

# Circles of Light

July-August 2001 – Number 14

## **Ditidaht First Nation Island Neighbours Working Together**

by Ken Kolba

**A** small Vancouver Island community and neighbouring First Nation can see a better future, and they're working together to hasten its arrival.

For the past two years, the Town of Ladysmith and the Ditidaht First Nation have been building a foundation for co-operation and shared benefits in anticipation of a post-treaty environment. The Ditidaht is one of 126 B.C. First Nations involved in complex treaty negotiations with the provincial and federal governments.

"The road ahead is about co-operation, not isolation," says **Gord Horth**, town administrator for Ladysmith, a community of 7,000 about an hour's drive north of Victoria. Horth is one of several Ladysmith municipal managers working with the Ditidaht to enhance their administrative expertise, through training and mentoring with municipal government employees.

The goal is to increase Ditidaht governance capacity to ensure long-term success, and harmonize government-to-government relations among neighbouring communities. The area as a whole will benefit in terms of regional infrastructure, resource management and economic development.



**Gord Horth** (left), town administrator for Ladysmith and **Judi Lamb**, administrator for the Ditidaht First Nation.

"The experience of their council, administration and operations represents an invaluable resource to us as we develop our institutions, systems and procedures," says Ditidaht

Chief **Jack Thompson** of the partnership with Ladysmith. The First Nation has nearly 600 registered members. About 200 live on a remote reserve on west Vancouver Island.

"The whole premise is that the Ditidaht will have their own local government once a treaty takes effect," Horth says, adding that his colleagues throughout B.C. municipalities are also waking up to the inevitable change. "With treaties coming, we'll get a lot more mileage by co-operating. The public is looking to municipal leaders for more innovative leadership. It's the right thing to do."

### **Aboriginal/Municipal Partnerships**

More and more Aboriginal communities are forming innovative partnerships with municipalities for their mutual benefit. These partnerships cover areas as wide-ranging as service agreements, increased trade, and support for economic development and tourism.

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# Aamjiwnaang First Nation Industrial Park Profits from Relationship with City

by Raymond Lawrence

With the 11.4-hectare first phase in full swing, the Chippewa Industrial Park is generating employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for First Nation people and for the adjacent city of Sarnia in southern Ontario.

In fact, the industrial park has generated more employment opportunities than it can fill. Phase II, comprising about another 81 hectares, will officially open in the near future. Currently, the Aamjiwnaang First Nation (formerly the Chippewas of Sarnia) are focused on developing and expanding their client base in advance of this new development.

As a result of its dedicated effort to develop employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, the First Nation boasts an unemployment rate below the national average. Only five percent of the community workforce are without jobs. “I think the whole economy is beginning to grow. There’s always enquiries and there’s always new opportunities,” says the park’s General Manager **Tom Maness**. “The reason we developed the facility was to create an environment for joint ventures, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities.”

The First Nation was “pretty aggressive” in developing the industrial park property, he says. In order to keep up with the workforce demands of the development and meet industry requirements, they introduced a training program. They linked this program to their overall development strategy. Some 80 First Nation members are now employed as a direct result of that strategy, while others have spin-off employment opportunities. These range from trucking to the management of a First Nation-owned gas bar and restaurant.

“Our development philosophy here isn’t restricted to the First Nation,” Maness explains of their relation to the city of Sarnia. “We’re a major contributor to the local economy. In our relationship with the city we have the common objective of attracting industries to the Sarnia-Lambton area and to build on our economic base. We have representation on the Sarnia-Lambton Economic Renewal Committee, and we believe we have to provide industry with as many options as we can. Our focus is on building landlord-tenant relationships with companies who invest in people and equipment, and that’s our target.”



Photo courtesy of Aamjiwnaang First Nation

As members of the Ontario Native Business Parks Association, the Aamjiwnaang First Nation is also able to market their industrial sites abroad. “The best marketing people for us are our own tenants,” Maness says. Last fall they sent a delegation on a trade mission to Germany, and are arranging a tour for a German delegation scheduled to arrive later this year.

