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Thousands of youth from around the province were able to participate in the Tony Cote Winter Games thanks to James Smith Cree Nation who hosted the event in Saskatoon.

By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News

On the surface, the Tony Cote First Nations Winter Games may seem, simply, to be an opportunity for young Indigenous athletes to compete against their peers from across the province.

But the games have deep, innumerable impacts on these young people's lives, extending far beyond sport. And the impacts of those games have perhaps never been more important, considering the First Nation serving as host of the games.

"Even though James Smith Cree Nation was the focal point of a very difficult news item, I think these games are a call to all of us to ensure

our young people start off and live their lives in a health, productive way," said Lyle Daniels, Games Manager of the 2023 Tony Cote Winter Games.

"Every year, these games give great pride in who we are as Indigenous people. Which is important no matter where you're from."

Despite a 47 year history, the Winter Games had been on hiatus for the last five years. After the tragedy that occurred at James Smith Cree Nation last fall, the return of the games couldn't have come at a better time, and serves as a 'bright spot', said Deborah McLean, Councillor at James Smith Cree Nation.

"We wanted to find a way to give our people back a sense of belonging.

continued page 2 ...



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- page 10

May 2023 is our
Lifestyles Theme

June 2023 Issue:
Indigenous History Month



ERICA BEAUDIN
New Day in Cowessess

"It was very much a tough decision to make. I love the helping community of Regina. I love our organization. We have a very strong organization and from my perspective we have built the most qualified Indigenous and allied group (both) front-line and professional people there is."

- page 7



INCA STUDENTS
Making their Marks

"Students from the First Nations University of Canada's INCA class make their writing debuts on pages 13, 14 and 15."

- page 12, 13, 14, 15

Tony Cote Winter Games 2023

... continued from page 1

To get back out there and help with their recovery. It was really needed during this time,” said McLean.

James Smith Cree Nation was just one of the many First Nations to participate in the games – according to organizers, all 74 First Nations were represented – but James Smith was the only First Nation who had the honour of hosting the event.

This meant they had a short two months to plan and coordinate the event, as well as assemble volunteers and Elders from their First Nation to work at the event.



One player makes a pass to team mate from the floor during one action packed basketball game during the Tony Cote Winter Games. (Photos by Maurice Longman)

“We wanted to nurture the spirit of everyone involved. Because we knew they were all going through a hard time. So this was a chance to get them out of the community and do something uplifting,” said McLean.

The young athletes from James Smith Cree Nation competed with Prince Albert Grand Council – one of 13 teams representing all 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan. A total of 3,400 athletes, coaches, and managers participated in the games, which were held from April 7 to 13 in Saskatoon and Martensville. The teams competed in volleyball, table tennis, badminton, hockey, basketball,

and curling.

Based on an overall point system, Battleford Agency Tribal Chiefs placed first, followed by Meadow Lake Tribal Council in second and Saskatoon Tribal Council third.

Regardless of the outcome of the games, they brought something invaluable to the First Nations and young people who competed, particularly those from James Smith.

“I think it gave us some resilience. It showed us that this tragedy is not going to be our entire identity,” said McLean.

“It gave the young people a sense of pride in themselves and their community. And it rejuvenated those passions to play, to compete, and to connect with others.”

In addition to athletic events, the Winter Games included a cultural component, with a parade of nations, motivational speakers, and a demonstration of the traditional sport of ‘handgames’.

Handgames, which dates back to 1885, consist of two teams of five players that sit across from each other in a line. While traditional drumming and music is played, one team works to hide objects in their hands, passing them between team members while the opposing team must guess where the objects are hidden.

Daniels, the Games Manager, said it was important to infuse the winter games with culture.

“It gave our young people the opportunity to start looking at a balanced life. To look not only at sport or career, but a more holistic side of who we are as people. Our spiritual side and believing in a higher power,” he said.

Leaders from across the province, including STC Chief Mark Arcand, and FSIN Vice-Chief Aly Bear, have championed the games and the impact they’ve had when they were competitors.

“We’re getting young people ready to be adults,” said Daniels.

“Those building blocks that sport gives them, learning to win and lose, to compete and share with those around you, it builds them in a way that will help them live a healthy, positive life.”



A young girl smiles as she stands among her team mates as a medal is placed on her. The Tony Cote Winter Games returned after a five year hiatus thanks to the James Smith Cree Nation (Photos by Maurice Longman)



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Alyse Custer refuses to let anything slow her down despite her diagnosis

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Three times a week, Alyse Custer must take herself to hospital in Saskatoon where, for four hours she receives dialysis. As Custer has kidney failure, the dialysis process performs some of the functions that kidneys usually do to keep her the body healthy, such as removing extra fluid and waste products from the blood – an essential process that the average person takes for granted.

The process is exhausting, on top of being extremely time consuming, and is one that Custer, 25, has been undergoing for four consecutive years.

“I’m exhausted all the time,” said Custer.

“Sometimes I think about how much time I’ve spent sitting in those chairs. It can be depressing. I feel like I’m stuck all the time. I’m tired of waiting.”

Custer is presently on the waitlist to receive a kidney transplant, but without a living donor, it could be months, if not years, of waiting.

From Pelican Narrows, and currently a fourth-year Social Work student at the First Nations University of Canada in Saskatoon, Custer has had a long and complex journey with her health. It started when she was only 11 and began suffering from regular nose bleeds – a symptom of kidney failure. But her problems were dismissed because of a systemic issue in our healthcare system, she said.

“There’s a lot of systemic racism in healthcare. They never did bloodwork or tried to figure out what was wrong. They just gave me nasal sprays for a year,” she said.

After Custer’s health was worsening, her mother, Andrea Custer H. Clarke, took her to the hospital, where Custer suffered a cardiac arrest. After a second cardiac arrest shortly thereafter, Custer was put into a medically induced coma. It was only then they discovered Custer’s kidneys were failing.

