

# eaglefeathernews

Newspapers will not transmit the Coronavirus

CPMA #40027204



*By Kerry Benjoe  
of Eagle Feather News*

It's that time of year again when the writers, staff and readers decide who or what dominated the news of 2021.

This year, we decided to do something a little different and focus on stories that highlighted the past, present and future.

Buddah once said, "Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon and the truth."

This became abundantly clear over the summer when the truth about residential schools was unearthed.

For decades, survivors of Indian Residential Schools have told stories of horrific abuse, but the most sinister has been the accounts of the children who just disappeared while at the school.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission doc-

umented many survivor stories and in its 94 Calls to Action, Calls 71 through 76 deal specifically with missing children and burial information. However, those calls were not answered until the truth could no longer be hidden.

In May, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced the discovery of 215 unmarked graves at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

The news shocked the world except for residential school survivors and their descendants.

The TRC report documented over 3,000 deaths at residential schools according to survivor accounts and archival history but added the death toll was likely much higher.

The many now-discovered unmarked graves and the children who didn't return home from residential school are this year's first newsmaker of the year.

*continued page 2 ...*



JOHN LAGIMODIERE

## Passing the Torch

*"We knew people read the paper but did not quite understand the long roots it had. The pressure then grew to ensure that the paper would go on. Fortunately, the people on the next page to your right all stepped up and said they wanted to continue the legacy..."* - page 4

December 2021 is our

## News maker of the Year

January 2022 Issue:  
Looking Forward: 2022



## CONNOR STANDINGREADY Chase Your Dreams

*"I think it's okay not to know all the answers. But I think in your life, you've been given something that you're passionate about, I think you have to follow that and work at it because that's your way out of the darkness."*

- page 14



## TESSA GENEREAUX Running for Honour

*"Running through the harsh winter conditions had me thinking of the struggles of weather that our veterans would have endured and having to put up with the harsh weather and physical effort made me appreciate their sacrifice even more."*

- page 17

# Newsmakers of the past, present and future

... continued from page 1

Canada operated over 300 Indian Residential Schools for more than a century and the discovery in Kamloops was only the beginning. The number of unmarked graves will take years to determine.

The public outcry after the discovery was loud and leaders responded quickly by declaring September 30 the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Throughout the summer, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people supported the Every Child Matters movement by wearing orange T-shirts.

In lieu of the usual Canada Day festivities, a Day of Mourning was held to honour the children.

Sadly, the names of many of the children may never be known because the records were destroyed or the deaths never documented. At the height of the residential school era, many of the institutions were overcrowded, it was not uncommon to ship children to other provinces and often the children's traditional names were anglicized by school officials.

It is believed that 150,000 children attended the more than 300 federally funded residential schools throughout Canada.

However, work is underway to identify as many children as possible and return them to their communities.

Many of the ceremonies the children were denied are now able to happen.

Most importantly, they are no longer the forgotten children.

Since Kamloops, several residential school sites in the province have also been searched using ground penetrating radar.

This includes the Marieval Indian Residential School site on the Cowessess First Nation, where more than 750 unmarked graves were discovered.



**Cowessess First Nation Chief Cadmus Delorme welcomed Premier Moe and Prime Minister Trudeau to the site of the graves at Marieval Indian Residential School. (Photo supplied)**

This attracted international attention for weeks, which brings us to our present-day newsmaker of the year – Chief Cadmus Delorme.

When Cowessess First Nation was thrown into the spotlight, he rose to the occasion.

Delorme fielded the tough questions and although he never attended a residential school, he had family members who did.

The discovery triggered old memories and many members of his First Nation were impacted.



**Bella Kulak wears her ribbon skirt proudly and encourages others to do the same. (Photo by Gerri Leigh Kulak)**

The Marieval Indian Residential school opened in 1899 and closed in 1997. Delorme spoke about the intergenerational trauma residential schools caused and continue to have on families.

While he had the attention of the world, Delorme used it to do what he could for survivors. He called for an investigation into allegations of child abuse at residential schools, he called for the release of all residential school records from the church, and he called for an apology from Pope Francis for the role the Catholic church played in the creation of residential schools.

Delorme is a strong advocate for residential school survivors and the need to right the wrongs of the past.

I've spoken to many Marieval residential school survivors including Phyllis Kretschmer who commended Delorme for being such a strong voice for them.

She said leaders like Delorme leave her feeling hopeful because he is bright, eloquent, and fearless.

The future remains bright for Indigenous people especially when there are young leaders like Isabella Kulak.

In January, the 10-year-old from the Cote First Nation, who attended Kam-sack School, made headlines when her story broke. Isabella had chosen to wear her prettiest ribbon skirt to the school formal and was told by a staff member her attire was not formal wear.

Initially, she was dismayed by the criticism.

However, Isabella decided to take a stand and with the help of her family amassed a large group of supporters.

She addressed the media and talked about the incident, but also spoke about the importance of culture.

Isabella's story reached people around the world, and it sparked a conversation about the significance of clothing among Indigenous people.

The school did apologize to Isabella and her family.

Her parents suggested one good way to raise awareness about Indigenous clothing was to hold a ribbon skirt and shirt day every year, possibly on Jan. 4th, which is an idea the school did not oppose.

*Christmas*

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# Three Kohkoms return for Rez Christmas

By *Andréa Ledding*  
for *Eagle Feather News*

The three kohkoms of Keewitinohk are back this December with more hilarity, thanks to Gordon Tootoosis Nikaniwin Theatre's annual Rez Christmas production, written by Curtis Peeteetuce.

"This play is called Mekiwin - the Gift," explains Peeteetuce. "One of the themes is loneliness and being an Elder, that's what I wanted to try and incorporate into this play."

Peeteetuce has written nine other plays in the series - he always begins with the title, but says nobody ever remembers the titles. One of the things he loves is people will say, "the play where," and describe a moment that touched them or made them laugh: the plays are known for both.

"People can look forward to the Cree Kohkoms Three as superheroes in this play," Peeteetuce said, adding the characters begin to write themselves. "Like one year I watched one of the plays and Sihkos said something about the youth of today, and I went wow she's starting to write her own lines all of a sudden!"

Claire, Zula and Sihkos are the three kohkoms, and originally were played by men - but this year Wanita Singing Bird and Aaron-Marie Nepoose play Sihkos and Zula, while Dalton Lightfoot cross-dresses as Claire. Shawn Cuthand rounds out the cast: characters play multiple roles, requiring lightning-fast costume changes.