While many of the goods and services the industrial park offers are aimed at the U.S. market, a few of the park’s companies are competing worldwide as well. “I think the next level of development is in the opportunities of the entrepreneurial type — in selling goods not only to the local economy, but also globally. But that’s something for the future,” Maness predicts.

The First Nation’s location right on the U.S. border has also made networking and job openings possible with some U.S. companies, Maness adds.

“The quality of life in the community — the standard of housing, the standard of living — is at a much higher level than it was 25 or 30 years ago,” concludes Maness. ✪

*Raymond Lawrence is a freelance writer of Ojibway and European ancestry.*

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# Many Partners Make for More Work in Saskatoon

by Raymond Lawrence

The old saying, “Many hands make for light work,” will probably forever hold true. But many hands can also make partnerships aimed at creating work opportunities.

A multi-player partnership in Saskatoon is focusing on access to opportunities, promotion, skills and education to help ensure Aboriginal people’s full participation in the workforce — either as employees or entrepreneurs. More than an employment strategy, it is one of the keys to the city’s continued success.

“Because of the large Aboriginal population in Saskatoon, we all have to work together to succeed,” says **Shirley Courchene-Lafond**, Aboriginal Coordinator for the Saskatoon and District Chamber of Commerce. “If we don’t work together our city will fail, and it’s our city too. So we have to make it a success, and in order to do that, we have to ensure that Aboriginal people are successful in finding jobs,

starting businesses and getting educations. Our vision is to ensure that happens.”

The Chamber of Commerce first established an Aboriginal Committee in 1995. However, without a dedicated employee, success was limited. So in May 1999, the Chamber of Commerce and Saskatoon Tribal Council hired Courchene-Lafond. “The Aboriginal Committee of the Chamber had this vision for a long time and has been very supportive,” Courchene-Lafond emphasizes.

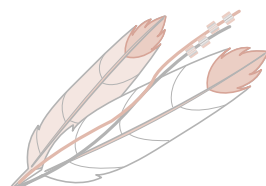
Shortly after she was hired, the committee expanded its circle of partners and funding agencies. “This is now a partnership between the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Aboriginal

Human Resource Development Council of Canada, and we also have about 15 private business partners who either contribute financially or through in-kind contributions,” she explains. “So this is a community effort.”

“The vision was to pioneer a committee to promote employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people, ensuring the success of future generations. And also, we wanted to provide a model for other chambers and business organizations to follow,” she explains. She liaises with Chamber businesses, giving them résumés of Aboriginal people looking for work, and also works with the local tribal council and Métis organizations to ensure opportunities are available to Aboriginal people. “Over the next while, I think we’ll be doing a lot more networking with other employment agencies who are either Aboriginal agencies or who promote Aboriginal employment.”

As a result of the various partners’ efforts, several Aboriginal businesses attended an annual business expo in Saskatoon in 1999. In 2000, they doubled that number, and hope to do so again this year. Other initiatives include finding entry-level work placements for Aboriginal youth that not only provide employment, but also encourage young people to continue their education.

Courchene-Lafond, who moved to the city when she was 18, attributes her success with the Chamber in part to her own urban experience. “I do know that as Aboriginal people we are struggling, and I think the most important thing is education...we have to get to the kids on the reserves and tell them to get educated because without that today, you have nothing. We have to start right away, when they’re young.” \*



A large logo for the 'Aboriginal Employment &amp; Business Opportunities Partnership'. The logo features a central circular emblem with a city skyline and the text 'Partnership into the 21st Century'. To the left of the emblem is the slogan: 'Building the Best Business Climate in Canada for Aboriginals'. To the right is a list of partner organizations: Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon &amp; District Chamber of Commerce, Kwik Transport Ltd., Lafond Financial Inc., M.C. Ambulance Care Ltd., Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, and Aspen Developments Inc. The entire logo is framed by a decorative border with feathers at the bottom.

## "Ditidaht First Nation..." continued from page 1

That idea is taking hold. In February, a \$200,000 treaty-related measure provided funding for Ditidaht and neighbouring Pacheedaht First Nation to expand the initiative. It will enable Ditidaht to include more members in training and mentoring activities. The Pacheedaht First Nation will establish a similar working relationship with Ladysmith administrators, and is looking to involve a second nearby municipality.

