

ALBERTA FIRST NATIONS
BUSINESS REVIEW

20 YEARS OF COMMITMENT TO THE
FIRST NATIONS ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

ABORIGINAL CAPITAL CORPORATIONS CELEBRATE 20 YEARS OF BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

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THE ALBERTA FIRST NATIONS BUSINESS REVIEW

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For over 20 years, the Aboriginal Capital Corporations (ACCs) of Alberta have provided loan capital and business assistance to thousands of Aboriginal Albertans, helping to create over 5000 businesses and 8000 employment opportunities. In working to assist Alberta's Aboriginal entrepreneurs, well over \$165,000,000.00 has been infused into First Nations and Métis economies by Alberta Indian Investment Corporation (AIIC), Settlements Investment Corporation (SIC), Indian Business Corporation (IBC), and Apeetogosan Métis Developments.

To commemorate their historic achievements, the Aboriginal Capital Corporations of Alberta worked together to host the **Alberta Aboriginal Business Symposium and Gala** on October 20-21, 2008 at the Edmonton Marriot at River Cree Resort in Enoch, Alberta.

This historical gathering brought together many stakeholders with the intent to promote and build capacity for Aboriginal business and economic development and to showcase ACCs and their contributions toward sustaining Aboriginal business development. It also provided an



The host drum group Thundering Spirit Singers sit poised, ready to begin the ceremony (above).



The awards were presented along with a symbolic eagle feather to each recipient (left).



AIIC GM Rocky Sinclair (second from left) receives an award of recognition on behalf of AIIC with fellow Aboriginal Capital Corporation Managers. From left, Mike Ivy, AMDI GM, AIIC GM Rocky Sinclair, Indian Business Corporation GM Rob Rollingson, and Settlements Investment Corporation's Wayne Gray.

excellent opportunity to showcase successful Aboriginal entrepreneurs and highlight emerging and exciting new business opportunities available to Alberta's Aboriginal people.

AIIC was proud to recognize three of their successful business ventures at the Gala: The McLean Family from High Level and their flagship **RKM Contracting**, Cody and Derek Bruno with **Cree Convenience** and **Peace Hills Water**, and Mona Royal and Daryl McDonald with the **M&R Trading Post**. See pages 3 & 7 for more on the event and pictures of the Gala, Tradeshow and Symposium.

Featured Articles Inside:

Read on to discover how some of AIIC's most successful clients have achieved their goals:

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RKM Contracting

Getting the job done for over 30 years



Kelly and Sharon McLean accept the award from AIIIC President Bernie Meneen and GM Rocky Sinclair.

RKM Contracting Ltd. has been an AIIIC client since November 1992 and in that time, have demonstrated time and again the benefits of experience, hard work and commitment to getting the job done.

Operating just outside of Fort Vermilion, Alberta, this family based business conducts work for reputable and high profile clients such as Husky Oil Operations Ltd., Penn West, Alberta Sustainable Resources, Shell Canada and a wide range of both logging and oil and gas operations.

The company is owned and operated by the McLean family, Reg, Genny and Kelly, and has undergone a few changes since it began way back in 1975 with a single skidder to help supplement the family's farm income. Now, 33 years later, RKM Contracting Ltd. has blossomed into one of northern Alberta's most successful forestry and oilfield contractors with a modern and professional fleet of equipment and a reputation for consistency and reliability.

Operations Manager Kelly McLean says that the successes they've enjoyed haven't simply been handed to them.

"It was tough when we were out there having to prove ourselves," said McLean. "Showing that we could get the job done, demonstrating our commitment to safety and quality work."

A commitment that paid off with acknowledgement as one of 2004's Best Safety Performers for small business in Alberta in the Work Safe Alberta program. Other accolades have included being nomi-

nated for the 2001 Eagle Feather Award of Distinction in the Alberta Chambers of Commerce Awards.

McLean credits any successes they have had to their greatest and most indispensable resource: People.

"If you surround yourself with good people, it makes the chance for success that much easier," said McLean.

Starting from the core unit of their own family, who are descended from one of Alberta's last hereditary Chiefs, late Chief Harry Chonkolay, the McLeans have grown RKM considerably with upwards of 30-40 seasonal full time employees and 5 full time year round staff, with approximately 75% of First Nations descent.

Diversifying in recent years to include oil and gas operations like salvage logging, lease and road building and other oil and gas related work, has given RKM Contracting Ltd. a greater share of the market activity in Northern Alberta and more flexibility in the kinds of work they can engage in.

