were mostly based off of my coaching, because I play hockey and I coached for over seven years,” Lightning said. “I worked in Enoch, coached all those boys. Those are all characters based off kids that I actually coached. And so, a lot of those stories are real with the characters.”

Bringing those young players into the production made the experience especially meaningful. Production sometimes meant spending as long as 10 hours on the ice, but Lightning said watching the players take part in filmmaking gave the project a purpose beyond the screen.

“It was just incredible to see them all show up, and they all did such an incredible job,” Lightning said. “I started wearing Skechers,” he joked.

“I know that they’re all very grateful and very proud of their work,” Lightning said. “And I’m just very fortunate that I get to say that I had the opportunity to lead them.”

For Lightning, the story behind the film began long before its TIFF premiere.

He grew up in Maskwacis. When he and his siblings were young, their late mother, filmmaker Georgina Lightning, moved the family to Los Angeles and raised them in the film industry.

“Times were tough, but we persevered and survived, and we made it work as a family,” Lightning said.

Film became a family effort, with the siblings contributing to the household whenever they found work. Lightning described the industry as difficult then and still difficult today.

His own path was not always direct. He stepped away from the industry several times, returned to school and spent time skateboarding and snowboarding while trying to determine what he wanted from life.

“I was a pretty rebellious teenager, so I drove my mom a little bit nuts,” he said.

Still, projects and opportunities repeatedly drew him back.

The film was directed by Lightning and co-written with Samuel Miller. The cast includes Lightning, Jana Schmieding, Paulina Alexis, Ed Helms, Treyce Wuttunee, Isaiah Kakepetum, River Rayne Thomas, Elijah James Lee Moar,

Ezekiel James Mekanek and Tyler Halcrow.

Lightning does not approach Indigenous storytelling by trying to make everything comfortable for audiences. For him, authenticity means showing people as they are, with humour, conflict, sadness, resilience and imperfections.

“A couple people asked me why they are all drinking and doing this and that,” Lightning said. “And I’m like, that has nothing to do with being Indigenous. They’re teenagers.”

He said Indigenous communities can experience dysfunction while still finding ways to laugh, persevere and move forward.

“There’s a lot of dysfunction in our communities. And we still find a way to get through. We still find a way to laugh,” he said. “So I didn’t sugarcoat anything.”

“It’s authenticity. It’s truth. It’s raw. It’s funny. It’s sad. It’s aggressive. But it’s real,” he added. “And so that’s the biggest thing, to portray that with my storytelling.”

Lightning said he intends to continue telling stories about subjects he knows.

“Sometimes it’s not that pretty,” he said. “Our communities have a lot of stuff going on.”

He is already working on what comes next, including a horror script and another comedy.

While hockey is built around competition, Lightning’s decision about the film’s ending was personal. When he and Miller debated whether the team should win or lose, Lightning knew what he wanted.

“You know, winning is huge,” he said. “Winning’s huge because, for me as an individual, I’ve lost a lot.”

“When I was writing the script with my partner, I was like, do we have them win in the end, or do we have them lose? And I was like, I want them to win. They’re winning.”

He had seen teams lose in other films but wanted a different outcome for his players.

“I’ve been in films where the teams lose, and I was like, hell no, we’re gonna have our boys win,” he said. “So yeah, it’s huge. It’s everything.”

Lightning’s perseverance was also shaped by his mother. He and his siblings had different relationships with her, he said, but all three witnessed the challenges she faced as a single mother trying to establish herself in a demanding industry.

“She was a single mother of three kids in a big city trying to make it in an industry that’s not always promising, but she did it,” Lightning said.

Georgina Lightning’s recent passing made the film’s festival journey particularly difficult. Her death came as *Smudge the Blades* was beginning its festival run, forcing Lightning to balance the celebration of his work with grief.

“It’ll be a tough one, and I know that there’s gonna be rough roads ahead for my emotions and my spirit and stuff like that,” Lightning said.



Filmmaker Cody Lightning.

He credited his friends and partner with helping him through the loss.

“I have a really, really, really great support team,” he said. “I have my really close friends. I have my partner, and they both help me get through this.”

Even while grieving, Lightning continued travelling with the film and attending festival events. “With my mom’s passing I have to do the press and travel around with it, but it’s just I’m doing it with an empty tank of gas,” he said.