But change comes slowly to a community that has lived for generations under the *Indian Act*. Ditidaht acting administrator **Judi Lamb** says progress today is measured in "baby steps."

Her efforts to pick up the pace focus on the First Nation's government and

administration personnel so they understand what is under way and why. "Change is not always welcome, yet the people need to take ownership of that change," Lamb says. "But everything is in place for some real momentum."

The co-operative project began in 1998, shortly after Ditidaht Council recognized the need to prepare for post-treaty responsibilities.

When Horth saw the Ditidaht's advertisement for a local government administrator, he got an idea. What better candidate to provide local government expertise than a neighbouring local government? With full support of council, he submitted an application on the town's behalf.

Since then, the project has blossomed into a comprehensive program

making Ladysmith administrators' cumulative expertise available to the Ditidaht. A training component combines post-secondary courses with mentoring and on-site experience at Ladysmith municipal hall.

Together, the First Nation and the municipality are analyzing Ditidaht's requirements for professional development, organizational structure, policies and procedures, financial management, business systems, public works — all the infrastructure of a modern government — in preparation for self-government. ✱



## Micmacs of Gesgapegiag Co-operation Agreement Reinforces Municipalities' Firefighting Power

by Annabelle Dionne

The volunteer fire fighters of the Micmacs of Gesgapegiag on the Gaspé Peninsula have twice won the championship in the First Nations National Fire Fighters Competition: in Vancouver in 1997, and in Calgary in 2000. Their success in these competitions enhanced an already solid reputation. "The people in the community feel secure now, because they know they are well protected," says Gesgapegiag Fire Chief **Jacques Martin**. "Other Aboriginal communities have even come to film us in order to study our techniques."

The Gesgapegiag community fire department was created in 1995, following a tragic fire in the community in which two lives were lost. About 10 men from the community then decided to get the necessary training and form a team of volunteer fire fighters to prevent this kind of tragedy ever happening again.

The nearby municipality of New Richmond was aware of the reputation the Gesgapegiag team has built up over the years. **Michel Leblanc**, Director of the New Richmond fire department, asked the Gesgapegiag fire fighters if they wanted to be part of an existing mutual co-operation agreement. Under the agreement, the participating communities assist each other in fighting major fires.

Gesgapegiag's Fire Chief saw this request as a sign of recognition. "We are regarded as equals by the surrounding municipalities," Martin says.

The proposal to include the Gesgapegiag fire fighters in their municipal system was welcomed by all four surrounding communities participating in the mutual co-operation agreement. "The Carleton, Maria, St-Jules Gascapedia and Caplanc municipalities recognize



Photo courtesy of Gesgapegiag Fire Fighters

our professionalism," Martin emphasizes. "With our training and the proper equipment we now have at our disposal, we have proved that we can intervene quickly and efficiently."

Martin has many reasons to be proud of his team of volunteers. Most of the fire fighters, ranging in age between 26 and 54, are trilingual. They also represent a wide range of jobs in

"Micmacs of Gesgapegiag..."  
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## 'Namgis First Nation

# Partnership with Alert Bay Supports Tourism

by Ruth McVeigh

Four years ago, residents of the relatively remote village of Alert Bay off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island realized that their former economic foundation of fishing was no longer viable. Something had to take its place, and tourism was the answer.

Alert Bay has a spectacular location. Situated on Cormorant Island, it draws many tourists to the U'Mista Cultural Centre, which features exhibits on the history and culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples.

After informal and formal discussions focusing on this potential, Chief **William (Bill) Cranmer** of 'Namgis

**"Micmacs of Gesgapegiag..."**  
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the community, including police officers and taxi drivers. In spite of their differences, one thing unites them: they are ready to intervene at all times when a fire breaks out.

"To become a fire fighter, one must have a sincere desire to help one's own community," Martin says. "Many people would like to be part of our team. Above all, we need people in shape, who understand what is involved in becoming a fire fighter. You can see their desire in their eyes, their words and their gestures."