"We saw an opportunity to expand our operations and took the necessary steps," said Kelly. "It is good having a partner like AIIIC that can help out."

RKM is committed to their vision and to the importance of working together through the good and bad times, which is a testament to their company and family ethic according to McLean.

"It is also very key that we believe in ourselves: That we have continued to work together as a team right from day one," said McLean. McLean also credits some of the company's success to understanding the industry and some of the dynamics, including economic conditions, market trends, and other factors that affect their industry.

"Timing is another factor that can make all the difference. Recognizing the shifts in the industry and being able to respond to the opportunities that open up," said Kelly.

The McLean family continue to prove that with the right combination of hard work, timing and dedication, success in operating a small business can be achieved.



Demonstrating versatility and the ability to recognize trends and diverse market needs, the McLeans have been able to secure work in both Oil and Gas and Logging operations. Boasting some of the north's most well maintained and modern fleets of equipment, RKM has earned provincial awards for exceptional performance in workplace health and safety.

Other awards have included the Eagle Feather Award of Distinction (2001) and Business of the Year (2003) from the Fort Vermilion and Area Board of Trade.



ALBERTA ABORIGINAL BUSINESS SYMPOSIUM AND GALA

OCTOBER 20-21, 2008



Three of AIIC's sponsored businesses received honours for their successes. RKM Logging, M&R Gas and Trading Post and Cree Convenience.

AIIC was a proud partner in the Alberta Aboriginal Business Symposium and Gala which took place last fall at the River Cree Resort—Edmonton Marriot. The two day celebration brought a variety of Alberta's Aboriginal Business community together and helped to forge new partnerships and renew old acquaintances. Other partners included Apeetogosan Métis Developments Inc., Indian Business Corporation and Settlement Investment Corporation.



The Tradeshow opened on day one, and allowed a variety of presenters to engage with attendees.



Jake Heron from the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association shares his insights with Gala attendees.

Major sponsors included Alberta Employment and Immigration and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Other sponsors included Sigfusson Northern—Executive Sponsor and Siksika Resource Developments Ltd.—Commemorative Sponsor. Trade Show sponsors were YTC Education, Y.T.D.F., Peace Hills Trust, Saddle Lake Trust, Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, Oteenow Employment and Training Society and Pre-Paid Legal Services Inc.



Emcees Tom Ghostkeeper and Jason Goodstriker kept the event running smoothly with many laughs along the way.

One of the highlights of the event took place with the presentation of Lifetime Achievement Awards to two very special contributors to Alberta's Aboriginal Business Community.



Peter Joyce accepts his Lifetime Achievement Award from AIIC President Bernie Meneen and GM Rocky Sinclair.

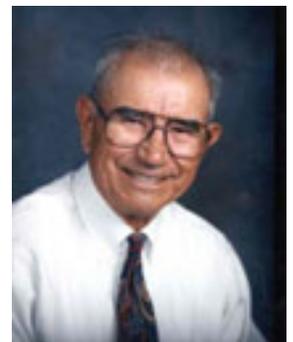
Past AIIC President **Fred Gladstone** (shown bottom right) and Elder Advisor **Peter Joyce** (bottom left) were honoured for their contributions. Both of these honoured and respected Elders are well known for their accomplishments and dedication to the First Nations communities they have served. Fred and Peter are both founding members of the Indian Equity Foundation and shared the vision of economic development as vital for First Nations communities.

Peter represented the community voice of Treaty 8 for over 20 years until his retirement in 1997 but is still a valuable part of AIIC as an Elder Advisor.

Mr. Gladstone, President of AIIC from its inception in 1988 until his retirement in 2001, was a successful rancher and businessman, political activist, champion calf roper, and remains to this day a champion of First Nations business success.



Mr. Fred Gladstone (right) helped chart the course for the formation of AIIC and for the continued success of Alberta's Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Members of Mr. Gladstone's family accept the award on his behalf (above).



CODY AND DEREK BRUNO: BROTHERS WITH A PASSION FOR SUCCESS

One thing is certain when it comes to the Bruno brothers: They know a thing or two about achievement. Recipients of the first ever Syncrude Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurial Award of Distinction in February of 2006, Cody, 26, and Derek who will be just 30 this year, continue to reap the rewards of their hard work, attention to detail and dedication to succeeding in everything they set out to do. Cody and Derek, members of the Samson Cree Nation, own and operate two successful businesses in central Alberta: One on Samson Cree Nation and another in the town of Camrose. From a business perspective, they have bridged the gaps that can exist between First Nations and mainstream business. On a personal level, they also work to bridge other gaps that may exist between the two worlds.