During the TIFF awards ceremony, he dedicated the Best Canadian Discovery Award to his mother, recognizing her influence on his life and storytelling.

For Lightning, filmmaking is also a way to create opportunities for others, particularly young Indigenous people trying to enter the industry. “I don’t make projects just for myself,” he said. “It’s for so many other people.”

The film industry can be difficult to enter, Lightning said, and he wants to help whenever he

Continued on page 10

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OUR SMILE IS OUR PRIORITY

Indigenous Policing Summit highlights community-led approach

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For members of Maskwacis, attending the Indigenous Policing Summit on the Tsuut’ina Nation near Calgary provided an opportunity to listen, learn and bring new ideas home. Several members attended the summit, which brought together speakers and policing representatives from across Canada to discuss Indigenous policing, community safety and the importance of meaningful relationships between police and First Nations.

For Cst. A/Cpl. Catlin Chiasson of the Maskwacis RCMP, the summit reinforced an important message: conversations about Indigenous policing need to lead to action. “It was phenomenal that we had the opportunity to send several members there,” Chiasson said. “From what I’ve heard, the speakers from across Canada were speaking about not only having conversations, but conversations that come to fruition. So, action. Having that action on what you discussed.”

The discussions also come at a significant point in the ongoing work of reconciliation. Ten years have passed since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report and Calls to Action, while five years have passed since the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released its final report and Calls for Justice. Chiasson said those histories cannot simply be left behind.

“We want to ensure that we’re also acknowledging the history. We can’t move past that, but we can acknowledge that, as well as bringing some of the items to action and moving forward with those conversations, as well as the action,” Chiasson said.

For the members who attended the summit, that meant returning home with ideas that could potentially be adapted to the needs of the communities they serve. One of those ideas is greater engagement with youth. A proposed youth day camp could bring young people together with police, and the four Nations served in the community. The initiative could provide an opportunity for youth to learn more about policing, understand what police officers do and why they do it, and develop relationships with officers in a community setting.

“There are absolutely discussions and actions that we can bring back to Maskwacis,” Chiasson

said. “One of them would definitely be working with youth and creating a day camp where youth can work in partnership with police and the four Nations that we do have here.” The initiative could also become part of a broader Truth and Reconciliation model focused on education, relationship-building and future opportunities.

The youth initiative could also have a recruitment component. Police are actively looking for members from all four Nations, with an emphasis on encouraging community members to consider policing as a career. Chiasson said a recently introduced opportunity may also help remove one barrier for some applicants.

“If we support a member of the community to apply to the RCMP and they’ve demonstrated that they have the attributes of a police officer by working or volunteering their time, if we have an event, anything like that, we can suggest that they bypass the written exam,” Chiasson said.

The approach provides another potential pathway for community members interested in pursuing a career in policing, while also creating opportunities for police to build relationships with young people and community members before they enter the profession.

The summit also reinforced another principle: there is no single model for Indigenous policing. “One size doesn’t fit all when it comes to policing and the needs of each Nation,” Chiasson said. “Each Nation has their own needs and their own vision on where they want to go with things.”

That means police services need to remain flexible and listen to what individual Nations identify as priorities. Among the issues identified by Chiasson was addiction support, including sober-living opportunities that could provide people with a safe environment and a pathway toward maintaining sobriety and rebuilding their lives. Youth initiatives and the development of future police officers were also identified as areas where police and Nations can work together.

The approach is ultimately about adapting policing to the community rather than expecting every community to fit the same policing model. “It means that we’re flexible,” Chiasson said.

That flexibility depends on maintaining an ongoing relationship with First Nations leadership and community members. When asked



Cst. A/Cpl. Catlin Chiasson

about the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration on policing and community safety, Chiasson said it is the top priority. That includes gathering input from community members and maintaining relationships with Chiefs and Councils representing the Nations.

“We want to ensure that there is maintaining an open dialogue and transparency from the police to the Nations people, from the Nations people to the police,” Chiasson said. The relationship, he added, cannot be one-sided. “It takes two to make a project work, and it’s not one-sided.”