This year, the Gesgapegiag fire fighters will once again defend their national title. If you ever drive by their neighbourhood, don't be surprised to see a group of fire fighters practising beside the main road. These community volunteers practise about three times a week in order to maintain their very high standards.

There is no doubt about the Gesgapegiag fire fighters' commitment to their mission. "We will never forget why we are here," concludes Martin. ✨

First Nation and **Gilbert Popovich**, Alert Bay's Mayor, signed an accord aimed at revitalizing the community and preserving the unique heritage of Alert Bay. Another of the accord's objectives is to seek the needed funding from all levels of government. To achieve this, the two parties incorporated to form a jointly owned and run Historic Alert Bay Development Corporation. The Corporation plans to market and promote Alert Bay internationally as a tourism destination.

One of the Corporation's first undertakings was to explore the idea of acquiring the huge, weathered British Columbia Packers building, which dominates the village streetscape. **Sam Bawlf**, a consultant who worked with the Corporation, saw its possibilities. If it were upgraded, the building could be used as a welcome centre to the village, a departure point for eco-tours with short-term lodging upstairs, a place to eat, and possibly one or two commercial enterprises. The Corporation is now reviewing these plans.

It also sees a breakwater as essential to provide more moorage space for the boating public. There are plans to build a fishing pier, improve facilities at the existing marina, and beautify the town. An extension of a boardwalk will link the Cultural Centre to the BC Ferries dock and on to the Bay Theatre. The Corporation is applying for funding for this project through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Other projects include an eco-tourism workshop aimed at developing a "how to" manual with a formula for successful eco-tourism that could be used by other communities. Alert Bay was selected to carry out this pilot project, with provincial funding in place and federal funding in progress. In addition, the Corporation has begun the process of identifying nearby



Photo courtesy of the Village of Alert Bay

(From left) **Lawrence Ambers**, Band Manager, 'Namgis First Nation, Chief **William Cranmer** and Alert Bay Mayor **Gilbert Popovich** with framed Accord to revitalize the community.

marine tourism resources including Hanson Island and Johnston Strait.

A less glamorous but very important aspect of the development plan is a preliminary study of the village's sewer collection system. A joint secondary treatment plant is proposed for construction later this year. Both the Village and the 'Namgis First Nation have applied for their share of construction dollars. The partnership is working on a total waste management program, which aims to reduce the amount of garbage for transport off the island by 80 percent.

Still in the dream stage is the idea of developing the heritage Doctor's Residence and Nurses' Residence into educational facilities. Another element of the vision is an interpretive centre located north of the Nimpkish River bridge on Highway 19, which would teach travelers and tourists about Alert Bay.

For more information about this visionary partnership, e-mail: [office@village.alertbay.bc.ca](mailto:office@village.alertbay.bc.ca) ✨

## Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce

# Opening U.S. Trade for Aboriginal Businesses in the City

by Diane Koven

**A** boriginal-owned businesses in Winnipeg are looking forward to increased trade opportunities south of the border as a result of an unique Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In the presence of Winnipeg Mayor **Glen Murray** and Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister **Eric Robinson**, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce (MAICC) recently signed what is believed to be the first MOU of its kind between a Canadian and an American Indian Chamber.

Eleven Winnipeg businesses took part in an Indigenous Trade Mission to Cass Lake, Minnesota in May of 2000, sparking enthusiastic calls from the MAICC for a return visit. The signing of the MOU on April 30, 2001 took place during the reciprocal trade mission hosted by the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.

**Mark Freedman**, Economic Development Co-ordinator for the Winnipeg Chamber, was instrumental in organizing the initial mission. "One of our goals was to make this a reciprocal event," he says, "and our plan now is to go back there (to Minnesota) again in 2002 and bring some new members, increase contacts, open more doors in Indigenous trade across the borders. By doing things like this, I think their Chamber and our Chamber certainly benefit."

Freedman and the other organizers of the April 30 mission put a great deal of effort and planning into making sure it would succeed. "We received corporate profiles from interested participants," he explains, "and we matched them up beforehand so that the time here was very productive. Some very good opportunities were opened up which would never have happened without this initiative."