“She was drowning from the inside,” said Clarke, Custer’s mother.

Clarke had to move her family to Edmonton, as there was no pediatric dialysis or pediatric nephrologist (kidney specialist) in Saskatchewan. She eventually quit her job to take care of Custer, and had to regularly fundraise to afford the life essentials. Clarke donated a kidney to her daughter in 2012.



Alyse Custer shines light on the need for organ donations. The 25-year-old is waiting for an kidney transplant. (Photo supplied by Alyse Custer)

“I wanted her to have a normal life where she didn’t have to depend on a machine to keep living. And, that did work for a few years,” said Clarke.

In 2018, Custer’s kidneys started failing again, and has since been on regular dialysis. Despite the ongoing health issues, Custer is vehemently independent – she lives on her own in Saskatoon, is completing a post-secondary social work program in the standard four-years, has a part-time job, and takes herself to dialysis three times a week.

Custer also does art and graphic design, creating ribbon skirts, stickers, and graphic art for her mother’s store. She also is immersed in her culture, attending ceremonies and smudges, and speaking Cree whenever possible.

“I don’t know how she does it. But she keeps pushing forward, even though she’s really tired and just wants to have a transplant and live,” said Clarke.

“She’s an amazing young woman. She’s kind and patient with her siblings, she’s hardworking, she’s talented, she’s a very strong person. She deserves another chance at life,” she said.

Unfortunately, there is currently no set timetable for Custer’s much-needed kidney transplant. According to the Canada Institute for Health Information, 2,782 organ transplants were performed in Canada in 2021, with 78 percent of those transplants used deceased donor organs, and over 4,000 people on the waitlist.

But, another 2021 study in the Canadian Journal of Kidney Health and Disease found that Indigenous communities in Canada experience various barriers in accessing culturally safe medical information and care, resulting in inequitable access to kidney transplants.

“Kidney failure is a huge problem for Indigenous people, but not a lot of Indigenous people know much about it so there’s not a long of people willing to donate,” said Custer.

In Saskatchewan, there were 115 people waiting for a kidney transplant in 2021, with two having died while waiting a transplant.

For Custer, a transplant would be nothing short of transformational to her life.

“I wouldn’t have to sit in a chair three times a week. I wouldn’t have such a limited diet. I could actually travel and leave Saskatoon for more than one night. And just my general health would be better, I would have more energy to do things,” she said.

“It would be freeing.”



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Want to retain indigenous employees? It's going to require change

Was colonialism all bad? Yes. Yes it was. Full stop.

The Oxford dictionary describes colonialism as "the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area". Nothing in that definition works in the favor of the Indigenous people in the Canadian context. It's plainly about settling on the land and taking control over Indigenous people's livelihoods.

The core problem is colonialism sought to replace Indigenous cultural values and ways of being in every institution and used those institutions to subjugate, or assimilate, Indigenous people into Western mindsets. This influence is most obviously seen in the residential school mandate from the late 1800's to the mid 1900's. However, it is in every institution from health, education, business, justice, and social services. Indigenous people are made to feel bad, or less than, for not lining up with the value systems and policies these Western institutions implement.

Did these systems disappear or are they still active in today's society? They are still here, and they are still trying to make Indigenous people assimilate into Western worldviews.

Lots of companies are seeking to Indigenize or recruit and retain Indigenous employees. They almost never fully comprehend why they have issues keeping their Indigenous numbers higher, or how to make their systems more Indigenous friendly. I would say, they do basic touch ups, things you can see, like hanging some art or using a Cree name, and call it Indigenization.

However, that is not Indigenization.

Indigenization of Western systems should be about changing the values of these systems, how they work, and how they can be changed to use an Indigenous worldview lens. This requires a process of decolonization: Western values replaced by Indigenous values. This is much deeper than some artwork or a flag, this is about radical change of how companies do

business. This is changing the actual culture and values the business is built on.

Do companies take this seriously? I have my reservations of saying yes based on what I have seen.

Changing the culture of an organization is probably the toughest thing to do in a business. There is usually resistance and change is tough to implement, most people like staying in their comfort zones. However, change management is what companies need to do to properly Indigenize their company.

Indigenous people have had to change the way they live to be part of these companies, and at some point, something must change, one way or another. Indigenous recruitment and retention numbers are usually low, as Indigenous people don't feel valued because of the systems in a company. They are opposite our worldviews and staying means changing to the values of these systems, which run counter to what we think and believe. This leaves Indigenous employees in an ethical conundrum concerning staying or leaving, do I stay where my values are not represented? Or do I leave and risk losing

my career for peace of mind?

Many people leave. Those who stay have hopes their worldviews will make it into policy in these systems. Overall, companies need to do a better job of changing their systems, policies, and procedures to reflect Indigenous worldviews, if they want to recruit and retain employees.

This is what I will address going forward with this column, Indigenous worldviews leading to change management for companies, to lead to our inclusion in these systems. I believe it is time we challenge the status quo of these companies and start seeking that our worldviews be respected, valued, and included.



In perspective

Jay Bird

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Weightlifting duo make their mark

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Two young athletes from the Lac La Ronge Indian Band are flourishing in a sport they aspire to compete in on a provincial, or even national level. But unlike many of their peers, it's not in hockey, football, or soccer that they're training for.

These provincial record-setters are dedicating themselves to weightlifting.

"It's actually a really fun sport," said Pesim Searson, 17.

"You use every single part, every muscle of your body. It's really demanding, but the more you do it, the more you see the results. And it's a sport where you can just hang out with your friends."



Weightlifters Leo Emond (left) and Pesim Searson (right) from the Lac LaRonge Indian Band prove they have what it takes to compete. They stand with the coach Mike Rogers centre during the 2023 Saskatchewan Winter Games held earlier this year. (Photo supplied)

Searson and his friend/training-partner Leo Emond, have only been training as weightlifters for less than a year, but already they're making significant waves in the sport on a provincial level.