"I think what I really love too is they are stories of here - these are not stories that come from any part of Canada or Europe or classical mainstream theatre - they are Cree stories right here in our homelands and that belly laughter is such good medicine," Peeteetuce said, adding that places like Little Pine and northern communities have begun to stage the plays, and he is glad to freely provide the scripts. "I want to see more of that. Let's get these stories out there! I want these stories from here to continue to be performed here, by other communities around here."

Last year the theatre company created a YouTube kohkom channel when there

was no live theatre. This year marks 20 years of the kohkoms.

Peeteetuce says he also has firm script ideas for plays 11 and 12, but has yet to write them.

"There's a path, there's a journey, and what will be fun is to have the Twelve Plays of Christmas," Peeteetuce says. He has, for now, retired from directing and acting because he is currently a student support worker at E.D. Feehan, which he loves.

"I have 20 years of stage experience and work to help me do that. The first focus is work, but the seed is there."

Director Danny Knight says the cast is amazing and has much to offer. Shawn Cuthand, who is relatively new to performing as an actor, brings stand-up comedian experience.

"I've been a fan of the GTNT plays for many years but this is the first time I've been involved," Cuthand said. "This is my first foray into theatre. I'm really excited to get this show in front of audiences."

Dalton Lightfoot says this is his fifth year with the GTNT Christmas show and has never done the same show twice.

"It's really cool to be able to relive these characters and build on them, but put them in different situations," Lightfoot says, adding he just builds upon what he has learned. "Claire has different motivations in this play, it's really fun and interesting to portray these characters in a different setting and in a different place than they previously were in other plays."

Nepoose loves seeing theatres open again. This is her third GTNT Christmas show.

"Having this script coming alive to us is a magical experience," Nepoose said. "I played Zula in the first show I was in... she's very challenging, but I'm the oldest of the kohkoms so I get to have more leeway and fun, and how cranky I can be. It's fun to play a grumpy person."

Bird echoes how much fun being in the play is, and says audiences can expect to have to wear Depends, they'll be laughing so hard.

The play runs December 15th to 19th at the Broadway Theatre, with matinees, school and evening shows.



**The actors for this years GTNT Rez Christmas play Mekiwin: The Gift are in front, Wanita Singing Bird and back row from left Aaron-Marie Nepoose, Shawn Cuthand and Dalton Lightfoot. (Photo by Liam Scramstad)**

*mino nakatawēnim  
kahkinow tapinohcimak  
śikwa kinapēm minwēntam*

(Saulteaux Language - take care of yourself, your family, and be happy)



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from the Leadership and Staff of the  
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## Well, I received my Christmas gift a bit early this year.

We finally made the decision to change career paths and move on from the paper in the summer and made it public in the September edition. This was a tough decision arrived at over several years of wavering debate. Once the decision was made, the pressure lifted a bit, but our biggest concern was to keep this entity, good old Eagle Feather News, going somehow.

Well, within a day of the paper going out, we had excellent response and a bit of shock to be honest. The shock came from folks who couldn't believe that the paper would go away. They looked forward to the monthly issue pick up at the gas bar or library or at the school. Folks told us about their EFN habit, loving the stories celebrating the success and awesomeness of people and events in the Indigenous community. Or tuning in every morning to see what was new on the website or searching the website for events or even way back into the archives.

We knew people read the paper but did not quite understand the long roots it had. The pressure then grew to ensure that the paper would go on. Fortunately, the people on the next page to your right all stepped up and said they wanted to continue the legacy. We couldn't believe our good fortune.

Over the years, we had built personal and professional relationships with Ben, Melody, Errol and Kerry. And in that time had grown to respect their abilities. When they all had a meeting and agreed they had shared vision and passion for the paper, what it does and can do into the future, the conversations switched from could we, to how do we transition to keep EFN serving the community. And tadda! Eagle Feather Media takes over January 1, 2022. A young, energetic and talented team that will take this media outlet to new heights.

What a relief. Seriously. I figured giving over the paper would be business as usual. Just a simple business transaction, hand it off and away we

go. But I tell ya when I read the press release the new team wrote, I wept. A deep twenty-minute cry of sadness, joy, stress and then relief. Turns out after an almost 25-year career, you hold some things close. I think the tears was all of that coming out in a rush. And ya know, I felt great after it.

I realized by letting it go, I was doing what was right for me and my family and for Eagle Feather News. Let it go and let it grow. And with the new team, we couldn't be happier or more confident on the future of EFN. And that's good news for the community and our loyal readers who cut out those stories of success of their relatives or a kid who is inspired by an article, or one of those folks who reads this paper cover to cover each month like my uncle Raymond. We look forward to contributing to the 25th anniversary edition in March but are happy and ready for some much needed rest and change.

Funny story. We had been talking about getting out of the paper for years and during a trip to Japan to see family in 2018, were gifted a Daruma Doll by my cousin Marc and his wife Eriko. When gifted, the figure's eyes are both blank white. You then select a goal or wish for the year and paint in the left eye of the figure's two eyes with Chinese or Japanese ink. Once the desired goal is achieved, the right eye is filled in. It is a Buddhist thing. Our goal was to deal with the paper and have a plan to get out before the end of 2018. Well, that little dude sat on my bookshelf, looking at me out of that one eye, guilting me for over three years. Well, silly me, I coloured in the right eye first. Eeeks! Cultural protocol out the window. Maybe that's why it took us three years.

Anyhow, come January 1st, I'm colouring in that other eye. Merry Christmas everyone. All the best in 2022.  
John Lagimodiere



**This Daruma Doll has been waiting for me to make a decision for three years.**  
(Photo by John Lagimodiere)



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PUBLISHER / EDITOR: John Lagimodiere, john@eaglefeathernews.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Betty Ann Adam, bettyannadam@eaglefeathernews.com

SOCIAL / DIGITAL MEDIA : Errol Sutherland, errol@eaglefeathernews.com

GENERAL INQUIRIES: contact@eaglefeathernews.com

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Written by CURTIS PEETEETUCE

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## The Eagle has landed. A new team has been assembled for EFN

By Kerry Benjoe  
of Eagle Feather News

For almost a quarter century, John Lagimodiere has been not only the face of Eagle Feather News (EFN), but also its backbone.

Many were shocked to hear of the publisher's intention to end his reign as the head of the longest-running Indigenous newspaper in the province, no easy task given the plight of the newspaper business.



**Kerry Benjoe. (Photo supplied)**

At one time, there were other Indigenous newspapers, but all have ceased to exist except for the PAGC Tribune.

Although John knew his time was over with the paper, he knew the people of Saskatchewan were not ready to let EFN go.