The goal is therefore to continue the conversations while ensuring they produce tangible outcomes. As communities and municipalities move toward a model of “listening to learn towards action,” the vision is for police and First Nations to jointly identify initiatives, establish responsibilities and measure the results.

“We’re very hopeful that they continue and that everybody comes to the table and we actually control the action moving forward,” Chiasson said. “We both have a way of helping each other, and that is a vision forward. That’s not only a conversation, but it’s action. We need to do things. We need to do tangible, measurable results.”

For those returning from the Indigenous Policing Summit, the next step is taking what was heard across Canada and determining what can work locally. The summit may have provided the conversations, but the work now is turning those conversations into partnerships, youth opportunities, recruitment, community supports and measurable action.

Cody Lightning cont. from p 9

has the opportunity. “If I ever get the opportunity to promote that and to spearhead the head of the ship, I’ll do it every single day,” he said.

That commitment came into focus during TIFF. Among the young hockey players attending the festival were teenagers playing in what Lightning described as the “mini NHL.”

One young player approached him, “gave me the biggest hug,” held his hands and said, “Thank you.”

“That’s powerful,” Lightning said.

The moment reminded him why representation and opportunity matter – not only for filmmakers, but also for young people watching and wondering whether they could one day be part of the industry.

The film’s production reflects that collaborative spirit. *Smudge the Blades* was produced by Lightning Mill Inc. and North Country Cinema. Producers include Cody Lightning, Joshua Jackson, Kyle Thomas, Sara Corry, Hayley Morin and Dylan Morin. Executive producers include Harlan Kingfisher, Mike Falbo, Brett Harris and Ed Helms.

The production received support from Telefilm Canada, the Government of Alberta, the Indigenous Screen Office, Shaw Rocket Fund and the Edmonton Screen Office. It was produced in association with Crave, APTN and CBC Films.

The film’s festival journey continued following TIFF – in Edmonton, Vancouver and Calgary.

Lightning’s message to other artists and young people is straightforward. “Just keep writing. Just keep being badass. Just keep moving forward.”

He believes communities need creativity, especially during difficult times. “We need this. We need more art. We need more music. We need more film. We need more – all of it,” Lightning said.

There will be difficult periods, he acknowledged, but his answer is to keep creating and coming together.

“So just be kind to one another, and just do your best to persevere through all the crap,” he said. “You know, Nitchies, we’ve done that forever. We’ve always done that. We need to continue.”

Lightning carries a message for the next generation: the doors of the industry are not reserved for somebody else.

“I just wish that anyone that watches it just knows that they can do it too.”

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Carving the Music: The evolving artistry of Patrick Calihou

By John Wirth, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Whether shaping timber in his workshop or performing on stage with a guitar, Métis artisan Patrick Calihou views visual art and musical performance as two sides of the exact same discipline.

His latest work in progress sits a nearly finished fiddle in his peaceful woodshed. Based on an instrument gifted by a friend, Calihou modified the standard f-shaped sound holes into infinity symbols, reflecting the central emblem of the Métis flag.

"I wanted to have infinity holes... Make it a little bit different. Make it yours, right?" Calihou says. "Apply it to everything. Not stamp it, but apply it to every aspect. The infinity. Its never-ending, endless possibilities."

That same philosophy carries into his public art installations, such as playground bridges and stationary carts found across Lower Mainland schools. Rather than copying static historical templates, Calihou paints motifs straight from memory and intuition.

"I didn't Google a template to mass-produce it," Calihou says, tapping his forehead. "It's from here! I want to be unique in my field so people remember me, not just like the 'cart guy.'"

When Calihou steps away from carving to play music, his physical approach to creation remains identical.

"I'm basically carving on my guitar. Everyone

knows you for carving that wood, but today I'm carving on my guitar," he explains. "It feels the same. Like you're carving on a piece of timber, just planing it, chasing it."

During performances—where he often operates as a one-man band managing a kick drum looper, bass, slide guitars, foot tambourine, and harmonica—Calihou enters a distinct flow state.

"When I'm playing my cultural music—the songs from my heart—I can feel it. My blood pressure rises, and I slowly start tuning out," Calihou shares. "I get into the music, into a different zone. If you hooked up electrodes to my brain, it would be crazy. It would be like a rainbow going off."