At the 2023 Saskatchewan Winter Games, Emond earned gold in men's 89 KG weightlifting, breaking provincial records for his age group, while Searson placed third.

"Seeing their potential, there's a good chance they could be competing at a national level if they keep going at the rate they're going," said Mike Rogers, member of Lac La Ronge Indian Band, who has been coaching both Searson and Emond in weightlifting for the past few months.

"[Searson] is a very quick to learn all the proper weightlifting positions, and is very strong for his age. [Emond] is ridiculously strong, so we need to get him into the right positions. They both have their own strengths," said Rogers.

Searson began training in weightlifting after he saw a poster at his school advertising the Winter Games, which at that point had no competitors representing the north in weightlifting. So he and Emond decided to give it a try. Previously, the two had been 'powerlifting', which entails the back squat, bench press, and deadlift, as opposed to 'olympic weightlifting' which comprises of two lifts: the 'snatch' and the 'clean and jerk'.

The sport has been transformational for Searson, he says. Over a year ago, when he started going to the gym, Searson said he was 5'2" [157cm] and about 200 pounds. He quickly dropped 40 pounds after consistently working out. Now, Searson has grown to 6'1" and is 208 pounds, much of which is from building muscle mass, he said.

"Even a month ago, seeing the progress I've made. It's really nice to see," he said.

"Some days are difficult, and even if I don't feel like going to the gym, I still go because I have to stay committed, and know that any

workout is better than no workout. That's the only way to keep progressing."

Likewise for Emond, the Winter Games poster was the catalyst the brought him to weightlifting. A football player in addition to weightlifting, he said the sport has facilitated stronger mental habits, in addition to the physical aspects.

"It builds good habits. You can't slack if you want to do well. You have to put the time and effort in," said Emond.

"If I'm at the gym training, and I fail the weight, I think to myself, 'I can do this, I can fix what I need to do it'. Sometimes it takes a while to get it, but it feels good when you get there."

Weightlifting has its practical challenges as well. Without a coach in their hometown of La Ronge, Searson and Emond need to record themselves in the gym and send videos to Rogers, who is located in Saskatoon. He then sends his critiques and instructions back to the young athletes as their training,, which they do two or three times a week.

Fortunately, La Ronge has the required training facilities, but many northern communities lack the necessary facilities to training in weightlifting, while other gyms often disallow exercises where weight is dropped, said Rogers.

"Making more resources and outlets accessible for these kids who don't have access to a gym is super important," said Rogers.

He is currently trying to create more accessible exercise space for northern communities, and train more athletes from the north [he can be found at mrogers306 on instagram] so stories like that of Searson and Emond are no longer outliers.

"It's a sport I think more people should get into," said Emond. "Even at the competitions, everyone is supporting each other and wanting to hit their lifts. It really has good energy."

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Brianna LaPlante a First Nations University Fine Arts graduate and artist reveals her final creations

By Memory McLeod
for Eagle Feather News

“We are All Medicine” is the title of Brianna LaPlante’s exhibit, which tells a story of personal healing through ceremony, family ties, and deep soul searching.

She describes her processes and the meanings behind her work with humility and generosity of spirit.

“When you braid your hair, you pray and you put your heart and good thoughts into it,” said Laplante. “Same with putting good energy into your work, braiding mind, body and spirit together. It’s something physically manifested to give back. It’s about being able to share with you guys what has been handed down, given to me.”

According to Audrey Dreaver, FNUUniv Indigenous Fine Arts Program Coordinator and lecturer said the exhibits are about helping the artist share their story.

“It’s an amalgamation showcasing their process and techniques, use of terminology and artistic constructs as part of a four-year capstone class, she said.

During the exhibit, Dreaver described LaPlante’s work as having “raised the bar substantially.”

One piece made of copper had to be bolted to the wall signifying its high value gained through its conduit powers. LaPlante explained that it symbolizes how something highly valuable can come through something seemingly simple.

“I’m pitiful, all I have in this world is my prayers and my hands and my ability to make things,” said LaPlante. “The copper symbolizes a conduit for ideas, about how I comprehend my creations and how I adorn myself.”

Another piece shows three figures together in a portrait depicting

LaPlante’s grandmother, her spirit name and her inner child.

“When I’m in a hard place I think about what I want for her, one of those three,” said LaPlante. “My inner child is an important one because the other two guide and guard her but she’s the one who creates. The three together are what keep me grounded and inform my art and processes.”

Completing the collection is a series of paintings that express the artist’s ways of using her four senses to stay grounded in the moment.

Swirling, smokey gray lines outline the images signifying the smell of smudge smoke and fingers braiding hair showing the power of touch to connect. Another features fingers holding the tip of a tongue signifying taste, and thirst but also being tongue tied and measuring one’s words carefully before releasing them. One shows a large eye in the center showing how one’s vision informs who we are and the things we create. Finally one shows a face contorted in either laughter or crying symbolizing the sense of hearing.

“For me when I look at it, I hear that famous aunty laugh,” she said. “Others see pain and that’s ok because on the other side of grief is joy. Feeling the feelings as they come and letting them wash over you. That’s being in the moment and fully experiencing the range of emotion. To me that is beauty,” LaPlante said.

In attendance was Big Sisters of Regina Association volunteer Nicolle Henrion, who met

LaPlante as a bright and talented 12-year-old who always found a way to pay it forward.

“Even when I took her out to buy her something, she always gave me something back,” she said. “A drawing, a teaching. In her humbleness she always tries to do something for others. Today I see her exhibition as her giving something she loves that will hopefully bring a teaching too.”



Briana LaPlante explains the meaning behind each of her art pieces at her recent exhibit called We are all Medicine. Her artwork is currently on display at the First Nations University of Canada. (Photo by Bee Bird)



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Newly elected chief of Cowessess First Nation speaks with Eagle Feather News

By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News

Erica Beaudin has spent most of her life as an Indigenous advocate and servant of the people within the City of Regina, but after some careful thought she decided it was time to go home.