"My biggest concern when we made the decision was (wondering) if the paper would continue," said John. "It was a very difficult decision, but it happened over a few years of conversations with my wife and partner Dee."

As the years passed, the writing was on the wall.

"I had run out of energy the last few years, but we understood the importance of what we did, so we kept going," he said. "But I wasn't happy."

The newspaper became increasingly more cumbersome, especially with his consulting business.

"The paper had to go or grow, and I didn't have the energy to grow it," said John.

In September, he announced his plan to step away from the paper effective January 2022.

Although people were concerned the paper would fold, he promised not to let it happen and true to his word he assembled a four-member team to fill his shoes.

Kerry Benjoe, CBC Saskatchewan's former Indigenous Storyteller, Errol Sutherland, a digital marketing consultant who works closely with EFN along with Ben Borne and Melody Lynch, co-founders of SymmetryPR, will all hold a stake in a new, majority

Indigenous-owned company based on Treaty 6 Territory and homeland of the Métis – Eagle Feather Media Inc.

The new corporation will assume ownership of the community newspaper in January 2022, and will continue to operate it as Eagle Feather News.

"When we received responses from the four people who are now taking over, I was thrilled," Lagimodiere said. "Ben and Melody are incredible professionals, the paper has a great history working with Errol and I'm happy to see him still involved, and to add in Kerry, who got her start with us in 2002, I know the paper is in great hands. I trust that the new group is going to make it soar, while I take more time to spend with my family."

Ben was one of the first people to contact John about EFN because he is a long-time supporter of the newspaper.

"I first entertained the idea of taking on EFN a few years ago, but the time wasn't right because I wasn't confident in my ability to run a business," he said.

However, after leaving his corporate job and co-founding his own company Ben knows he has the ability and the drive to take on the role of being a publisher and advertiser in the digital era, which EFN needs to do to stay in the news business.

"I'm not afraid to dream big," said Ben. "As an Indigenous-owned media company, I believe we are first and foremost storytellers who connect people to ideas, information and ultimately each other. As we look ahead for our business, I believe this can take place through many different mediums while still maintaining the spirit of the publication."

Ben knows EFN is important to many communities because it's a source of connection to the broader Indigenous story unfolding in Saskatchewan.

"We are committed to the legacy of the publication, but also growing all the potential it holds," he said. "We invite people to continue to contribute,



**Melody Lynch. (Photo supplied)**

subscribe and even advertise. Your support means we can keep doing what Eagle Feather News does best - telling Indigenous stories that make a difference."

John will continue to advise Eagle Feather Media during the ownership transfer starting this month until March, which coincides with the publication's 25th anniversary.

"I hope the paper continues to serve the community forever in one form or another," he said. "Build Indigenous journalists, tell our stories from our perspective and celebrate the good stuff we have going on."

Although he is retiring from the news-

paper business, he will continue to operate ACS Aboriginal Consulting Services.

As the new managing editor, I cannot thank John enough for trusting me to continue the legacy of storytelling that he started.

I am equally honoured to be part of an amazing team that's committed to not only maintaining EFN but to growing it. Like Ben, I want to encourage everyone to continue to support EFN because we plan to continue to be a reliable news source that highlights real stories from the Indigenous community through a variety of different mediums that have yet to be determined.



**Errol Sutherland. (Photo supplied)**



**Ben Borne. (Photo supplied)**

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## Two spirit couple's surrogacy journey filled with love

By Betty Ann Adam  
of Eagle Feather News

When Archer Vermette was born to Matt and Sam Vermette on October 20, he was the realization of a treasured dream and the gift of a team effort.

The two-spirit couple says their whole family were strong team members.

Matt Vermette, from a Métis family with roots in Prince Albert, St. Laurent and Duck Lake, and husband, Sam (nee Hadden), from Northern Ireland, got together 12 years ago.

They talked about having kids, but when they came out, it didn't seem to be an option, they said.

Matt's family has always been supportive. When they were married earlier this year, Sam took the Vermette name.

The pair love children and became "automatic godparents" to their friends and family members 10 times.

They came close to adopting a baby once but that fell through. It was a difficult time and they stepped back from trying for a few years.

When Matt's sister, Colby, had a son, now 6, and then twins, the couple became a big part of the children's lives.

"I think that really spearheaded us feeling like we would be great parents and really wanted to do that journey," Sam said.

Matt's parents, Perry and Wendy, sat them down and started a discussion about surrogacy and offered to help pay for the process. It has cost about \$80,000.

"They really wanted us to have a family. Being in a Métis family, a really big family, they figured it was something we would really enjoy. They were our biggest advocates," Sam said.

Colby told them she had intended to carry a baby for them, but having recently birthed twins, "the shop (was) permanently closed," she said.

She did, however, promise to donate all the eggs they needed to conceive in vitro.

That meant the baby could be genetically related to both dads. She was the perfect donor.

Colby made the donation at Aurora Reproductive Care clinic in Saskatoon, which used Sam's sperm to make four healthy embryos in August 2019.

"When they sent us pictures of the four embryos... that felt like something. We had done the first crucial step... It was really, really exciting for us," Matt said.

With the embryos safely frozen, the Vermettes had about 10 years to find a gestational carrier.

They signed with the Anu Fertility surrogacy agency in Alberta, creating an online profile for a database with "hundreds and hundreds" of other people.

They spent almost a year getting to know a woman they were matched with, but that journey ended amicably without a transplant.

It was disappointing but they soon got word that a woman from Moose Jaw had picked them.

She had children of her own and had borne one as a surrogate.

They met in October 2020 and were comforted by her experience and knowledge of her body in pregnancy.

"We learned through this process what a miracle life actually is. You never think about all the things that have to be aligned for a baby to actually happen," Matt said.

The transplant happened without a hitch in February 2021.

Ultrasound technicians were taken with their story and helped both dads experience the moving imaging by having them take turns in the room or by using Facetime video so they could experience it together.

In the summer, the surrogate and her children went camping with the Vermettes, giving the dads-to-be extended time with her, getting to see the baby moving and being part of things dads are usually part of when they're home with their pregnant partner.

When the time came, they had an LGBT doula, who made sure both dads could be in the birthing room, where the labour and delivery were remarkably swift.

She ensured the dads got to hold baby in the minutes after birth and the hospital gave them a family room, where they stayed together in private for the first days of Archer's life.

They have built a strong bond with the surrogate and her family they say will last a lifetime.

"It takes a special person to be a surrogate, to want to do that for someone else. It's such a selfless thing," Sam said.