The Winnipeg trade mission also welcomed participants from Nunavut. "Bringing Nunavut into it really opened more doors," Freedman emphasizes. "We have to start looking north-south instead of just east-west."

**Darrell Brown**, President of Kisik Marketing & Communications Ltd., is one of the participants who has already benefited from the trade mission. "By co-organizing and participating in the Minnesota American Indian/Nunavut Trade Mission," Brown says, "I have made international contacts that have given me entry into the U.S. and Central America markets, and possibly into Mexico. It was well worth my time and involvement."

**Lorraine Bear** of First Nations Vending — one of the participants in the first mission — made excellent contacts which enabled her to market her company's White Bear Springs bottled water to South Dakota, Nevada, Minnesota and New Mexico. "I've

been put into contact with some large corporations that are receptive to doing business with First Nations businesses," she says. "I feel the MOU is a great initiative that demonstrates that both chambers are willing to support Aboriginal business on both sides of the border."

**David Angus**, president and CEO of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce echoes these sentiments. "The development and growth of our Aboriginal business community in Manitoba is critical to the success of our province," he says, "and I see the relationship we have developed with the Minnesota American Indian Chamber as an important step. The MOU formalizes that relationship and means that both groups are committed to the pursuit of trade development."

According to Freedman, Winnipeg has the largest Aboriginal population of any city in Canada. "Promoting Aboriginal trade can only benefit Winnipeg," he says. ✨



(From left) **David Angus**, President and CEO of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and **Richard Antell**, Executive Director of the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce, at signing of historic Memorandum of Agreement.

# St. Mary's First Nation Cultivating Business Ties with Fredericton

by Raymond Lawrence

With a huge potential market at its front door, St. Mary's First Nation has transformed itself from a community with high unemployment to a major employer. Its thriving commercial relationship with the neighbouring city of Fredericton has resulted in jobs for its own members, for members of other nearby First Nations and for city residents.

Only three years ago, the First Nation's unemployment rate was running at about 80 percent. Today, the community has several commercial businesses, and plenty of jobs, founded on strong business ties with the New Brunswick capital.

This success is all part of the First Nation's vision. "We're governed by a five-member economic development business and planning committee and they set the divisions and directions for economic development in the community," explains **Wayne Brown**, the First Nation's Director of Economic Development and Planning. As a result of concerted community-driven efforts, St. Mary's Retail Sales, the First Nation's umbrella company, now owns and operates a courier and delivery service, a convenience store, a gas bar, a wholesale division, and a coffee vending and vending machine service.

The First Nation has been able to stick to its "pay-as-you-go" philosophy in developing all its businesses to date.

The community is in the process of developing a 6,100-square-metre mall and office complex — a critical component in its economic development plan. The mall will cost an estimated \$4.3 million, and will create approximately 100 new jobs.

"We're providing management training for those people who will take the management jobs for the mall. We have 13 managers and supervisors

in the organization who all come from St. Mary's," Brown says. Currently, 130 people are employed through St. Mary's Retail Sales, an exponential leap from the three employees it started out with three years ago.

"Our location is a plus for us because there are about 20,000 cars a day that travel the streets around our facility and around the reserve," Brown explains. "I've heard it many times how our employees are very friendly and very professional. We try to be sure that our products are competitive with our non-Native friends around us. We have to remain competitive because we're surrounded by large super-stores and grocery stores and gas stations."

These days, St. Mary's is attracting more and more opportunities. "I've found that since we've attained some success, there are a lot of proposals that come our way and we're careful about who we do business with," says Brown. The economic development and business planning committee interviews all potential business and investment clients. After evaluating proposals, the committee makes its recommendations to the Chief and Council.