On April 24th, at approximately 8:30 p.m. Beaudin took the oath of office to become the new chief of Cowessess First Nation.

She admits it took a few days for it to fully sink in. “It wasn’t until I addressed the FHQ (File Hills Qu’Appelle Tribal Council) chiefs through Zoom and they asked me about a transition plan,” said Beaudin. “It was only then at that moment that I realized my life was going to change.”

Prior to becoming chief, she was the executive director of the Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services (RTSIS) a position she held since 2007. Under Beaudin’s leadership RTSIS went from a staff of 20 people with less than \$2 million in contribution agreements to one with 100 employees and more than \$10 million annually in contribution agreements.

Beaudin had no ambition to enter politics and was satisfied with being a helper.

“For my professional career it has been from a technical or an advocacy position or a policy technical role,” she said. “That was how I thought I was going to spend the rest of my professional life.”

However, about 18 months ago that all changed. “I had been approached several times by Cowessess community members asking me if I would consider making a change in my career and coming home,” said Beaudin. “It was very much a tough decision to make. I love the helping community of Regina. I love our organization. We have a very strong organization and from my perspective we have built the most qualified Indigenous and allied group (both) frontline

and professional people there is.” Although it’s her first political role, she has been mentored by many strong leaders such as Marie-Anne DayWalker-Pelletier who holds the title as Canada’s longest serving chief. The former chief publicly supported Beaudin’s political bid in a Facebook video post.



Chief Erica Beaudin of Cowessess First Nation has given her first media interview to Eagle Feather News. The long-time Regina advocate and former executive director of the Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services is enjoying the opportunity to work for her community. (Photo from Facebook)

“Erica has a real soft heart, a very loving and caring heart and our people need that at the chief’s level,” said DayWalker-Pelletier. “It’s not about Erica, it’s about leading the people and working for the people. Certainly, it will not go to her head, she will lead.”

Beaudin spent the first 10 days on the job meeting with her council and staff to get a better understanding of where things are as well as connecting with Cowessess members to find out what they want the leadership to focus on.

The First Nation follows its own Election Act, and it has a residency clause, which means Beaudin has moved home and she couldn’t be happier.

“I am living on our family land where my grandparents built their house and where our family has resided for generations,” she said. “It’s been an absolutely wonderful feeling to wake up on the same land that gave me so much comfort and love and joy as a child growing up.”

Beaudin is looking forward to the next four years of work.

Former Cowessess Chief Cadmus Delorme announced he was not seeking re-election in February; he was first elected in 2016. He has since been named the chair of the federal government’s new Residential School Documents Committee,

RTSIS will also be seeking a new executive director to replace Beaudin.

The official inauguration of the chief and council takes place on May 27.



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SK Voter Registration Month

Honouring matriarchs at skateboard competition

By Trish Elliott
for Eagle Feather News

Skateboarding contests are high-decibel events, featuring adrenaline-pumping music and wheels thumping onto plywood ramps.

But on April 22, Regina's normally boisterous Heritage Skatepark fell quiet as a circle of girls and women gathered around Elder and Knowledge Keeper Diane Kaiswatum of Piapot First Nation, for a pipe ceremony.

It was Elder Diane's first time to lift the pipe at a skateboard park, and she was glad to meet the young athletes and their family members.

"It's good because it's learning, it's teaching why we do the pipe ceremony," she said after the ceremony. "We're asking for prayers for everyone. In the circle our prayers are stronger."

It was the skatepark's first ceremony offered exclusively for female-identifying skaters. Elder Diane said they prayed for the safety of all the contestants -- male, female and two-spirit -- who were taking part in the Honktown Meltdown Skateboard Contest that day.

Elder Diane said one of her granddaughters has a skateboard. "It's good young women are becoming more part of sports. I see a lot of them in hockey and baseball, so we've moved into it slowly," she said.

Nine-year-old Ophelia Chapados was thrilled to be part of her first pipe ceremony. "I've only ever done smudging at school," she said.

Elder Diane's teachings were well remembered. "I learned that the feather she used is very important. I learned that when you take the pipe, you do one-two-three," Ophelia said, showing the motions for receiving a pipe. "I learned that you have to take the pipe apart before you can stand up."

But she said her biggest lesson was "that I could actually do the pipe ceremony, because I'm just nine."

Ophelia's mom, Jenni Stradeski, sat beside her daughter during the ceremony. "I am just so grateful to be welcomed into it, because I'm so interested in the culture," she said.

She's also happy her daughter has taken up a sport that requires no small

amount of courage. "It's amazing. I'm so proud of her trying new scary things," she said with a laugh.

Olivia was excited to be in the Meltdown Contest. Skateboard events are called contests, not competitions, because the point is for everyone to have fun and cheer each other on. Increasingly this includes cheering for female-identifying skaters.

"It's not just a male sport. Females can do just as good as males," Ophelia said emphatically. But when asked who her favourite skateboarder is, she named a male: "My dad."

"Dad" is David Chapados, vice-president of the Regina Skateboarding Coalition. The group has been working hard to create a space for skateboarders after their indoor facility was demolished to make way for Mosaic Stadium in 2013.

Nine years later, in March 2022, the skatepark re-opened with a two-year trial lease at the exhibition grounds. The park's grand opening included a pipe ceremony, and it was recommended one be held at least once a year, Chapados explained.

At first glance, a skatepark may seem an unusual place for ceremony. However, skateboarding's roots are in Indigenous Hawai'ian technology, art and culture, and it's become an active space for expressing Indigenous identity in Treaty 4 and globally.

Regina's skateboard community has been home to many well-known Indigenous athletes over the years, including legendary skateboarder Eddy Lugt, the flying Tapaquon brothers Jason, Sid and Mikey, and Colonialism Skateboards founder and artist Micheal Langan, to name a few.