"She wanted to see people, who wouldn't otherwise be a family, be able



**Matt and Sam Vermette (L to R) with son Archer October 20, 2021 (Photo submitted)**

to become a family," Matt said.

"It was a complete honour to go through the process with her. She changed our lives, our whole family and brought such joy. It really is the best thing in the world." Matt said.

"The love we feel for him - it just takes one look from him to make our little hearts melt," Sam said.

**Merry Christmas!**

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# Trans identity explored in Christmas play

By *Andréa Ledding*  
for *Eagle Feather News*

A new Christmas play, *Fruitcake*, by Heather Morrison will be “so meaningful to so many people for so many reasons,” says actor Deneh’Cho Thompson.

He’s excited that his first experience on a Saskatchewan stage will be in the play’s premiere at Persephone Theatre BackStage in Saskatoon this month.

*Fruitcake* is a holiday comedy that explores the coming out of a young trans character while the whole family deals with the loss of their matriarch and what



**Lenore Claire Herrem (she/her) plays Katie, Deneh’Cho Thompson (he/him or they/them) plays Brad in the premiere of *Fruitcake* by local playwright Heather Morrison. (Photo provided by 25th Street Theatre)**

to do with her 137-year-old fruitcake.

“It really is the classic family Christmas romp: there’s lots of comedy, lots of fights and broken Christmas ornaments...what family show isn’t complete without a crying baby?” Thompson said. “But it really dives into identity, specifically trans identity, in a really meaningful way.”

Thompson, who teaches at the wîcêhtowin Indigenous Theatre Program at the University of Saskatchewan, says it’s great for trans stories with trans bodies to be on a theatre stage.

“Indigenous theatre has gone through that kicking-down doors kind of stage, so speaking for myself and (fellow player) Bruce Sinclair, it’s great as Indigenous artists to go in, not just showcasing Indigenous pain and identity, but supporting other artists in their identity, and the work they have to do.”

Thompson’s character isn’t specifically written as Indigenous, so it’s positive for him and Sinclair to play Indigenous characters without racial identity being the main focus and, instead, supporting the showcasing of a trans story, he said.

“There was a lot of thought about who was in the room. As Indigenous artists we have a particular experience that provides us a context for allyship for our trans compatriots, but it’s really nice to just have an Indigenous body on stage and they don’t have to be Indigenous - they just are. And that kind of representation is really radical still, unfortunately, but hopefully becoming more and more common.”

Thompson said he feels very much at home in the good and bad moments of the play and thinks the audience will relate to this world which is, “very prairies,” from the set itself, to the characters, to the traditions and the stories being told.

“I’m excited about the turkey - but that’s all I can say. And I managed to assemble an entire Christmas tree in less than a scene,” he said, adding that Morrison’s script is amazing and funny while exploring serious themes.

“There is an educational aspect it, so people will be more exposed to trans stories and trans terminology, and what micro-aggressions look like...but they’re also going to have a great time. Fantastic acting, great jokes, and at least one stage fight - and the decor, I think, will speak to a lot of people.”

There are six actors in the cast, who are directed by S.E. Grummett. *Fruitcake* runs at Persephone Theatre BackStage December 8th to 19th.

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## Indigenous community gives Canada Post a stamp of approval

By EFN Staff  
of Eagle Feather News

What does Buffy Sainte-Marie have in common with politicians, royalty and athletes?

The living legend is the newest Canadian to be immortalized by Canada Post and many are giving the move their stamp of approval.

A special ceremony was held in Ottawa on Nov. 18 at the National Arts Centre to unveil the image that will be featured on the new stamp.

The world-renowned singer, songwriter, artist and advocate, known to many by a single moniker, began her music career in the 1960s. Buffy soon made a name for herself and used her platform to raise awareness about important political and social issues.

Although not much is known about her early beginnings, it's believed she was born on the Piapot First Nation in February 1941. However, she was adopted by a non-Indigenous couple and raised in New England.

"Not only are we proud of Buffy's amazing accomplishments, but we are also so proud to have one of our own honoured in this way," said Chief Mark Fox of Piapot First Nation.

He said Buffy has made efforts to keep the connection to her home community alive with frequent visits.

"As her career progressed, she always remembered her roots and where she came from," said Fox.

Buffy returns to Piapot for ceremony or if she just happens to be nearby, he said.

Although her career spans six decades, the 80-year-old remains an active performer and is currently on tour.

"Throughout the years she has connected with many friends and relatives and has always thought of us when she worked on projects," said Fox. "In 2018, she per-

formed at Chief Payepot School along with 11 Regina Symphony Orchestra players during its Truth and Reconciliation Outreach Tour. She ended up staying afterwards to watch the talent show and interact with the students."

Despite her fame, she has never forgotten her roots and the community appreciates her for it.

Fox is not the only local who is beaming with pride over the new stamp.

Blair Stonechild, professor of Indigenous Studies at First Nations University of Canada, who penned Buffy's biography titled, *It's My Way*, is equally excited.

"Buffy is not only a pioneer of Indigenous music but a musical icon," he said in an email statement. "Her creative work and tireless advocacy for our people makes her certainly worthy of recognition via being on a stamp."

Buffy's song-writing is legendary and many of her songs have been covered by the likes of Elvis Presley, Neil Diamond, Barbra Streisand, Cher and Céline Dion.

Like any true fan, Stonechild said he has already purchased a pack of the stamps.

Buffy is not the first Indigenous person to be honoured with a stamp.

Other Indigenous people to appear on a Canada Post stamp since Confederation include: Pitseoluk Ashoona, Molly Brant, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Emily Pauline-Johnson, Kateri Takakwitha, Crowfoot, Gabriel Dumont, Chief Dan George, Tom Longboat, Matonabee, Louis Riel, Robbie Robertson, and Tecumseh.

The stamp features a photograph by Simon Fowler, which appeared on the cover of her single "The Big Ones Get Away" from her 1992 album *Coincidence and Likely Stories*.

The stamps and collectibles are available at [canadapost.ca](http://canadapost.ca) and post offices across Canada.



**The stamp is a cover image from Buffy Sainte-Marie's single "The Big Ones Get Away." (Photo Canada Post)**

## COVID-19 vaccines are now available for children aged five to 11.

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## Two-spirit artist wins Best Actress at the American Indian Film Festival

By Rose Mansbridge-Goldie  
of Eagle Feather News

Dakota Ray Hebert, a Dene, two-spirit performance artist from Meadow Lake, has won Best Actress at this year's American Indian Film Festival (AIFF) for her role in *Run Woman Run*.

"(To win this award) for my first movie feels really good, sort of this outside validation I didn't know I needed," Hebert said.