Photo courtesy of St. Mary's First Nation

For the future, St. Mary's First Nation is considering several new possibilities, including developing more infrastructure for sports. The First Nation's softball park is already in regular use and has hosted a number of tournaments. The community hopes to be able to work with the city, and provincial and federal governments to jointly develop a major facility — one that will generate more jobs and opportunities. ★

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# North Shore Tribal Council Partnering with Elliot Lake on Arts Academy

by Fred Favel

There are more and more examples of Aboriginal communities forming partnerships with oil and gas companies, mining companies and forestry programs. And in the service sectors of the economy — like banking, transportation, telecommunications, education and retailing — constructive relationships with Aboriginal people have also become an important corporate issue.

Against this backdrop of resource and service sector partnership development, the collaboration which resulted in the White Mountain Academy of the Arts in Northern Ontario stands out as innovative and unique. It involves the City of Elliot Lake, the Serpent River First Nation and the North Shore Tribal Council. While this partnership involves economic development, it is also about art, vision and imagination, and respect for First Nations and non-First Nations culture and values. The partnership will also ensure a lasting positive legacy from a mining industry that brought short-term prosperity, but long-term economic deprivation and health risks to a community.

In the early 1950s, uranium was discovered at Elliot Lake and a sulphuric acid plant was built in Serpent River. Initially, both the First Nation community and the City of Elliot Lake prospered from this industry. When Ontario Hydro shut down mining in the area, it set aside \$65 million for economic diversification, of which \$10 million was earmarked for an arts college.

Both First Nations and Elliot Lake have pursued their own rebuilding strategies in the aftermath of the mine's closure. Serpent River has focused on building an infrastructure to meet its community's needs. One of the priority areas has been health, as its members have suffered health effects, including cancer, which have been

linked to the occupational hazards of uranium and sulfuric acid.

When the city approached the North Shore Tribal Council to participate in development of a northern campus of art, **Earl Commanda**, who is both Chief of Serpent River First Nation and a tribal council representative, expressed his concern. "I was kind of leery of that involvement because I didn't want any more tokenism that I had seen in any college or university initiatives in the past."

Today, White Mountain Academy of the Arts has a board that comprises four seats for the City of Elliot Lake, three for the North Shore Tribal Council and one for the Serpent River First Nation. The academy is housed in a 4,180-square-metre building, formerly used as a federal laboratory, and which is ideally suited for studios. Aboriginal people are involved in

key staff positions and Commanda is pleased with the direction in which the Academy is headed. "It is a true partnership," he says.

The best test of this partnership's success is to look at the student body. Now headed into its fourth year, the academy has a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. They study a curriculum which, according to Commanda, "really has captured the essence of where we are in terms of First Nations people."

As a privately funded, self-sustaining economic development project, the Academy is now exploring the establishment of an art gallery in Toronto. This will bring the work of its students and instructors to a larger audience and will provide the Academy with a source of financial support. ✨

**Fred Favel is an Aboriginal writer and communications consultant.**



White Mountain Academy has a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Photo credit: Fred Favel





# Portrait

## "Generation of Change"

Stan Dixon  
Coast Salish, Sechelt First Nation  
Editor, Philosopher, Catalyst

by Fred Favel

"We're going to bring our people back because we are going to have economic development. There will be a reason for them to stay here. They'll have a job."

We drive over the Lions Gate Bridge connecting Stanley Park and Vancouver's North Shore and then on to Horseshoe Bay, taking in a panoramic view of Vancouver and its harbours. At the BC Ferries terminal, we board the *Queen of Surrey* on our way to the Sunshine Coast. The huge vessel glides over the waters of Howe Sound, as children watch excitedly for whales. After the landing, a 20-minute drive along winding Highway 101 brings us to the First Nation community of Sechelt, snuggled neatly against the shoreline, alongside the neighbouring community of the same name.

Sechelt is well known as the first Aboriginal community to declare self-government under special parliamentary legislation. Among the many people pioneering this initiative was Chief Stan Dixon, a lifetime resident of Sechelt, famous for his dedicated and sometimes forceful manner.

Stanley Earl Joe Dixon was born on May 5, 1942, a member of the Sechelt Nation Hunaechin tribe, Wolf Clan. He attended St. Augustine School in Sechelt and St. Mary's School in Mission. He was an excellent student, and attributes his motivation as a self-starter to his experiences at school. Dixon graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in North Vancouver as one of its first Aboriginal students.

