



# Building Aboriginal and Northern Economies

## Blood Tribe

# Open communication leads to good governance

by Tara Lee Wittchen

Using television, radio and other media, the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta is keeping the lines of communication open with its members. "There has been a lot of talk lately about the need for accountability and transparency in First Nations," says Rick Tailfeathers, public relations and communications director. Strengthening communication between the administration and community members is important for the First Nation.

"Community meetings are held twice a year, and one of those community meetings is dedicated to the financial report," he explains. All spending, including staff salaries, is independently audited and published. Community members are encouraged to attend and ask questions at these meetings.

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Members watch a live broadcast of a council meeting.



Chief Chris Shade communicates with his members.

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Photo credit: Blood Tribe PR

Across the country, good governance practices are helping to build strong communities, people and economies. This issue profiles some of the many First Nations who are reaping the benefits of improved accountability and governance.

The Government of Canada is working to support these efforts in self-government negotiations, and through the Communities First: First Nations Governance initiative and the introduction of the First Nations Governance Act. For up-to-the-minute information, log on to the website at [www.fng-gpn.gc.ca](http://www.fng-gpn.gc.ca).

Visit our Aboriginal success stories database at [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca) (Click on "News Room").

Canada

## "Open communication..."

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Tailfeathers says, "Last year we did a press conference and the financial department, along with the Chief, went through the budget and the priorities for spending."

Tailfeathers feels that advancements in good governance can be made through technology and various media. "That's one of the reasons we're buying air time from our local independent tribal radio station. We produce a weekly radio program and do live broadcasts of the community meetings. We also produce a television show, which is broadcast on Global Lethbridge. We have a local newspaper, a newsletter and we've also got the Internet."

The First Nation also has a local television broadcasting system. Eight television monitors are set up in three administration buildings in the Standoff townsite, partly to address frequently asked questions. Tailfeathers explains, "The content we put on the network is information about activities happening on the reserve and public service announcements. We also do videotaped interviews and meetings." The different types of media enable the First Nation to communicate with both on- and off-reserve members.

"More First Nations are developing public relations and communications departments," he adds. "That is a very positive movement and I hope it continues to improve here." The most important thing for First Nations governments to realize, he says, is that people have to learn how to use communications technology.

"It's a tool to get the message out. Younger people really are catching on to digital technology." There's also a role for older members of the community. "Media has always existed in Blackfoot communities. It just hasn't been a written

Rick Tailfeathers, public relations and communications director, is videotaped in council chambers.



Photo credit: Myron Fox



language as we know it today. Elders can provide some of the traditional knowledge, the language."

If members continue to take part in communication initiatives, the First Nation's success in good governance will continue. Today the Blood Tribe independently controls 29 essential programs, including housing, education and community infrastructure—the largest number for any First Nation in Canada. ★

**Tara Lee Wittchen is a writer and editor of Ojibway and European heritage.**

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# *Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council* Luxury resort leads to economic growth

by Richard Landis

**T**he vision, patience and persistence of Chief Sophie Pierre helped change a former residential school into a \$42 million resort. The four-star resort has a hotel, casino and award-winning golf course. An aquatic, recreation and fitness complex, a Ktunaxa teepee camp and interpretive centre and an artists' co-op are also in the works.

"It has been a long and difficult development process – 10 years – but we kept focussed and the results speak for themselves," says Chief Pierre, a former St. Eugene Mission residential school resident.

"We created 250-plus new jobs and the resort now makes us the third largest private employer in the region," Pierre says. "Our project is creating new revenues for our communities and the economies

of our neighbours. It will strengthen the BC Rockies as an international tourist destination." The resort is designed with a Ktunaxa cultural theme, developed with the help of elder Mary Paul.

Pierre explains that accountability is important. "We're happy to invite other agencies, departments and corporations to see the openness and transparency—and witness the leadership of the five Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council (KKTC) bands. Accountability: that's why people have invested \$20 million in what we do."

Pierre says that while the KKTC owns 100 percent of the resort, they received assistance from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Western Economic Diversification Canada and Aboriginal Business Canada. Investors include the Columbia Basin Trust and the Royal Bank of Canada.

Pierre was recognized by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers with its Individual Economic Developer of the Year Award for 2002. She also recently received the Queen's Golden Jubilee commemorative medal for outstanding contributions to the five-band KKTC and was a 2003 recipient of a National Aboriginal Achievement Award.