A self-proclaimed "drama geek," Hebert was in school plays throughout elementary and high school, where they found encouragement to pursue performance art.

This brought them, at 19, to Regina's Globe Theatre for training in 2012.

"I was the first Indigenous student at Globe Theatre's conservatory program—I almost quit because it was very intimidating and it was very hard," Hebert said.

After completing the program, Hebert continued to pursue their passions.

In 2016, they ended up "by accident" at the Centre for Indigenous Theatre (CIT) in Ontario, a post-secondary school in Ontario.

"I was living in Toronto that summer because I was pursuing stand-up. I had no money, nothing to my name. I was floundering," Hebert said.

She got a job with CIT driving a group of theatre students to Peterborough.

"I was planning to head straight back to Toronto after dropping them off but they had me sit with them, have some soup and visit," Hebert said.

They ended up being offered a position in the program.

"I didn't know how I was going to eat, how I was going to live (back in Toronto) and they had room and board for me and this wonderful theatre program with

other Indigenous theatre students," Hebert said.

"It was so incredible because not only was I able to learn more about theatre, but in an Indigenous setting."

A few years later Hebert was cast in their first feature film.

*Run Woman Run* stars Hebert as Beck, a woman who, after losing her mother, struggles with her own well-being. After a health scare of her own, Beck (Hebert) decides to reclaim her family, health and culture by training to run a marathon with the ghost of renowned Onondaga marathoner, Tom Longboat.

Hebert had some things in common with their character, which they said made it feel motivating to, "be in Beck's cros." "When I was 20, I ate like absolute crap, which I think most people do, living on their own for the first time," Hebert said.

"It was two years of eating Wendy's and Doritos every day that caught up to me and I was severely anemic, to the point where I had to take supplements and iron pills for a year before my iron stores were up because I had been leaching out of my bone marrow. Beck felt like a version of me if I hadn't gone to the doctor, if I didn't take care of myself," Hebert said.

Being two-spirit, Hebert said the word "actress" hasn't bothered them, but it is "food for thought."

They gave birth to a boy in early November, 2021, shortly after learning about the award.

"Right now I'm feeling very femme presenting so (the term) actress is not a big deal," Hebert said.

"But it felt weird being very pregnant, but also feeling very masculine. On those days, I can think about how...being called

"actress" (would feel)".

Hebert is currently working on film proposals of their own, and plans to record their first comedy album this April.

*Run Woman Run* will be available in select theatres mid-February.



**Dakota Ray Hebert (left) and Lorne Cardinal (right) on set for *Run Woman Run*. Cardinal plays Len, Beck's (Hebert) father. (Photo supplied by Dakota Ray Hebert)**

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## Red Pheasant member Baptiste performs with Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra

By *Andréa Ledding*  
for *Eagle Feather News*

Falynn Baptiste, of Red Pheasant First Nation, took her language on stage with the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra (SSO), singing traditional Christmas carols in Cree and English.

The concert, under guest conductor Maria Fuller, at TCU Place on December 4th, came about after Baptiste caught the attention of SSO Executive Director Mark Turner, when she released her album, *A Cree Christmas*, in 2020.

"The SSO loves highlighting local artists and it was clear Falynn was the perfect fit," Turner said. "Her voice is beautiful and it's so moving to hear Christmas carols in a new way."

Baptiste, a teacher at E.D. Feehan high school in Saskatoon, is also releasing a new single, *Little Drummer Boy*, this month.

"I've always enjoyed sharing music...there's the vulnerability of being on stage, sharing an organic sound, it's so short but that moment's really enjoyable - connecting to the listeners, and just being in a moment of beauty," she said.

Raised on Red Pheasant First Nation in a Cree-speaking home, Baptiste lost touch with her Cree and Métis roots as she grew older, but music and studying at university to become a Cree language teacher reconnected her.

Baptiste says there's a power that comes from hearing songs we all know sung in the language of the ancestors.

Passionate about preserving Indigenous languages, she instructs students in Cree but also tries to incorporate language in every class she teaches; she has also taught elementary students at St. Francis Cree Immersion.

"My dad was a musician, my kohkom was a singer in ceremony, my family members were part of a pow-wow singing group, so singing has always been a part of my family," Baptiste said.

Even as a toddler her mother called her "La-La" because she was always singing.

She studied music theory and singing lessons as a child, studying classical music, and began performing as a teenager.

Baptiste says she is a more confident performer now in her mid-30s, appreciative of the opportunity to share music and language with a wider audience, something she always dreamed of.

She grew up following Cree ceremony and singing Cree hymn translations in church, where she learned to read Cree. She began by performing "Amazing Grace" in Cree at age 12, and progressed to singing the national anthem in Cree. One of her first public performances was at the Olympic Torch Relay.

"It's the power of the language. If you speak to any Elder or any language keeper, they will connect you to the Indigenous ways of knowing that tells us that the language is directly tied to who we are as nehiyawak. It's tied to our spirit and our soul, so when people hear the language sung in a contemporary setting, there's just this connection, you don't have to know the language to have a connection to it - it runs in our blood, it's who we are.

"A spiritual awakening happens when we hear our language sung."

Baptiste says language is central to restoring pride in identity, culture and worldview, while also helping bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in a way that brings about reconciliation.

"That's what we're trying to achieve, a world that is fair and equitable and welcoming and sharing of all nations, regardless of where you come from," she said.

"Maybe somehow they take part in creating space for the language in their schools, within their organizations, within their world... language is really important and it will take those alliances, that allyship, partnership and togetherness to keep our languages alive forever, for generations to come."

Baptiste's music can be found on Spotify, iTunes, YouTube or her website [www.falynn baptiste.com](http://www.falynn baptiste.com)



**To kick off the Christmas season, Falynn Baptiste performed Christmas carols in Cree and English during a stunning concert with the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra. (Photo by Julie Isaac Photography)**

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# Regina salon owner recognized for Indigenous business impact

By Rose Mansbridge-Goldie  
of Eagle Feather News

Destinee Peter was only 22 when she bought Tangles Hair Salon in Regina and eight years later has been recognized for “excellence and outstanding impact in Indigenous entrepreneurship.”

Peter won the Up and Comer Award at the inaugural Indigenous Entrepreneurship Awards, sponsored by PowWow Pitch, an Indigenous entrepreneur-supporting organization based in Kiti-gan Zibi Anishinabeg in Quebec.

“I kind of knew I always wanted to be a hair-stylist,” Peter said.

As a kid Peter loved braiding and remembers all of the hair shenanigans that went on in her home growing up.