That "rainbow going off" isn't just poetry. Studies of musicians in flow show a measurable shift in brain activity: the prefrontal cortex—the seat of self-critique and overthinking—quiets down, while networks for attention, reward, and motor control synchronize. In deep flow, alpha and theta waves rise, gamma bursts fire, and a cocktail of neurochemicals locks the performer into effortless, high-focus action. For Calihou, that state is where culture becomes craft.

When he's "carving" on the guitar, he's not just playing songs; he's running Métis motifs through his body in real time, translating the same infinity symbol he cuts into wood into sound. The one-man-band setup—kick drum looper, bass, slide



Métis artisan Patrick Calihou

guitars, foot tambourine, harmonica—becomes a kind of mobile workshop, where every limb is another tool shaping the same piece.

In that zone, the distinction between artisan and performer collapses. The infinity holes on his fiddle, the playground carts painted from memory, and the cultural music that sends his blood pressure up and the world away are all expressions of one principle: apply the symbol to every aspect and let the work become endless possibility. As Calihou puts it, he's not stamping a template; he's carving a living practice – one that keeps evolving every time he steps into the rainbow.

‘WaaPaKe’ cont. from p 7

does not see them as substitutes for the work of healing itself.

"I feel like we do the work that we do to try to get things started, but we can't heal everybody," she said. "We can only use our talents and our own platforms to educate the best we can. It's about creating those conversations so people can begin the work."

Creating those conversations also required Koostachin to think carefully about how the people featured in the documentary would be treated. She said everyone interviewed was given an opportunity to see their interview before the film was released. A counsellor was available online, and the production included conversations about healing at the beginning and end of filming.

The production also relied largely on an Indigenous crew. For Koostachin, that was an important part of creating an environment where participants could speak without constantly having to explain their experiences to people who did not share their cultural background.

"They don't have to overexplain themselves," she said. "It was a big part of my methodology, making sure there were Indigenous people, and the non-Native people on set were true allies. They understood what was happening."

That approach extended to her mother's interview. Koostachin placed a curtain between her mother and the camera so that the interview could feel more intimate and less like a traditional filmed interview. She also made time to debrief with participants afterward, asking whether they were comfortable with what they had shared and whether there was anything they wanted removed.

"I made sure, Are you okay with everything that you've said? Is there anything you want to

retract?" she said. "Just doing the things that you need in a Native community to make sure we're not retraumatizing or victimizing anyone."

That responsibility, she said, is part of working within an Indigenous community where filmmakers, journalists and other storytellers remain accountable to the people whose stories they tell.

"We are held accountable and obligated to do things the right way," Koostachin said.

The responsibility also shaped who she made the film for. Rather than creating *WaaPaKe* primarily as an educational film for non-Indigenous audiences, Koostachin said she wanted to speak first to Indigenous people who already understand the history and are living with its continuing effects.

"When I make films, I don't make it for a non-Native audience," she said. "I made it for an Indigenous audience first and foremost."

Her hope is that Indigenous viewers will recognize something of their own experience in the film and feel able to begin releasing some of the weight they have carried.

"Hey, I've been carrying this weight for a very long time. I have to shed it, because I want to soar. I want to fly. I want to live my life," she said. "I'm so tired of carrying this heavy weight of trauma."

That idea of carrying weight returns to the central question behind the documentary. Koostachin said she wanted to explore what identity can look like when a person begins to separate their own life from the trauma experienced by previous generations.

For her, that does not mean forgetting what happened. It means asking whether people can acknowledge that history while also allowing themselves to experience a life beyond it.

The film has also become part of a broader body of Indigenous storytelling that Koostachin

sees growing across Canada and internationally. *WaaPaKe* received Best BC Film at the 2023 Vancouver International Film Festival, followed by several awards in 2024, including recognition at the Junction North International Documentary Film Festival in Sudbury, the Indie Awards in Los Angeles and the Montreal First Peoples' Festival.

Koostachin sees that growing recognition not simply as an achievement for individual filmmakers, but as part of a longer history of Indigenous artists creating opportunities for those who follow.

She points to trailblazers such as Alanis Obomsawin and Willie Dunn, along with Indigenous lawyers, journalists, artists and others whose work helped create space for the generation working today.

"I think we're already living it," she said. "If we could look at TIFF and look at all the Indigenous films out there in the world right now, we're already on that path."

