

Community

Tikinagan honours foster parents

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Tikinagan Child and Family Services is recognizing the commitment of more than 200 foster parents for helping children to stay closer to home during Foster Parent Appreciation Month in March. Tikinagan states that about 74 per cent of the children and youth in its care are placed with First Nation foster families and nearly half of the children in its care are placed in their First Nation and in the same community as their family despite some of the hardships foster parents face

such as limited resources, grocery prices and housing.

"It is important to provide our children with stability in what can be an uncertain time, including going to the same school, seeing friends and staying in the places they know," says Gail Anderson, director of services at Tikinagan. "That is why we believe these answers lie within the community, where we focus our efforts on keeping children in their community and maintain their connections to family. This is all made possible by our amazing foster parents."

Tikinagan also thanked all of its foster parents for their dedication to the children and youth who walk through their door, whether they offer emergency placements for a few days, provide long-term care until reunification is

possible or work directly in one of Tikinagan's seven agency-operated homes.

"They do a lot for our children, they take them and they care for them, they nurture them and they look after them as their own, they love them and care for them," says Nora Vincent, service manager at Tikinagan. "That's why we'd like to thank all our foster parents for doing what they do. We try to keep families together and work with the family, or place (the children) with extended family."

Tikinagan states that its live-in foster parents, who care for children in the agency-operated homes on seven-day, 15-day or 30-day rotations, offer an alternative way to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, adding that the live-in foster parents play a key role in making a child feel comfortable, cared for and accepted.

"The comfort of home can be provided in many meaningful ways: speaking in the language, preparing traditional meals like moose or pickerel or involving youth in cultural and land-based activities," says Anderson, who also stressed the importance of Tikinagan's service model, Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, which means everyone working together to raise our children and reflects the traditional ways in which First Nations protect and care for children and



submitted photo

Tikinagan Child and Family Services is recognizing the commitment of more than 200 foster parents for helping children to stay closer to home during Foster Parent Appreciation Month in March.

support families. "Our foster parents embody the true spirit of Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin. We are deeply grateful for their role in helping our children."

Vincent says Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin is about the whole community working together to keep the children safe.

"We work with the families, the children, extended family

so we can keep the children at home, making sure all the children are safe and taken care of," Vincent says.

Tikinagan also announced an upcoming youth event, Aandeg Milkana, which includes a documentary unveiling and Indigenous artworks, will be held on March 29 from 12-5 p.m. at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Noodawishinaam

Oshkiniigiwig (Hear Us Youth) members Eternity Neekan and Malakai Mawageesick worked together to release the resource for Indigenous youth in the Thunder Bay region.

Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwig, which was launched in January 2025, has a mission to provide opportunities for children and youth currently and formerly in

care from Tikinagan's 30 First Nation communities including: opportunities to speak up and share concerns, ideas and vision for themselves; opportunities to engage with other youth; and to help guide Tikinagan's mandate.

Information about Noodawishinaam Oshkiniigiwig is posted on the Tikinagan website at: www.tikinagan.org/projects/hear-us-youth/.

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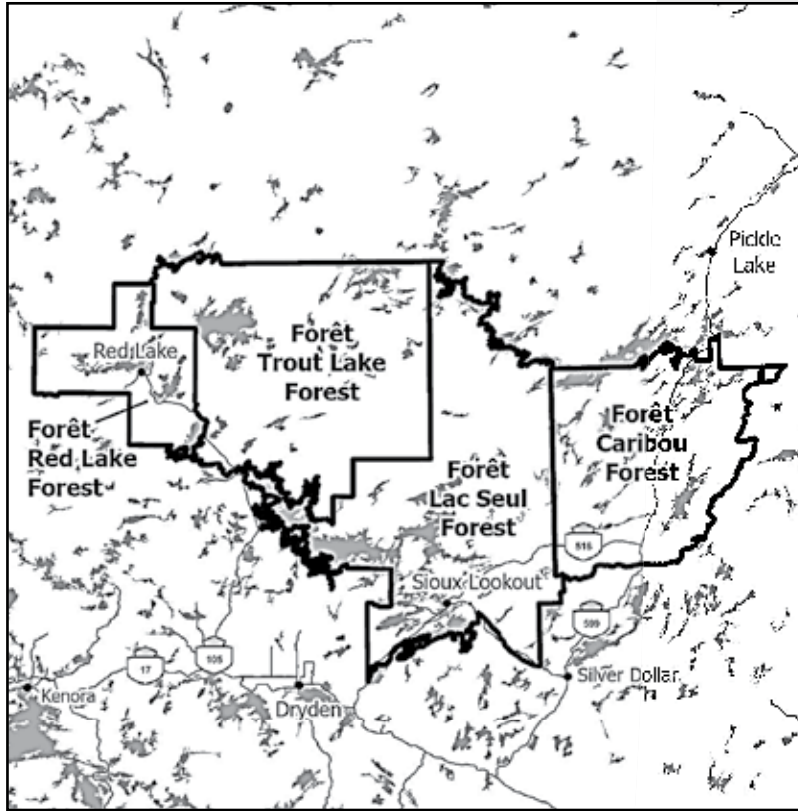
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Inspection

Inspection of 2026 – 2027 Annual Work Schedules for the Red Lake, Trout Lake, Caribou and Lac Seul Forests

The April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027 Annual Work Schedules (AWS) for the **Red Lake, Trout Lake, Caribou and Lac Seul Forests** are available for public viewing by contacting the forest company contacts listed below during normal business hours and on the Natural Resources Information Portal at ontario.ca/ForestPlans beginning **March 17, 2026** and for the one-year duration of the AWS.