“When I think back, everything was braided: my blankets, my mom’s curtains, my sister’s hair was always cut, the floors and the tub were colored in hair dye.

“I was always in trouble,” she laughs.

Peter began working as a hairstylist at Tangles after finishing cosmetology at Avant-Garde Beauty College. Three years into working at Tangles, the owner asked Peter if she’d be interested in purchasing the salon.

“I was about to start another job somewhere else because the salon was closing,” she said.

“The owner approached me and asked if I wanted to purchase Tangles since I was the busiest stylist there at the time.”

“It was so nerve wracking. I was super hesitant

and scared to take on that role because I didn’t know anything about owning a business or running a salon,” she said.

Despite her doubts, Peter purchased Tangles in October 2013 and has since expanded it to a full-service salon, offering hair, skin care, make-up, waxing, and lasering services.

Peter was supported by her parents, who are business owners, and the group Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan (WESK), taking classes to learn about business ownership.

Peter currently has six staff, four of whom are Indigenous.

“I had no staff at the start, so I built the team, I rebranded Tangles, I remodeled the whole salon and made it the way I wanted the salon to be,” Peter said.

Her pride and knowledge of her Indigenous culture are a backbone in the warm, thoughtful environment. The salon recognizes the sacredness of haircuts and clients have the option to take their hair home with them.

“To use my platform to share and teach my culture is important to me. Winning this award validates my hard work in overcoming obstacles, recognizes my team and their commitment and shows us that we are on the right track.”

Outside of the salon, Peter is an active member of her community, speaking at career fairs and giving haircuts to students.

Before the pandemic, Peter offered cosmetology classes in her home community of Carry the Kettle Nakota Nation and hopes that can continue in the future.



**Destinee Peter, owner of Tangles Hair & Beauty Salon in Regina, won the Up and Comer Award at the inaugural Indigenous Entrepreneurs Awards this year. She bought the salon when she was 22 and has provided a warm, welcoming environment for all of their clients for eight years. (Photo supplied)**

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## Blindness didn't stop StandingReady from legal career dream

By NC Raine  
for Eagle Feather News

When Connor StandingReady is admitted to the Saskatchewan Bar, he will make history as the first lawyer from White Bear First Nation.

He will also be realizing the dream of his parents and grandparents to have lawyer in the family.

But the accomplishments are even more significant because StandingReady is legally blind.

"I'm a big believer that if you set your mind to something and if your desire to accomplish it is strong, then the world kind of moves around you in order for that to happen. And I think I'm a pretty good testament to that," he said.

StandingReady speaks of the challenges he's faced with the matter-of-factness and nonchalance of a person who has been too busy leaping over hurdles to worry about how high they were.

The 28-year-old is completely blind in his left eye (the retina in that eye constantly fires, making him see firework-like flashes at all times,) and has only "navigational vision" in his right – enough to walk around without bumping into things, he says.

StandingReady was born with congenital cataracts in both eyes – a rare birth defect that can cause vision problems or blindness – leading to eye surgery when he was only six weeks old. His vision was corrected with glasses, until he was 13, when his eyesight rapidly deteriorated.

There was a new surgery being performed in Indianapolis that could transplant a piece of his cornea needed to restore his vision. StandingReady's school in Carlisle raised \$20,000 to make sure he could get the operation. And for a few days following the surgery, all seemed well.

"I was pretty ecstatic. I was thinking that my world was going to be open. But after a few days, I started to see this shadow, like a curtain descending over my field of vision," he said.

During the surgery, StandingReady's retina had detached – a risk he knew of going in. After a few brief days of clear vision, StandingReady permanently lost vision in his left eye.

"I didn't know how to deal with it. I was a little kid. I would have tantrums, I would lash out," he said.

"Because of my vision, I had trouble fitting in with kids that age. It was tough. I had anxiety for a long time. I didn't know how to make friends. All the kids my age were playing sports and video games, and that was something I wasn't part of anymore. So I fell into a deep depression."

In his later teen years, StandingReady said he got into drugs and drinking, both as a means to cope and as a way to feel connected with others. But at about 19 or 20, he came out of his depression and realized using substances to cope was not a sustainable solution.

"Even to this day, people tell me to hold out hope. But in the end, you just have to learn to deal with it. I realized, since this is something I can't change, I better start learning how to accept and adapt and love myself regardless."

In a better mental place, StandingReady began studying political science at First Nations University of Canada, but the challenges were far from over. Without knowing of any of the disability services available to him, or having a peer to help guide him through, StandingReady struggled with tasks most would take for granted, like reading.

"That was the biggest challenge... actually finding out those resources existed. When I was going to University in Regina, I was trying to read by maximizing the font and using what little remaining vision I had. It was super slow, something that would take you half an hour to read would take me three or four hours."

Despite the challenges, StandingReady graduated as valedictorian of his class, and went on to work at the Gathering Place in Regina for a year before applying and being accepted to the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan. He started using a digital screen reader and, importantly, to speak up for himself, he said.

"I learned to be an advocate for myself because no one else is going to do it. I was used to people knowing what I needed. But no one knows what you need until you tell them."

With his law degree almost in the bag, StandingReady is now articling at Community Legal Assistance Services for Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC Law) in Saskatoon. He expects to be called to the bar in autumn 2022.

"It's been a journey," he said.

"I think it's okay not to know all the answers. But I think in your life, you've been given something that you're passionate about, I think you have to follow that and work at it because that's your way out of the darkness."



Connor StandingReady outside his workplace at CLASSIC Law in Saskatoon. (Photo supplied)

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# Long awaited CUMFI Elders lodge opens

By John Lagimodiere  
of Eagle Feather News

Marlene Conron was the first Elder to move into the Round Prairie Elders Lodge. Marlene stresses she loved living with her daughter, but the chance to have her own place and a community of elders to live with was too much of a draw and she intends to have no regrets.

"My independence. Finally, I get to leave my daughters place and the rules. Now you can do what you want. Go where you want and everything," said Conron after the ceremonial opening of the Lodge.

She was surrounded by community leaders and members and her family. And she couldn't be happier. "Your kids are your kids, but you want that independence. I'm 72 years old and been independent all my life."

It is people like Marlene that the Lodge was designed for, filling a gap in Saskatoon that was without an Indigenous Elders home. The leaders of Central Urban Métis Federation, Inc (CUMFI) had been dreaming of this for years. Located in the Pleasant Hill neighbourhood, the newly constructed 26-unit residence will provide culturally appropriate housing that is safe, affordable, and accessible. It has a gathering room, ceremonial space, a small gym, and



Marlene Conron and her new home. (Photo by John Lagimodiere)

a garden to grow traditional plants and medicines. Métis cultural signs are everywhere, from flower beadwork room numbers and window cut outs, to a dandy life size red river cart, built by George Fayant, that will sit on the roof above the entrance. The building is an homage to the legacy of the Round Prairie families that now live in Saskatoon.