“Part of running a successful business is knowing your market, knowing your community,” said Cody. “We find that as we develop our businesses, we build rapport and have developed a level of communication that helps to build bridges between our communities.”

Building bridges means spending time forging relationships and strengthening ties in the community. For the Brunos, that means being involved with the Wetaskiwin Chamber of Commerce, the Hobbema Financial Advisory Group—a group developed for

small scale community lending, Samson Management Ltd and the Maskwa-chees Consultant Group which is an anti-gang and violence volunteer committee.



Derek Bruno with AIIIC President Bernie Meneen and General Manager Rocky Sinclair.

The brothers are also wholly committed to staying involved with community based activities such as cultural events, and community gatherings, and make donations of their time and other resources to help carry forward the vision of a strong and vibrant community. Derek is currently finishing his MBA part-time through the University of Cape Breton. He holds a management diploma as well as a professional designation through CANDO in Aboriginal economic development. Cody is completing a Bachelor of Commerce Degree through the University of Athabasca as well as finishing his training with the Water Quality Association of Canada to become a Certified Water Quality Technician.

The Bruno’s first venture, Cree Convenience, is located in the Samson

Mall, and was opened in June 2001. The Brunos built the store around quality customer service, a clean and inviting storefront and a diverse product selection. The store gives First Nations residents an excellent option for on-reserve shopping and provides full and part time employment for members. There are approximately 12 employees, with the average age hovering around 22. The Brunos are currently moving forward with an innovative expansion for the store and look forward to opening the new aspect in the new year.

The second company, Peace Hills Pure Water started in 2001 and has since been expanded to a full scale reverse osmosis water treatment plant with clients from the Four Nations, Wetaskiwin and Edmonton. Their product “Peace Hills Pure Water” can be seen in many venues, including the tables of this year’s gala.

When asked about what helped them first embark on their business journey, Cody offers: “AIIIC was a real help right from the start. They took a risk on us when I was 19 and Derek was 23; we laugh about it now—wondering if we would have even given loans to a couple of kids like us.”

The investment was definitely worth the risk, and we all look forward to seeing what else is in store for the Bruno brothers.



M & R GAS & TRADING POST: COMBINING SERVICE WITH TRADITION

The M & R Gas Station and Trading Post opened its doors on December 22, 2002 and they haven't looked back since that time.

Owners Darryl McDonald and Mona Royal have over a combined 32 years of experience in the administration, management and finance fields. Mona has a Business Administration diploma from Mount Royal College and a Supervisory Certificate from the University of Calgary. The family also has 5 daughters with a span of 14 years from youngest to oldest who are a vital part of the family owned business.

This 100% Aboriginal-owned business sits on the southwest corner of the Siksika First Nation and is open 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The nearest competition is over 20 km away and does not provide the level of product that M & R carries.

In addition to the gas and convenience store, there is the trading post, which opened the following year and specializes in Indian art, crafts and handiwork. The stores have shown consistent profits since the doors opened and Mona credits this to believing in their vision and having the support of the community and an organization like AIIC.

"The main pointer I would have to share is that you really need to believe in yourself and what you're doing and to have a strong support system," said Mona.

The supporting role that AIIC played was more than just financing, according to Royal.

"They looked at intangibles and didn't leave any rocks unturned."

This prepared the duo more effectively for the successes and pitfalls of entrepreneurship with their "one of a kind" approach said Mona.

"It's really nice having our own Nations' people providing this support. Makes them more accessible, and with the same background, we tend to be on very similar wavelengths."

Royal also credits the success of M & R to maintaining a strong awareness of those things outside their control and remaining true to the original vision while allowing for flexibility and the ability to respond to market shifts and new opportunities. As well, a lot of effort is expended in ensuring that staff are happy.

"We are constantly asking ourselves: How can we service our employees? We find that this is a good management strategy because with happy employees, we are going to be assured polite, courteous and friendly service, which are the cornerstones of our business."

Mona and Darryl are also committed to giving back to the com-



From left: Darryl McDonald and Mona Royal of M&R Gas, AIIC President Bernie Meneen and GM Rocky Sinclair.

munity that supports them. They are involved in the sponsorship of the Strathmore Hospital, Siksika Ambulance and Siksika Health Clinic's Teddy Bear Program, which provides teddy bears to children who are transported via medical emergency or who just may need a soft, comforting friend to hug when receiving a needle.