For Koostachin, the word "tomorrow" in *WaaPaKe* represents that continuing movement forward.

"For me, tomorrow just keeps getting better and better," she said.

WaaPaKe was screened at the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton on Sept. 30, as part of the museum's recognition of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. It is available through the National Film Board of Canada (nfb.ca) for viewers who want to watch it online.

For Koostachin, the work is ultimately about creating enough space for people to acknowledge what they have carried, while also beginning to imagine what life might feel like without carrying it alone.

"And *WaaPaKe*, is the first step in allowing yourself to feel something."

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NDP MLA warns against promises of better treaties through Alberta separation

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As Alberta’s separatism debate continues, NDP MLA Brooks Arcand-Paul says promises of better treaty negotiations through separation raise serious questions about the future of First Nations’ rights and relationships with the Crown. Arcand-Paul, who represents Edmonton-West Heday, said the political discussion must consider the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and the longstanding treaty relationships that predate Alberta becoming a province.

For him, the issue extends beyond a potential referendum. It concerns whether First Nations’ rights will be respected, how Indigenous communities will be included in decisions affecting their future and whether existing treaty commitments will continue to be honoured.

“Our Elders, my knowledge keepers, the people who have taught me about treaties, have always said that we do not renegotiate our treaty,” Arcand-Paul said. “Our treaty will last as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow.” Some supporters of Alberta separation have suggested that independence could create opportunities to negotiate new arrangements with First Nations. Arcand-Paul questioned whether such promises align with the rhetoric some separatist supporters use when discussing Indigenous Peoples and their leadership.

“Coming at it, particularly from the separatist side, is the idea that we will get better negotiations, that we will get better treaties if we go forward with separatism,” he said. “On the other side of the coin, those same people online are sharing that people will get a better treaty or any other right. At the same time, they preach negative things about Indigenous people, saying that we only really stand up because we want

more dollars, that the Chiefs are captured and are in it for their own personal gain.” He said the contrast between promises of better treaty negotiations and criticism directed at Indigenous leaders raises concerns about the intentions behind those promises. “When you couple those things together, it really makes you question what intention they might have, even if they are deceptive in this referendum,” he said.

His concerns come amid wider questions about accountability and trust in arrangements involving First Nations, including legal disputes connected to Alberta lawyer Jeffrey Rath, who has represented First Nations in litigation and has also become associated with the province’s separatist movement. In an investigation published Oct. 8, 2026, Global News reported that two U.S.-based litigation funders had sued Rath for \$112.56 million, alleging misleading representations related to funding for First Nations litigation. The allegations have not been proven in court and should not be treated as established findings.

For Arcand-Paul, the central question remains whether the promises made during the separatism debate would protect First Nations’ existing rights and relationships. “I really don’t see any opportunity for a treaty or negotiated agreement because the writing is on the wall,” he said. “They already have expressed how they feel about our people, and it’s not good.”

Arcand-Paul’s assessment reflects his perspective as an NDP MLA. The broader questions about treaty rights, provincial jurisdiction and the potential consequences of Alberta separation

remain significant considerations for First Nations as the debate continues. He said the teachings he received from Elders and knowledge keepers shaped his understanding of treaties as enduring relationships rather than agreements that can simply be reopened when political circumstances change. “I have hardly seen any of our people buy into the idea that we will go forward with separatism and that we will renegotiate our treaty,” he said. “There may be some that aren’t connected or don’t have those teachings yet, but I do remain hopeful that we are having this conversation.”

Arcand-Paul said the debate also provides an opportunity to discuss treaties in the context of future generations, not only as historical agreements. “We are talking about treaty in this regard, not only in a historical context, but in a future context on how we look forward to the next generation that are yet to be born,” he said. He also emphasized the importance of remaining connected to Indigenous teachings and protecting treaty relationships as political discussions continue. “We need to stay strong, we need to persevere, and we need to protect our treaty at all costs,” Arcand-Paul said.

As Alberta debates its political future, Arcand-Paul argues that treaty relationships cannot be treated as an afterthought. Any discussion about separation, he says, must also address the future of existing treaty obligations, the recognition of First Nations sovereignty and the protections owed to generations to come.



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