Marlene is one of those family members. "I was twelve years old when I was out in Round Prairie with my dad Joseph Trottier, and we would camp out there. We dug Seneca root. And that was our means of money. I would go to the exhibition after because you had that little bit of extra. Round Prairie goes back a long way for me," said Marlene. "Can you imagine what they would think? My mom is turning over in her grave in a good way. In my heart I wish they were all still here. Shirley and I think about them all the time. They started all this. They went to the meetings when the old Sinclair Centre was open. They were the ones in there fighting for us and this kind of thing."

Shirley Isbister picked up that leadership legacy from her ancestors and has been a driving force for the housing that CUMFI now offers. "We are very excited to have the Round Prairie Elders Lodge opening in the Pleasant Hill Neighborhood. It's been two decades in the making and our Elders finally have a place to call home. For years we have seen Elders struggle and make decisions between rent and other essentials such as medicine or food. CUMFI is proud to help in this small way to overcome these issues and we will continue to work for our Elders and people," said Isbister, the President of CUMFI. "By working collaboratively with Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments, this Lodge is now a reality."

Several funding partners were on hand for the ribbon cutting. The all spoke about working together. "This project exemplifies the success we can achieve through partnerships. The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan funding is one



The official ribbon cutting to open the Round Prairie Elders Lodge from left Big Block CEO Alex Miller, Elder Evelyn Johnston, CUMFI President Shirley Isbister, MN-S President Glen McCallum and Kim Aasen representing CMHC. (Photo by John Lagimodiere)

example of our Métis government's commitment to increase housing capacity and stimulate the economy across the province," said MN-S President Glen McCallum. "We are pleased to be involved in such a well-rounded, culturally appropriate housing project dedicated to our Elders. The Round Prairie Elders' Lodge allows our elders to relax in comfort as they so deserve."

After working three jobs her entire life and having fostered over 700 children in 29 years, Marlene Conron is ready for the relaxing Lodge life. "I am looking forward to the gatherings. Because of Covid, some of our elders are scared. But we all have our two vaccinations," she said. "I am just so happy for everybody. Shirley and Kelly. I know all the work they put into this place. Its fantastic."



# The Wanuskewin rib stones mysterious discovery

Four carved stone artifacts have been found at Wanuskewin and are now on display along with a stone knife found in close proximity. They were found by accident exposed in a buffalo wallow made by a newly introduced herd. An Indigenous person may find this more than coincidence. Stone and buffalo are spiritually closely connected. In Indigenous belief, stone is animate, which is to say alive. Perhaps they wanted to be found and it was the buffalo who exposed them. There is no indication they were there before the buffalo wallow.

Rib stones are a most significant and rare find. The Wanuskewin rib stones are somewhat different from others. Instead of deeply incised lines representing buffalo ribs they feature shallow scratches. On one artifact lines converge at what is likely a spirit figure.

It is believed the first buffalo emerged from stone and when they were being hunted to near extinction great herds went into the earth with the prophecy they would reemerge in the distant future. There is an island on Manitou Lake south of Lloydminster where it is said a herd went into the earth. Anishinabe people camped nearby for years in the belief they would witness the herds return. They did not return in their time and so most of the camp eventually moved on to the Little Pine First Nation where their descendants live today.

The union of buffalo and stone is repeated in the origin story of the great stone Mistisini

which was located near Outlook Saskatchewan. The story tells of a boy raised by the buffalo who could not become a buffalo nor return to his people for all he knew were the buffalo ways. Kind old man buffalo who raised him helps him transform into a large boulder in the shape of a sleeping buffalo. People come asking for him to speak for them to old man buffalo, chief of the buffalo nation, who in turn tells his nation to offer themselves to the people that the people may live. Mistisini was a very important intermediary between the people and the buffalo they needed to survive.

Wanuskewin was mercifully spared the desecration of the plow. It remains original prairie and keeps a human history older than the pyramids going back five thousand years and more. Along with buffalo jumps, a pound and occupation sites, there is a medicine wheel whose meaning



## Breaking Trail

John Cuthand

is a true mystery. The rib stones complete the site.

There is a movement under way to have Wanuskewin declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is a huge step from the pasture developers wanted to make into a suburb of Saskatoon some forty years ago. Sadly, there are many places where equally important archaeology has been destroyed.

Wanuskewin, the land, is a story teller from an ancient time. Stories are now becoming told through exploration and discovery. The four rib stones, the tool used to mark them and a stone knife are an important living gift from more than the land but the spirit of the land.

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# Teen runs through snowfall to honour veterans

By Creeden Martell  
for Eagle Feather News

It was a foggy November morning and the first snow of the year was falling when Tessa Genereaux stepped out of her home on the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation.

Those steps would be the first of a 14-kilometre run to the entrance of Canwood Community School on Nov. 10 as part of an English assignment to commemorate Remembrance Day.

"I touched a lot of people's hearts and people were surprised that I pulled through, considering it was the first winter snowfall," she said. "A lot of people were proud too, that I have a big heart, that I'm doing good in the things that I'm doing, just to keep up the good work."

Canwood is located just west of Ahtahkakoop on Treaty 6 Territory. The run started around 7:30 a.m. and took just over two hours until she arrived at her destination around 9:50 a.m.

Genereaux had family members who served in the military in the past but she hasn't met them. She thought if veterans could endure and persevere, then she could bear the brunt of running across a cold, snow covered prairie.

The conditions that morning included an overcast sky with temperatures hovering around -2 C.

Wind gusts of around 30 kilometres per hour were recorded that morning and would be the case throughout the rest of the day, according to data from

Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Genereaux's run was recognized by the school and featured on its Facebook page on Nov. 17, which received more than 100 compliments and comments.

"I had thought about all the people we have lost in the past wars and that didn't make it back," Genereaux wrote.

"Running through the harsh winter conditions had me thinking of the struggles of weather that our veterans would have endured and having to put up with the harsh weather and physical effort made me appreciate their sacrifice even more."

Genereaux, 17, did not train for the trip prior to that morning, though she does work out and has played soccer for about seven years.

Nonetheless, the 14-kilometre run was something Genereaux said she knew she could do and something she wanted to do. Still, there were points during the journey where she had to slow down to a walking pace.