"We go through hundreds a month and order them by the crate from the U.S. The program is not just for First Nations children but for all colours and backgrounds," said Royal. "I think when you're growing as a company, it is vital that you give back to your own community, and it feels awesome that we can share some of our success."

It is clear that by combining family based tradition and an innovative approach to management and community involvement, M & R Gas and Trading Post will continue to have a lasting and positive impact in their community.

MARIE BOUCHER AND SAKASTEEW TRANSPORTATION: FROM BUSH TO BUSHINGS

Marie Boucher is proud to tell you about the ownership group of Sakasteew Transportation Company Ltd. – after all: They are her grandchildren!

Sakasteew (which means “early morning rays of the sun” in Cree) is a very successful family-owned company located in Fort McKay First Nation, that has grown from a single bussing contract in 2002 to a multi-faceted transportation company with contracts with some of the major industry players in the area, including Albian, CNRL, Suncor and others. With 26 units on the ground, including both 15- and 21-passenger vans and buses and over 30 employees, the company has grown substantially and is not showing any signs of slowing down.

Marie brings into the company over 30 years of experience in the transportation industry, having worked every angle of the industry from driving to dispatch to management. But it wasn't easy, according to Marie. After a humble beginning of trapping with her family and living off the land, the transition to CEO of a multimillion dollar company has not been an easy road.

“From bush to bushings,” joked one past employee.

The beginnings were humble and it was through a little prodding from an honoured and respected leader that Marie began her journey in the transportation business.

“My Chief, the late Dorothy McDonald came and knocked on my door and told me that they were going to get a bus, a 28 passenger bus and that I should go to school for my class three.”

Marie, who was making crafts with her kids at the time, was sur-



Marie Boucher poses with a portrait of the Sakasteew Transportation Board of Directors.

prised and unsure but carried through with the task.

“I said yes, but not with a willing heart; I was scared, but I had to respect my Chief.”

Marie attended Keyano College in 1981 to complete a drivers' training program and was unsure of her chances of success. Throughout each of the difficulties she faced, Marie kept reminding herself of Chief MacDonald's faith in her and her respect for the late leader and her wishes. Even after hitting a curb or two and bouncing an instructor clear out of his seat, Marie completed the course and commenced her 11-year career as driver for then Fort McKay Transportation.

Marie completed more schooling throughout her time with the company and eventually became a dispatcher, supervisor and finally a manager of Fort McKay Transportation for nine years. Marie opted to go out on her own and forge ahead

with Sakasteew Transportation and in 2002, with the assistance of an Entrepreneurial Program from Keyano College and 30 years of experience in the industry, Sakasteew Transportation commenced their operations.

Sakasteew recently worked with AIIIC to assist them in planning and developing their mechanic shop, which is located in the Fort McKay industrial area. Having their own shop will assist Sakasteew in maintaining their fleet rather than having to contract it to outside service providers thereby reducing costs.

One of the unique aspects of Sakasteew is the role it plays within the community. Through Marie Boucher, her family and their devotion to their Christian faith, Sa-



Tamara Boucher and mechanic James Serafinchan show off the new Sakasteew shop and tire machine and balancer.

kasteew profits are shared with a community based ministry program that is responsible for distributing on average over \$3000 worth of food and clothing per week, among some of Alberta's northern First Nations communities. The ministry delivers food hampers, clothing and other much needed items. During the holiday season, the Ministry increases

(Continued next page)

IMAGES FROM THE ALBERTA ABORIGINAL BUSINESS SYMPOSIUM AND GALA

Clockwise from top left: Grand Entry at the 2008 Alberta Aboriginal Business Symposium and Gala; Fancy Shawl Dancer Jade Brown dazzles the crowd with her performance.



Other performers included Edgar Gualoto, a traditional Indigenous flute player and some energetic and lively Métis fiddling from Garry Lee accompanied by jigging and step dancing.



Bottom: Awards were presented with traditional eagle feathers for First Nations recipients and sashes to Métis award winners.



Left Centre: Enoch's Thundering Spirit share their gift with those present.

----- MARIE BOUCHER & SAKASTEWEW TRANSPORTATION CONTINUED -----

(Continued from page 6)

its deliveries to include turkeys and gifts for children.

When asked about some of the factors that have contributed to the



(Above) Sakasteew fleet vehicles parked at home base in Ft. Mackay First Nation.

Tamara (l) and Loretta Boucher pose with Marie who hugs future Sakasteew CEO King-David Boucher.



success of the company, Safety Officer, Tamara Boucher unequivocally credits the drivers.