Pierre has been Chief of the 320-member St. Mary's First Nation for 20 years and is the administrator of the KKTC, an umbrella organization established in the early 1970s to promote the political goals and the social, economic and developmental needs of the Ktunaxa Nation and the Kinbasket people.

According to Pierre, governance is critical in creating a viable community with a strong economic base. "Our Aboriginal nations must become self-governing again in order for us to regain who we are as a people—and to be able to take our rightful place in Canada."

For more information, contact Chief Sophie Pierre at (250) 489-2464. ✴

This four-star resort is designed with a Ktunaxa cultural theme.





# Open government encourages community participation

by Hélène Katz

**K**eeping up with local politics is easy for the 4000-plus Innu of Mashteuiatsh in Quebec.

The band council manages nearly \$30 million each year. An annual report, statutory open meetings and a consultation process for proposed regulations “allow members to find out what the band council is doing,” explains secretary general Denis Gill.

The First Nation in Mashteuiatsh was the first Aboriginal community in Quebec to publish an annual report, which began in the 1991-92 fiscal year. “Someone can read the annual report and see how councillors are meeting expectations,” says Gill. The council is also preparing a handbook so that band members fully understand the

responsibilities of their elected officials. While the band council as a whole makes decisions, each councillor is responsible for overseeing a specific service and ensuring that decisions are put into practice.

In 2000, the council created an economic development corporation that is managed by local entrepreneurs. It receives an annual budget to manage. “We’re putting this in the hands of the community. By doing this, the band council is showing that it supports private enterprise. It has stimulated interest in entrepreneurship,” Gill explains. Local entrepreneurs are involved in construction, arts, fur, forestry, convenience stores and a sawmill, among other enterprises.

Open council meetings are held every two weeks. Members can watch their councillors make decisions and then participate in a 30-minute question period. About 15 to 20 people usually attend the meetings and the entire half-hour question period is used.

A new consultation process “was set up so that people could give their opinions and participate in making decisions,” Gill says. The council organizes public meetings to give band members the opportunity to comment on a proposed regulation. The comments are used in the decision-making process.

For more information, visit the website at: [www.mashteuiatsh.ca](http://www.mashteuiatsh.ca) ★



The Innu of Mashteuiatsh are kept well-informed of what is happening in their community.

# Accountable members, accountable community

by Raymond Lawrence

**F**or the Ojibways of Pic River, accountability is becoming a way of life—not only for the band council, but for most of the First Nation's 950 members. This has led to more jobs, a stable community government and a better future.

There has been a major effort to give members opportunities to jobs, either through band businesses or job openings in the area surrounding Heron Bay in northern Ontario. To make sure that members meet and exceed expectations wherever they work, the community runs a holistic healing lodge, offers money for training and skill-development and works with members to help them make good career choices.

"We self-administer our training dollars so we can access money to put people through school and training so they can find meaningful jobs," says Byron LeClair, director of economic development. "If people have meaningful job opportunities, they should be accountable for the decision to work and provide for their families. In the same sense, we do our utmost to ensure they have those opportunities."

Through its efforts to develop business and through its investments, the First Nation has a silviculture (forestry) operation and a firefighting contract with the Government of Ontario. Last year, the First Nation created 140 summer jobs. They own two cable television companies, Superior TV and Pic River Development Corporation. One of the cable companies is also a high speed Internet provider. They have also invested over \$36 million in two hydro-electric projects in the area—projects that will provide a key revenue stream in the years to come.

"We want to participate, we want a share of the revenue and we want

opportunities for our people to work," says LeClair. "We've become an important employer in the region." The First Nation's jobless rate has dropped to 10 percent during the off-season and to five percent in the summer.

"From a government perspective, there's been a shift in demanding equity of First Nations for business investments." LeClair says that this is an important step toward accountability because if people have invested their own money in a business, investors will see that they're committed.

"Outside companies are more aware of our drive to succeed when we have our own money on the table," he says. The result? Companies are more willing to work with the First Nation, creating a cycle of success where their investments make money to be invested back into the community and into other opportunities.

"The community is involved throughout the process in determining how it is invested and where it goes," he says of band revenues. ✱

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



Pic River strives to create all types of jobs for community members.



# Good communication helps First Nation get its message out

by *Melanie Ferris*

**T**hree years ago, the Squamish Nation in North Vancouver was facing a huge challenge – how to get 50 percent plus 1 of their voting members to vote and accept a \$92.5 million land settlement.