This year's female focus was meant to reflect the changing demographic of a traditionally male-dominated sport, Chapados said. He noted girls now outnumber boys signing up for lessons.

"The demographic is changing, and we want to make the space and build on it as more women get involved," he said.

The girls are still shy at joining contests, making Ophelia a trailblazer as one of two female participants in her category, and a good example for others to follow. The day gifted her with an armload of prizes for her first-place run, a grin from ear to ear, and important teachings from an Elder.



Nine-year-old Ophelia Chapados, a young skateboarder was thrilled to participate in the women's ceremony at the Heritage Skatepark. (Photo by Trish Elliott for Eagle Feather News)

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Virtues on the Powwow Trail: Honor

By Lindell Haywehe
for Eagle Feather News

Honor. Among indigenous people, honor is a virtue that is practiced through humility, reverence and being a good relative. The dictionary defines honor as a virtue of the highest esteem or a standard code of conduct. To honor a relative, in the powwow circle, is a sign of respect for the life of the person being honored. In the repertoire of the drums, there are honor songs. Songs are composed for relatives in general, as well as specifically for an individual. This year, three families were a part of the celebration and hosted a dance special for their loved ones. Honor is the central inspiration for what each of the families did for their family member.

This year, the family of Patience Benjoe honored her by hosting a jingle dress special. In a conversation with her father, Thomas Benjoe, he spoke about what honoring our relatives while they are still here means to him. He learned what protocols to use and the importance of giving back to the community and to the powwow circle. His family has been quite involved in the powwow circle, and his children have danced since they could walk. He stated that his family has honored his daughter, Patience, when she was in Tiny Tots, and Juniors, in Teens and when she was the Princess for the Standing Buffalo First Nation. Acknowledging the milestones of his children ensures they understand and carry forth the values of humility and giving back when you have been fortunate.

The family of Kaylin “Punky” Delorme chose the First Nations University Spring Celebration to honor their daughter to honor their daughter’s transition

into the teen girls fancy dance category. Kaylin had started her powwow journey at the spring celebration when she was initiated into the powwow circle as a tiny tot. An initiation is an honoring of the new dancer into the powwow circle by dancing them in accompanied by a role model whose style they admire; in the category they have chosen. Memory Delorme-Antoine, Kaylin’s mother, says that originally, her special was going to be in 2020, but COVID caused the powwow to be cancelled and it was important to them to honor the commitment they made.

A lifetime of participating in the powwow circle and perseverance of spirit and will was the inspiration for the family of champion grassdancer, Byron Goodwill. Wawokapishni, Hard to Shoot Down, according to his wife Nellie, is a son, husband, father, uncle and grandfather whose perseverance, strength and hope that he inspired in others during his battle with cancer is the source of motivation for his family to honor his life. “Byron means everything to us, there isn’t anything we would not do for him...He has so much strength, willpower and courage. He is so inspiring and makes all our problems trivial as he fights for his life,” states his wife. She adds that they honored him because he is a figure of inspiration to all. To have grassdancers from across Turtle Island participating in the special was an honor for the family to host and demonstrate the love and support they have for Byron.

Honoring the living spirit of your relatives also provides a sense of pride in culture. Nellie Goodwill, stated it best: “The powwow circle means celebrating culture...making connections to other tribes, creating new families through adoption, creating new bonds, making lasting memories. Powwow is life.”



Byron Goodwill (left) is a lifelong champion grass dancer. Despite battling cancer he continues to be a positive influence and his family honoured him at FNUniv powwow. (Photos provided by Kirsten Goodwill)



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First Nations Power Authority leading the way and investing in the future

By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News

Tucked away in the mezzanine level at the First Nations University of Canada is a small but steadily growing company determined to help create a greener and more sustainable world for future generations.

The First Nations Power Authority (FNPA) is North America’s only non-profit entity owned and controlled by First Nation communities operating in the electricity sector to clean Canada’s electricity grid.

FNPA CEO Guy Lonechild took the helm of the organization in 2018 and since then he has seen tremendous growth and doesn’t see it slowing down any time soon.

The organization was created in 2011 by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations to create a way to include Indigenous people into the provincial economy.

“FNPA specializes in designing procurement strategies that allows for participation in power sector opportunities meaning power purchasing agreements would be entered into with industry players or with SaskPower as a vertically integrated monopoly,” said Lonechild. “We are uniquely positioned to offer to our membership base opportunities for long-term, power-purchase agreements so they benefit on a contractual basis with a Crown utility like SaskPower.”

FNPA has a 166 members in six different provinces across the country.

Originally, the entity was designed to represent the province’s 74 First Nations. However, all 74 didn’t automatically become a member of FNPA, each decided whether or not to join.

The membership growth was achieved through several different methods such as community outreach, workshops and training such as Power 101, project financing and by developing strategic partnerships with industry players among others.

Lonechild said as the world moves towards eliminating its dependence on fossil fuels there is a growing interest globally in renewable energy. Because

renewable energy like solar power, wind power and hydro power are still relatively new FNPA has become an industry expert.

“We write reports for the federal government,” said Lonechild.

Lonechild said he doesn’t miss politics because he loves his job. He knows the work being done today will benefit future generations and by getting Indigenous people involved from the start means long-term financial benefits.

“This is financial reconciliation,” he said.

In addition to promoting alternate sources of energy FNPA is also helping First Nations become more knowledgeable about energy efficiency this includes new building design, architecture, retrofitting and looking at other ways to become less reliant on energy derived from fossil fuels.

“There is an old saying, ‘the best use of a kilowatt is the kilowatt you don’t use,’ ” said Lonechild.

He said FNPA is working to educate and promote a more sustainable way to exist that causes the least amount of damage to the environment.