“Each driver puts their life on the line when they come to work. They’re putting their lives at risk. We have to recognize that. The drivers have to be able to drive in any kind of weather. Whenever one of the other big transportation companies have any kind of problems or difficulties on the highway, our drivers are the first ones on site. Whenever there is a big storm coming, it’s our drivers that are out there, clearing the road, making track for other drivers,” said Tamara.

Marie ensures that the drivers are recognized with various employee incentive programs, and bonuses. It’s why, according to Tamara, that no one refers to the matriarch of Sakasteew Transportation as Marie.

“Almost all of the drivers call her ‘Mom,’ and it’s well

deserved. My mom has a really good heart. Any time someone needs help, she is there to help them. Even if it’s in their personal life, she’s there to help.”

Marie also gives credit to Fort Mackay Chief Jim Boucher and council for supporting her in the early phases of business start up and for their continued support. With daughters Loretta, Sakasteew CEO, and Tamara, safety officer, Marie works hard to ensure that Sakasteew remains a family business.

It is no wonder that Marie is working on a book, chronicling the journey from “bush to business.” She aims to share her story and help to inspire and build confidence in others.

It is this commitment to helping others and sharing her successes while maintaining strong business ethic that sets Marie Boucher and the family at Sakasteew Transportation far above the pack.

Message from the General Manager

AIIC STAFF AND MANAGEMENT



The Alberta Indian Investment Corporation staff and management welcome you to explore your entrepreneurial vision and pledge to work closely with you in realizing your business goals.

Office Manager Bernadine Coyote (below left) is pleased to welcome some new faces to the AIIC team. From left are Jennifer Cardinal, Loans Administration Officer, Rhonda Potts, Administrative Assistant and Reception, Business Loans Manager Angel Isaac, and Business Services Officer Assistant Priscilla Cardinal (top left).



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"Providing Business Development, Loans and Support for Over 20 Years."

This year 2009 will be our 21st year in being the leader in Alberta First Nation business financing. This issue of the *Alberta First Nation Business Review* profiles some of the business success stories over the past 20 years. These successes were commemorated in our *ACC 2008 Alberta Aboriginal Business Symposium and Gala* as profiled in this issue. Our clients represent the kind of spirit, hard work and resilience that is required to achieve success. I believe their stories are a microcosm of the longstanding reality of First Nations people in that we are not only simply able to survive, but can thrive despite many obstacles.

Although the current economic outlook in Alberta is presented by some as a less than rosy picture, I remain optimistic and hopeful that the economic slowdown will not be a protracted downturn but rather a cooling and correcting of an overheated Alberta economy.

The concerns now being expressed by governments, economic prognosticators and the general public about fears of high unemployment, inflation and the credit crunch, interestingly enough has been the reality of First Nations people for many years.

The very existence of AIIC is central in helping address those challenges for First Nations people. Through many years of perfecting a unique approach to that need, we have created products and ser-

vices that can meet much of the financing requirements of aspiring entrepreneurs as well as educate those First Nations that look to business or self employment as their future.



**AIIC General Manager
Rocky Sinclair**

First Nations people are resilient and this current economic outlook has been our reality for many years but we continue to be buoyed by optimism and a survival instinct that has served us well in conditions far more perilous than now.

The AIIC will continue to be committed to that spirit – the spirit of rising to those challenges; seeking the positive from the onslaught of negative; supporting our inherent right to chart our own course and determine our future.

This is the spirit of entrepreneurship and is the foundation on which we are built. We are proud to be able to share this with our clients and invite you to share in that vision.

Thank you.

Rocky Sinclair
General Manager



WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF THE FIRST NATIONS BUSINESS REVIEW?

The Alberta Indian Investment Corporation (AIIC) is pleased to bring you the *First Nations Business Review* and we will be developing and distributing further issues of this periodical throughout 2009.

Would you like to be a part of this publication? We invite our readers to take part in the development of our next issues, either through writing, photography, art/design. Youth are especially encouraged to submit ideas for our next issue.

Are you a First Nations entrepreneur and would like to gain greater exposure for your company? We will help you develop an article for upcoming issues of

the *First Nations Business Review*. The invitation is not only open to clients of AIIC: All First Nations owned businesses are welcome.

We especially encourage individuals to submit articles on business, investment or issues affecting business development for Aboriginal people in Alberta.

For more information or to submit a story idea, feature, photograph or artwork, please contact:

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