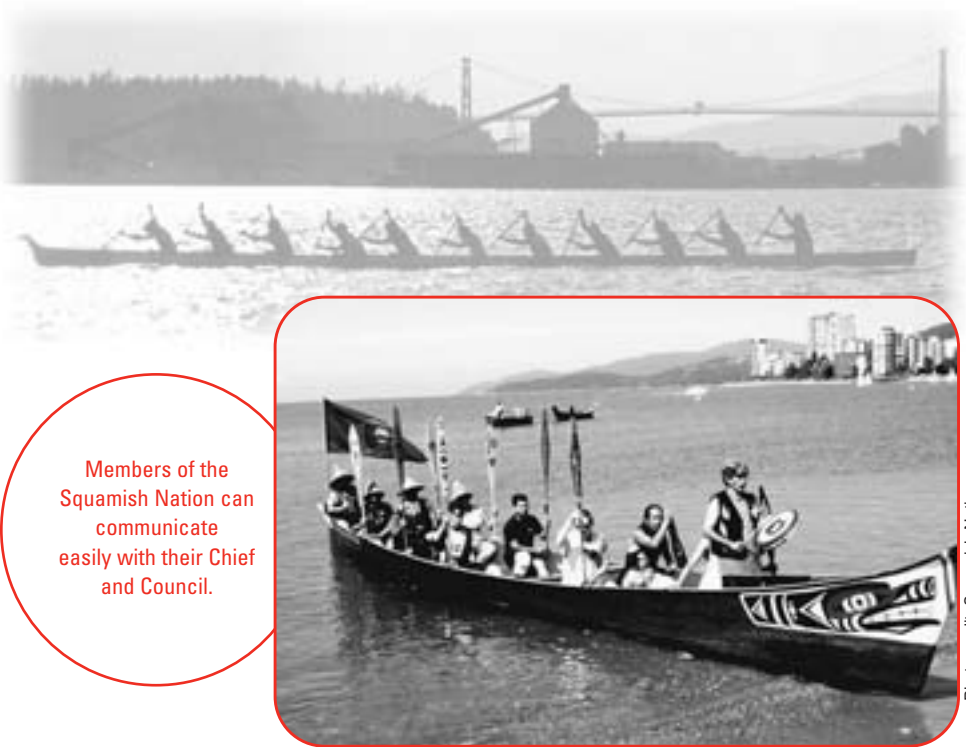
Former Councillor Tewanee Joseph explains, “The late Chief Joe Mathias, on behalf of the Squamish Nation, launched the *Omnibus Trust Action* in 1977. Some of the lands involved included Kitsilano, town of Squamish and Boullion.”

By 1998, negotiations on an out-of-court settlement were taking place. “In 1999 the Squamish Council received a proposed \$92.5 million settlement agreement and trust offer. It was at that point Council agreed to take it to our members for review and approval,” says Joseph.

The Chief and Council believed the settlement to be a fair offer and one with future benefits. It was decided that a vote would be called. Councillors Joseph and Krisandra Jacobs were asked to develop a communications strategy that would enable members to make an informed decision on the settlement offer.

The Chief and Council quickly developed a communications strategy with information tools such as a video, bulletins, mail packages and a website. The information was delivered the most basic way possible while still explaining the technical and binding nature of the agreement.

Joseph suggests, “The information video was the most effective form of communication because it was easy for the audience to understand, and was a familiar format for people to gain information.” The second most efficient



Members of the Squamish Nation can communicate easily with their Chief and Council.

Photo credit: Squamish Nation

communications tool was the toll-free telephone line, which allowed for off-reserve members to have their questions and concerns responded to quickly.

The Chief and Council also held regular meetings for different age groups. They would have question and answer sessions and explain the benefits of the agreement. The meetings were interactive and friendly; steps were taken to ensure that all questions were answered.

In the end, the hard work was worth it—76 percent of the 1944 Squamish people came to the ratification vote, of which 88 percent voted in favor of the settlement. The vote showed that good communication gets results.

With this success, the Squamish Nation demonstrated the importance of effectively communicating to and listening

to members, activities essential to good governance. To keep the lines of communication open within the community, a permanent Communications Department was created.

Today, the Squamish Nation has over \$60 million in trust. Members can call the Communications Department and suggest where money be spent. The department receives between 120 and 150 calls each day. Members also had the chance to respond to a survey that identified the following spending priorities for the trust funds: housing, health, social development, recreation, education and economic development.