"I was running against the wind the entire time. That was the biggest challenge,"

Genereaux recalled. "I'd jog if I kind of got tired. It was challenging but I'm glad I finished it."

The falling snow, blowing wind, ice fog and aching muscles didn't stop her progress.

"I was just so tired," she added. "I wanted to give up, but I just kept pushing myself."



**Tessa Genereaux ran 14km through a storm from Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation to Canwood to honour veterans for their service. (Photo supplied Tessa Genereaux)**



As the end of another year approaches, we want to thank you for your ongoing trust and support.

**From our family to yours, have a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year.**

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# More than \$2.5 million in prizes given in MN-S Vaccine draws

By Creeden Martell  
for Eagle Feather News

Karlin Selinger's holiday bet paid off in early November when the 18-year-old's name was selected in the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan's prize draw for Métis citizens who got vaccinated against COVID-19.

Selinger did not believe what she was hearing when she received the phone call from the MN-S telling her she had won a \$25,000 scholarship because of that decision. Her name, one of 80 total winners, was selected during a November 5th draw.

"In the beginning, I was a little bit hesitant and then my family all got it, so I just went ahead and got it also," Selinger said.

Selinger said she had no problems or negative side effects from vaccination. She's mindful that vaccination will make her life easier going forward as travel restrictions and other precautions against COVID-19 become common.

The 18-year-old aspiring elementary school teacher from Rapid View was one of 30 recipients of \$25,000 scholarships to be used for future or current post-secondary studies.

She's currently enrolled in the University of Saskatchewan in Lloydminster but will transition to Saskatoon in 2022. She has 10 years to use the scholarship.

The contest started in September. Between Sept. 1st and Nov. 27th, the number of total vaccination doses administered in Saskatchewan increased by 248,559 to 1,726,722; first doses rose to by 110,587 to 892,927 during the same period.

There were 13,496 entrants overall and the winners were picked across several weekly draws over a three-month period. There were about 21,000 eligible Métis citizens in the province.



**Karlin Selinger was one of the thirty lucky students to win a \$25,000 education bursary in the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan vaccination contest. (Photo supplied)**

Other draw prizes included gift cards, Chromebooks, tablets, a pontoon boat and various vehicles, said Marg Friesen, MN-S minister responsible for health and safety.

"We were very encouraged (at MN-S) and very proud of the fact that so many people also considered being vaccinated or supported the efforts of being vaccinated," Friesen said.

"It certainly was an ambitious project. However, it was successful in the way that we reached thousands of Métis citizens with this incentive draw," Friesen said. "We see that as a great success."

The total prize value was more than \$2.5 million, Friesen said. The money came from federal government COVID relief funds.

"This was a way to really capture people's attention and to encourage people to be vaccinated," she said.

The idea for the draw was born when pop-up vaccine clinics in Métis communities throughout the province didn't attract enough people, she said.

Proof of double vaccination is required for winners to collect their prizes. Vaccination was required prior to the draw and included those Métis citizens who were vaccinated prior to the contest start.

Winners were announced during a live stream on Nov. 27th, during the MN-S Legislative Assembly.



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# LaRose-Smith first to be elected MN-S Youth Council president

By *Andréa Ledding*  
for *Eagle Feather News*

Autumn LaRose-Smith is the first elected president of the provincial youth council of Métis Nation – Saskatchewan.

The SUNTEP student at the University of Saskatchewan and Outreach and Programs Administrator of the We Matters anti-suicide campaign, said she looks forward to amplifying the voices of Métis youth, transforming the youth council and connecting youth to each other, culture and services.

“I am really passionate about helping community and just people in general,” said LaRose-Smith, who doesn’t see herself as a politician, but loves volunteering. A proud queer Métis youth, she sits on the OutSaskatoon board, the Ness Creek Music Festival board, the University of Saskatchewan board, and in 2020 was the first female Indigenous president of the University of Saskatchewan Students Union (USSU).

“I guess I’ve come into this by being recognized by community and being asked to run. It was a big decision for me to decide to run for president of the Métis Nation Youth Council because I love my current job so much,” she said.

But as with the USSU Presidency, it was Métis youth who encouraged her to run. To her, this is a full-time job and Métis youth are her bosses. She looks forward to transforming the council into a driving force for change and putting forth the voices of youth from urban and rural centres all over Saskatchewan.

“I know mental health is a very serious concern for Indigenous youth all over Canada, and especially Métis youth,” which is part of her job at We Matter, she notes. “I’m hoping to bring in the work I’ve done in other positions and use that to support Métis in Saskatchewan. Sustainability and environmental advocacy is really important...also that connecting to culture and exploring our identities is really important. MN-S has a huge priority to increase their registration for citizens.”

LaRose-Smith says her main priority is to engage youth, so they are motivated to register with MN-S, where they can explore culture, identity, history and traditions. She encourages youth who have just discovered their Métis ancestry to reclaim their culture, history, identity, and to honour their ancestors; to know that it isn’t their fault or shameful to resist the colonial narrative trying to erase them, and to continue a public discussion of who Métis are and are not.

“We’re all still learning and in the process of reclaiming culture and history,” she notes, adding concerns can differ by region, so youth voices from the north and south need to be represented in a meaningful way.

“It’s listening and then making whatever they want to happen, happen, alongside them,” she said.

LaRose-Smith says youth are engaged and interested but haven’t been given opportunities to show their involvement. She encourages anyone interested to step forward because everyone brings different gifts and talents to the table.

“If you are interested, we can make it work. I’ll work with you to find out what your gifts are, and make sure you can succeed in that way and be a part of something that is a lot bigger than each of us.”

Her hopes include a Métis summer camp focused on teachings, leadership, language preservation and getting back to the land, while learning from Elders and creating community and jobs.

Overall, Métis self-governance, leadership and sustainability require youth to step up and be mentored by current leaders in power, she said.

“The challenge lies in engaging youth in every step of the way going forward,” she said, adding there is almost no mention in MN-S legislation of the youth. She wants to see youth from 16 to 29 representing every region, shadowing every minister portfolio while participating in the work being done throughout the MN-S and

creating action plans for each region.

“We kind of silo youth and say, ‘Okay, you work on youth things.’ Well youth things are everything. They are health, economic development, environment development, land securement - youth really need to be involved in all those conversations.”



**Autumn LaRose-Smith, first elected president of the Métis Youth Council for MN-S, was sworn in by her grandmother Senator Nora Cummings at the Métis Nation Legislative Assembly November 27th, 2021. LaRose-Smith will serve a four-year term. (Photo provided)**

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