Lonechild credits his team for everything FNPA has accomplished thus far. He believes there is still more room for growth and FNPA needs young people to get involved especially entrepreneurs and anyone in a related field.

FNPA is hosting its annual conference on June 26th and 27th in Saskatoon. This year, FNPA will be giving out five awards that include, youth leadership, community energy champion, innovation in cleaner technology, Indigenous

allyship individual and Indigenous allyship organization.

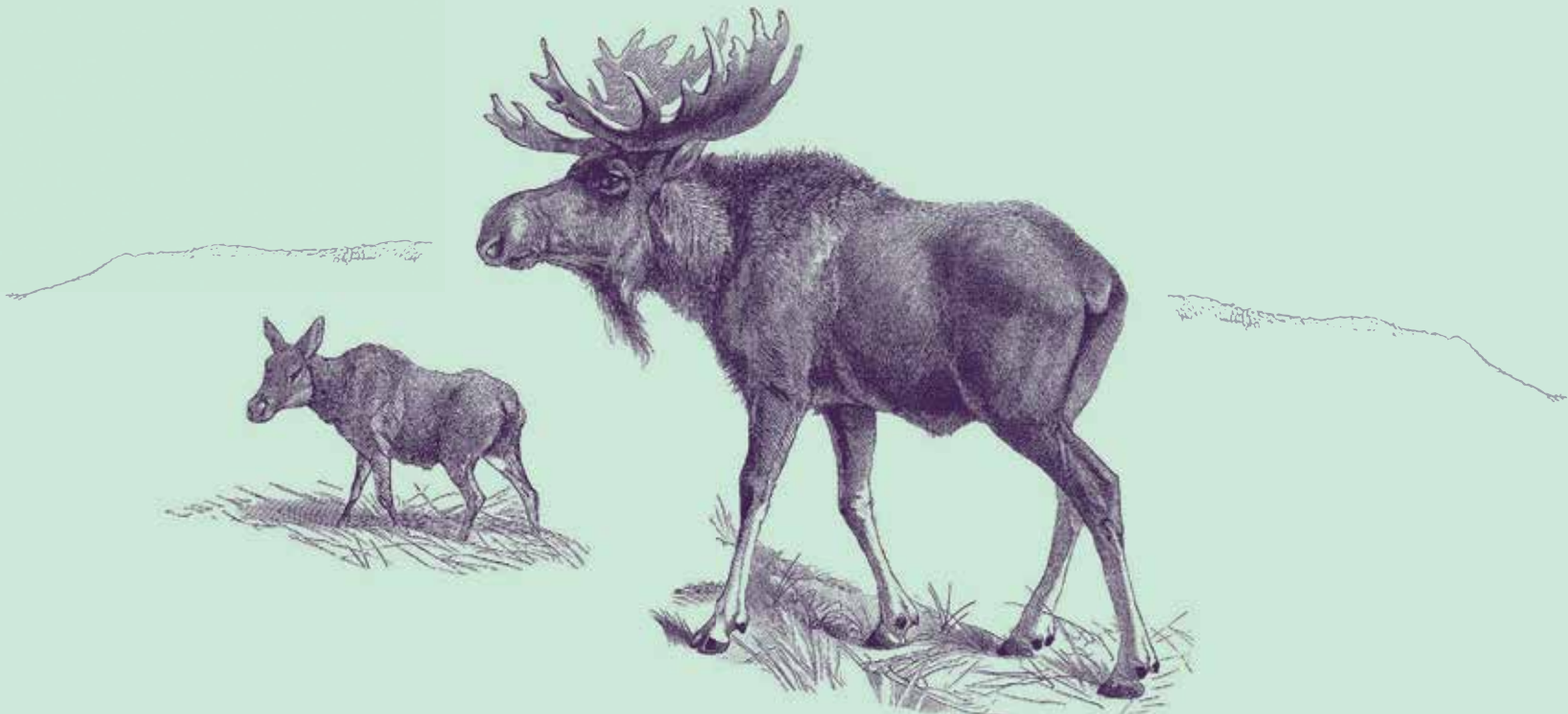
Each award recipient will receive a two-year scholarship for a master’s degree in energy security at the University of Saskatchewan. In addition, FNPA is offering five additional scholarships to the public.

Nominations for the awards will be accepted until May 30th. For more information call 1-855-359-3672.



Guy Lonechild, CEO of FNPA, holds a biodegradable globe once planted turns into flowers. The entity is focused on creating a sustainable future for everyone. (Photo supplied)

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STC’s Women Housing Facilities

By Judith Iron
for Eagle Feather News

The Saskatoon Tribal Council has opened a new facility designed to help recently incarcerated women transition back into society.

The housing facility, *îkwêskîcik iskwêwak*, which is Cree for “turning their life around”, will house and assist 18 women who have been recently released from the Pine Grove Women’s Correctional Centre.



Mayor Charlie Clark second from left and Chief Mark Arcand in headdress were on hand at the official ribbon cutting ceremony for the new housing facility in Saskatoon called, *îkwêskîcik iskwêwak*. (Photo by N.C. Raine for Eagle Feather News)

“The 18 women that will be walking through this door will have a home. They will have something they’ve never had before. They will have an opportunity to have that rehabilitation in their lives so they can have a quality of life,” said STC Chief Mark Arcand at the grand opening.

The facility, located in Pleasant Hill in Saskatoon, will offer an innovative approach to help Indigenous female offenders access holistic and culturally-informed supports they need to end the cycle of re-offending. The supports include access to mental health and addictions specialists, Elders, and safe, stable housing.

“It’s outcomes like this that are really making a difference,” said Arcand. “It’s in an area of Saskatoon that needs a bright light.”

The Saskatchewan government is investing \$3.6 million over the next three years in the project. And the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation provided \$486,000 for the construction of the housing complex.

“The significant investment from all levels of government shows true treaty relationships. That has to be the focus of what treaty means,” said Arcand.