Visit the community's website at:  
[www.squamish.net](http://www.squamish.net) ★

**Melanie Ferris is a writer and editor of *Ojibway* and *European heritage*.**



# Award winning housing creates jobs

by Owen Roberts

**D**uring the cold winter months, many of the 2200 Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory sleep tight—good governance by their Chief and Council helps them stay warm.

Affordable, energy-efficient housing is a priority for this southern Ontario community, located about 160 kilometres east of Toronto. Chris Maracle is the First Nation's director of housing, parks and band property maintenance. He oversees a busy 20-person department consisting of members who are carpenters, painters, electricians and apprentices. The department built more than 60 R-2000 homes, which are energy-efficient 1200- to 1300-square-foot houses. They are located on full-serviced 75-foot lots and rent for \$476 a month.

The community has 800 homes, many of which were built under the band's revolving loan program. The program was created 30 years ago when the band began pooling its federal housing subsidy instead of awarding it individually. Now, about 375 members have mortgages held by the band. That's created a multi-million dollar housing portfolio. The program also supports businesses in the community, such as the local lumber yard.

In 2003, the First Nation will build 12 more energy-efficient rental homes. They also plan to award nine mortgages and provide four renovation loans to their members.

"The key is support from the Chief and Council," says Maracle. "They've seen the economic and social benefits of a good housing program. That's why they're behind it so much." Maracle adds that people living in the energy-efficient homes are saving money on utilities,

giving them more to spend on life's other necessities.

The housing industry has taken note. The housing program has won over a dozen awards, including the coveted Energy Efficiency Award from Natural Resources Canada in 2003. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation recognized the band in its Healthy Housing Program. The program recognizes innovations that help low- and moderate-income families across Canada find adequate and affordable places to live.

But the work's not done yet. The mortgage program attracts 30 to 50 applicants each year. Another 75 to 80 families are waiting for rental homes. "We're getting that number down," says Maracle. "We're working on it."

So what about those wicked Canadian winters? The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte say, "bring them on." ★

***Owen Roberts is a journalist and communications instructor of Ojibway and European ancestry.***



Photo credit: Chris Maracle



Award winning housing is improving quality of life.

# Model in economic development

by Richard Landis

**T**hrough strong leadership, good governance and an eye to the future, Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba has achieved a remarkable economic feat.

Several major economic development projects helped the community get rid of their deficit of \$3.8 million. This is one of the reasons Norway House was named Economic Developer of the Year for 2001 by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

One of the community's biggest challenges has been its remote location. "I think that since we are an isolated northern community and have been able to accomplish these things, (that) is probably what captured the support," says Norway House Chief Ron Evans. Located 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg, Norway House is at the top of Lake Winnipeg.

The Cree Nation planned its business ventures to serve the needs of community members. With the largest on-reserve population of any First Nation in Manitoba, Norway House has 5000 members and 1000 Métis and non-Aboriginal residents. More than 80 percent of members live in the community.

Norway House keeps its members informed of their financial affairs by publishing their annual financial report in the local newspaper. "If people know our financial affairs, if people know about our initiatives, they are more willing to support them," says Chief Evans.

Compensation from the Northern Flood Agreement helped establish a trust fund. Through a community approval process, the fund allows interest dollars to be used for community projects and programs.



Good governance in Norway House means more jobs for the community.

The trust enables the Cree Nation to access funding and financing needed for major development.

In 1997, Norway House built health division buildings, a council and administration building, a 16-unit apartment building and a 32-room motel. The Nikanihk Achakosak Day Care and Kistapinanihk Mall were built in 1998, followed by the Child and Family Services and Keenanow Trust Secretariat buildings in 2000. Chief Evans is particularly proud of the community's multiplex, a building that has an arena, curling rink, fitness centre, restaurant, community television and radio stations, offices and small businesses.

A new school is being built at a cost of \$43.1 million. This is a major development that will be the only one of its kind in any First Nation in Canada. It is

scheduled to be done in December 2003. A community complex will be attached to the school.

All this construction has created jobs and opportunities to learn new skills. Between 65 and 70 percent of members work within the community. "Our people do all the construction... we are building a healthy community," says Evans. "We must continue to improve the quality of life in our community." People also work within the band-run businesses while others have started their own businesses, including gas stations, convenience stores, restaurants and car service centers. Chief Evans concludes, "Each time we're able to accomplish our goals, that creates jobs."