He recalls his community of those days — surrounded by logging camps, and a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. "The band members were quite influential in the logging industry. We were already established, from years gone by in fishing — but in logging we became prominent, and the best loggers on the coast were from the Sechelt Indian Band."

He has many happy memories of trips up the coast in the summer, a welcome break from residential school life. His grandfather would go into the woods with a few other men where they would chop down a red cedar, hollow it out, haul it to the beach and create a boat. Canoes could be carved in five or six days, he remembers.

It seemed inevitable that Dixon would become a logger, a job at which he quickly excelled. He does not mince words when describing his 25 years in the logging industry. "I was one of the most prominent loggers here on the coast. There's a lot of non-Native people who still remember how I helped their children when they were sixteen- or seventeen-year-olds entering the logging business." After a 21-day holiday in December 1972, Dixon chose not to return to the logging camp. Instead, he stayed home and was elected Councillor for the Sechelt First Nation. "Most of the people were thinking about the past, and I just started thinking what we've got to do is start thinking of the future, about our children."

Over the years, the logging industry had dried up for the residents of Sechelt. Dixon saw that there had to be some serious change if his community was to survive. In 1983 he ran for Chief and was elected for two terms. "We wanted to give our people employment. We wanted to have local autonomy. We wanted to have pride in ourselves. We wanted to have good houses like anybody else, and we wanted to be able to dress our children

up so they could go to school looking half decent, and have a lunch bucket. All these kinds of things that create what's necessary to have a healthy family. And we were at that stage in the last few years prior to self-government. And the government just could not refuse us."

The First Nation began self-government negotiations with Ottawa. Around the same time, the community signed a five-year option agreement with a private firm to begin the largest gravel operation in the world. The Sechelt First Nation's accomplishments continued as the years led up to the signing of the "Proclamation of Bill C-93: The Sechelt Indian Band Self Government Act" on October 9, 1986, and to the provincial legislation creating the Sechelt Indian Government District. Dixon attributes much of the First Nation's success to its work with bureaucracy to prove that self-government was common sense. "Why should the government be paying us welfare to do nothing when they could be paying us the same money under different legislative wording that would bring pride back to our people?"

The neighbouring community known as the District of Sechelt supported the First Nation. Dixon had addressed the municipal council. "Do you want us to work for ourselves? Do you want us to have jobs so we can come and buy cars from you? Buy clothing in your stores? Or wait for the government to distribute the money to us? And they agreed with us 100 percent." Today, the Sechelt First Nation receives funds directly from Treasury Board, money which is not divided among government departments. The community does not come under the *Indian Act*, and now has title to its own land.

In 1987, Dixon was defeated in his quest for a third term as Chief by just three votes. However, that same year he ran and was elected to the Sunshine Coast Regional District and returned to the Sechelt Band as Councillor in 1988.

During his tenure as Chief, Dixon negotiated an agreement with the Sunshine Coast Regional District to handle sewage and garbage disposal. Today, the District of Sechelt not only shares public utilities in partnership with its Aboriginal neighbours, but also the services of the fire department. A police liaison position exists with the local RCMP. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids attend the nursery school, and First Nation residents are employed throughout the community.

And Stan Dixon? In 1992, he took over *Kahtou*, an Aboriginal newspaper published in Vancouver, and moved it to Sechelt. In 1993, he was elected as Councillor to the District of Sechelt, and in 1999 he won again for a third term. In terms of partnerships between First Nations bands and neighbouring municipalities, he believes "there is probably none as good as this."

The Sechelt First Nation, the neighbouring town of Gibsons, the Sunshine Coast Regional Board, and the District of Sechelt now meet four times a year to discuss mutual interests in economic development. "What's the vision of the Sunshine Coast? How can we make all of those people happy? How can we make people self-reliant?" Says Dixon, "These are the same words as I was using in 1980...just a bigger picture now!"

**Fred Favel is an Aboriginal writer and communications consultant.**



Photo credit: Fred Favel



Photo credit: Kahtou