“We don’t need to be investing in more jails. We need to do the reverse. We need to put the money in the front so it stays in the back-end,” he said.

The facility will be staffed 24 hours a day, said Arcand, and each room is furnished with its own bedroom, kitchen, and eating space.

As of Monday April 17, the facility will welcome its first six residents, and hopes to have all 18 in the facility by May 1.

“We are facing a crisis in our community when it comes to homelessness and addictions,” said Saskatoon Mayor Charlie Clark. “A big part of that is people being released from incarceration and not having housing and plans in place to help them land in the community and stabilize.”

Clark reflected on Kimberly Squirrel, a 34-year-old woman mother of six who tragically passed away in 2021, only three days after her release from Pine Grove Correctional Centre. He said programs like *îkwêskîcik iskwêwak* will help prevent these kinds of tragedies.

“It’s absolutely appalling to me that a woman would die when she’s released from prison because we didn’t care enough to provide her with the supports that she needed and, unfortunately, her case is not unique across this country,” said Pam Damoff, a Liberal MP from Ontario.

“A parole officer described it to me, like releasing people from prison and putting them on a three-legged stool and expecting them to sit. Without housing, without employment, without healing (...) we are setting these women up for failure,” she said.

Staff from *îkwêskîcik iskwêwak* and Pine Grove will assess which women meet the criteria to be placed in the home. All individuals entering the home will be screened by the province before moving into one of the suites.

Arcand said that there are already 100 women on the wait list to get into the facility from Pine Grove.



The *îkwêskîcik iskwêwak* which means ‘turning their life around’ in Cree is a housing facility for 18 women recently released from the Pine Grove Correctional Centre. (Photo supplied)



Photo: Two daughters of fishermen, Ungava. The girl on the right has been identified as Susie Sarah Eve Etok., in Kangiqsualujjuaq, George River, Quebec., between July 13-August 9, 1960. © Library and Archives Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada.

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What’s new with Eagle Feather News

By **Kerry Benjoe**
of *Eagle Feather News*

May is always a special edition because it’s our birthday, sort of, we are officially in our 26th year of consecutive publication.

This is no easy task considering everything that has happened and continues to happen in newsrooms around the country.

When I took on the role of editor, I knew it would be a tough job, but a worthwhile one and I wasn’t wrong.

Since September, I have also been working as a sessional at the First Nation’s University of Canada where I was given the opportunity to teach a print and online journalism class for the Indigenous Communication Arts (INCA) program. It has been a steep learning curve juggling two very heavy roles.

What has made teaching feel less like work is being able to provide students with an opportunity to receive their first byline.

This semester, I asked the students what they wanted to produce and they said an Arts and Lifestyles section. In this edition we will include three student features.

The INCA 291 class was diverse and included Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The one thing they all had in common was a desire to tell Indigenous stories from an Indigenous perspective. Working with

young people reminds me of when I first started out in the news business.

The enthusiasm from the students as they see their stories unfold is inspiring even for someone like me who has been in the business for more than two decades.

One of the best parts of this job thus far has been working with young writers.

In May, I will be working with another INCA intern on a different part of the news business and that is community outreach. The goal is to touch base with most if not all Indigenous and Métis communities in the province as well as create fun interactive content for our social media platforms.

In September, an intern from the University of Regina’s School of Journalism will be joining the paper for 12 weeks.

I sit here and think about the young writers interested in telling Indigenous stories and it fills me with pride. It is so very important to keep telling Indigenous stories

whether it’s for broadcast, film, print or radio.

Former INCA student Connie Walker from the Okanese First Nation is proving there is an interest in Indigenous history and Indigenous stories. When I heard she won a Pulitzer Prize and a Peabody Award for her podcast Surviving St. Michaels I shed tears of happiness. She has proven anything is possible and our stories need to be told.

Congratulations Connie and to her home community from all of us at Eagle Feather News.



Editor In-Chief
Kerry Benjoe

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The troubadour of Treaty 4

By Campbell Stevenson
for Eagle Feather News

More than a year since the release of his debut album, Aren Okemaysim has continuously tied tradition to art.

Okemaysim, also known by his stage name *okimaw▷PL°*, is a nehiyawak country/folk musician, actor and sound technician originally from Beardsy's Okemasis Cree Nation.

His upbringing was a mix of the urban setting of Saskatoon, and the rural landscape of his home reserve.

"I went to school in Saskatoon." Said Okemaysim. "I grew up in the west end there and spent a lot of time on the reserve too. I like to tell people that I've grown up in both places, a bit of both worlds."

Both places had an impact on him.

"I spent a lot of time with family and other extended family doing ceremonial practices. So that was where my land-based learning came from."



At home with *okimaw▷PL°*. (Photo provided by Aren Okemaysim)

Upon discovering music and acting, he felt a strong connection to the arts.

"Music was just kind of like one of those things that just kind of happened because other people around me were doing it." said Okemaysim.

Since he released his album, Okemaysim has only played a handful of shows.

When not working on music, he works on his other passion acting.

"Theater is a big inspiration," said Okemaysim. "A lot of the times we're lifting up images and creating something out of a script. Since I have a lot of experience with that, it just kind of comes naturally to do that with music."

Okemaysim has been a theatre actor for many years.

He's Currently featured in a play that'll run from April 12-30 in Toronto. The play, *Niizh* is directed by Desirée Leverenz and written by Joelle Peters.

"It's a coming-of-age comedy about a young woman who's going to go to school for the first time, and she's leaving the reserve." Said Okemaysim, "I play the character Jay, which is her older brother, who's stuck on the reserve. But he's really supportive and he's encouraging and kind of a goofball."

For years, he's been a sound technician and, the last couple seasons, the head of sound at the Globe Theatre.

During the pandemic, he took the opportunity to focus on his music.

"When I recorded the demo, I did everything myself in my mom's garage." Said Okemaysim.

Working in solitude influenced the music he created.

"As far as debut albums go, a lot of artists tend to write the things that they're most comfortable with and topics that they're more familiar with." Said Okemaysim.

His sound can be described as country-folk; He sings passionately about

Indigenous culture, race related issues and the prairie landscape he calls home.

During his performance at the 2023 Winterruption festival, Okemaysim often spoke in Cree because language revitalization is another one of his passions.

"When rebuilding a language that was lost, it's really important to let go of judgment and academic thought on it," Okemaysim said, adding, "to let go of that and just let yourself make mistakes and know that rebuilding a language is going to take more than a lifetime."

Although he's been working hard on writing new material, he's in no rush to release music any time soon because he's focused on building listeners.

"Right now, the writing is still kind of continuous, but I haven't quite decided when I want to record again. I just got to wait for the right window of time and just do it." said Okemaysim.



Winterruption at The Exchange. Ian Cameron (left) and Aren Okemaysim (right). (Photo by Shawn Cuthand)

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Dickie Yuzicapi indigenizes cuisine in his Sioux Chef Catering business by taking traditional food and injecting it with a modern twist

By Michelle Meeches
for Eagle Feather News

With more than 20 years of cooking experience under his belt, Yuzicapi’s has gone beyond just cooking in his kokum’s kitchen.

He has founded his own Indigenous-owned food business called Sioux Chef Catering.

Originally from the Okanese First Nation, he now lives in Regina.

Yuzicapi is recognized for his use of wild meats, and various cultural food items to recreate mouthwatering dishes.

He is also a skilled baker who has created more than 150 bannock recipes.

“So, for every kind of bread, there is out there. I have an answer for it in bannock form.”

Finding a niche in the food and hospitality sector has been a journey for Yuzicapi.

“[There’s] recognition for every culture around the world, they have their own cuisine, and [First Nations] were left out,” he said.

Being raised by his grandma and from an early age, she began teaching him the basics like how to cook soup and bannock.

He remembers those early days fondly.

“Every morning, on the wood stove there was always a big pot of soup, a big pot of tea, [and] bannock was always fresh and hot,” said Yuzicapi. “So, people come over, you know true traditional hospitality rules, sit down, shut up and eat.”

For him, it’s more than just food, “when you’re cooking, it’s all love,” said



Page 14 Caption: The Sioux Chef Dickie Yuzicapi prepares a catered lunch at a camp in the Prince Albert National Park in 2019. Since he started his business it has kept him busy. (Photo supplied)

Yuzicapi.

He keeps his grandmother’s memory alive through her recipes that he shares with extended family.

“I have a lot of nieces and nephews and adopted nieces and nephews all over North America that have taken up the job of cooking,” said Yuzicapi.

These days, the Sioux Chef re-invents traditional dishes to create combinations that other local restaurants don’t have. He has travelled to all parts of the world to gain his knowledge of cuisine.


“I use sushi, then I combine that with all our traditional foods. I actually make rice rolls with buffalo, rice rolls with smoked salmon, all that kind of stuff,” said Yuzicapi. “Squash, corn, and beans like the three sisters. I make a three sisters sushi roll. That’s the combination of bringing Japanese into our cuisine.”

Yuzicapi can be found on Facebook under Sioux Chef Catering.


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Daybird Beauty continues its lash expansion

By Jenelle Lippai
for Eagle Feather News

Nicole Daybird, founder and owner of Daybird Beauty, has continued evolving her lash business since its initial launch in November of 2020. And despite emerging amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, she says the community's positive outpour and her own knowledge on marketing had the largest impact on her success.

"It was a little scary [to start a business during a global pandemic]," Daybird confessed. "I also didn't have a background in business, but more of a background in journalism."

Though Daybird Beauty was gaining traction quickly throughout the pandemic, she knew she had to do something to set her business apart from the rest. And she did just that, by incorporating her own culture into her creations.

"I'm Cree, and I'm still learning my language," Daybird explained. "So the first collection I came out with was the Cree Collection. It has ten different lash styles, and each is named one to ten in Cree."

From pȳak to mitȳaht, she designed these 10 sets of lashes in her Cree Collection and named them using her own language. Each style of lash also differs in length and thickness, depending on the customer's personal preference.

Alongside her career as an entrepreneur, Daybird is also a full-time mother and community research coordinator in Fort Qu'Appelle. Each of these roles combined have allowed her to incorporate aspects of them all into her beauty business. She's even found ways to honour her special friendships.

"I had reached out to them [those Daybird has worked with] and asked

if I could name a pair of lashes after them," she said. "We kind of worked together to pick out their favourite style. They also gave me a quote about what resiliency means to them."

This is how Daybird Beauty's Resiliency Collection was born.

But with the successful launch of each collection and the community's ongoing praise, Daybird also acknowledges the challenges she's had to overcome. Rather than it being a deterrent, she sees it as an opportunity to make future improvements.

"I think I grew my business too fast," Daybird admitted. "It was really hard to keep up. And so over the last couple years, I would take a break for maybe two or three months."

Last summer, she even took six months away from Daybird Beauty, while continuing to sell her lashes in local beauty supply stores.

"It was too much to manage and I really wanted to take care of myself. But I don't know if that was the best move for my business, because right now it feels like I'm having to kind of rebuild it up again."

These days, in hopes of freeing up a bit more of her time, Daybird mainly focuses on her beauty business during the evenings. She's also using this time to plan a few more projects, to expand what Daybird Beauty carries.

"I have branched out into other items besides the lashes. I carry self defence keychains, but they're sold out right now. And I'm also looking to carry more beauty items and maybe even apparel."

Other salons and beauty vendors that carry Daybird's products include Miyosiwin Salon Spa and Becky's Place.



Nicole Daybird selling her products at Dakota Dunes Indigenous Market. / Nicole Daybird photo. (Photo supplied)

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