Scheduled Forest Management Operations

The AWS describes forest operations such as road construction, maintenance and decommissioning, forestry aggregate pits, harvest, site preparation, tree planting and tending that are scheduled to occur during the year.

More Information

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Maegan Ciaruko, R.P.F.
Management Forester
Ministry of Natural Resources
Red Lake District Office
227 Howey Street
Floor 2
P.O. Box 5003
Red Lake, ON POV 2M0
tel: 807-738-1047
e-mail: maegan.ciaruko@ontario.ca

Trout Lake Forest

Neal Hissa, R.P.F.
Planning Forester
Dryden Fibre Canada
1 Duke Street
Dryden, ON P8N 3J7
tel: 807-323-4199
e-mail: nhissa@drydenfibre.ca

Caribou Forest

Matthew Hupf, R.P.F.
Forestry Superintendent
Domtar
2001 Neebing Avenue
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 6S3
tel: 807-475-2458
e-mail: matthew.hupf@domtar.com

Red Lake Forest

David Maxfield, R.P.F.
Management Forester
Ministry of Natural Resources
Red Lake District Office
227 Howey Street
Floor 2
P.O. Box 5003
Red Lake, ON POV 2M0
tel: 807-728-0177
e-mail: david.maxfield@ontario.ca

Stay Involved

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Renseignements en français : David Maxfield, F.P.I., 807 728-0177, david.maxfield@ontario.ca.

Robert Partridge, R.P.F.
General Manager
Red Lake Forest Management Company Ltd.
P.O. Box 1338
Red Lake, ON POV 2M0
tel: 807-728-3832
e-mail: redlakeforest@gmail.com

Lac Seul Forest

Kevin Pruys, R.P.F.
Management Forester
Ministry of Natural Resources
Sioux Lookout District Office
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Sioux Lookout, ON P8T 1A6
tel: 807-738-4937
e-mail: kevin.pruys@ontario.ca

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tel: 807-737-9644
e-mail: jbinguis@obishcorp.ca

Community



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Jeffrey Gunner, director of the emergency first response team program at Ornge, speaks during Ornge's announcement of new emergency response trucks, medical equipment pods and stretcher systems for the Emergency First Response Team program.

New equipment for First Nations emergency response team

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Ornge recently displayed some of the specialized equipment that will be provided to First Nation communities through the Emergency First Response Team (EFRT) program on March 10 at the Ornge Hangar in Thunder Bay. The EFRT program, which is supported by Ornge and operated by First Nations, includes a community led, paid emergency first response team to respond to local health emergencies in the community.

“Strengthening local response capacity is critical in improving outcomes for patients in remote and northern communities,” says Dr. Homer Tien, president and CEO at Ornge. “This program represents a partnership approach, providing communities with the tools and training necessary to independently respond quickly to the needs of their community while advanced care is on the way.”

Ornge will provide EFRT teams with initial and annual training and oversight, a vehicle with transport capabilities, supplies and equipment and support with records management and data collection, and the responders will be paid for duty.

“The idea of it is to provide First Nations communities with access to training, funding, equipment, vehicles in order to respond in their community, treat patients and transport them to a nursing station,” says Wade Durham, chief operating officer at Ornge. “We’re quite excited to launch the program today. When we were first asked by the Ministry of Health to take this on, the one thing that we realized quickly was that it had to be First Nation community owned, First Nation community run and led, and today there’s representatives from five different communities, all in northern Ontario, that are here as part of this announcement.”

Zaccheriah Brown, community coordinator for the emergency first response team in Wapekeka, appreciated the opportunity to check out the new emergency response trucks, medical equipment pods and stretcher systems at the Ornge Hangar.

“They’re really nice,” Brown says. “These are very nice vehicles and they have 4x4 on them so we won’t get stuck anymore when we go to calls.”

Brown says he asked for help a few years ago to form a team of first responders when he was a medical driver in his community.

“We had a good group there, there was only like nine or 10 of us,” Brown says. “We did it for years for free, just to serve our community because that’s what our community needed, was first responders.”

Alisha Makila, advanced emergency first response lead with KO Health in Deer Lake, says they are currently moving from volunteer-based to paid first responders in Deer Lake through the EFRT program.

“We’ve actually been fortunate enough to have the first version of the truck (the new emergency response trucks on display in the Ornge Hangar), and we’ve been working out of that for the last year-and-a-half,” Makila says. “We actually just received a lot of new equipment — we’re having training coming down on the 20th for this new equipment and the first responders to give them a bit of a refresher since we now have the updated equipment. We have everything you would typically see on an ambulance in Thunder Bay, equipment-wise minus the medications.”

Jeffrey Gunner, director of the emergency first response team program at Ornge, says the new emergency response trucks were built by a company in northern Alberta.

“He works alongside the dealership and also the company that builds the (medical equipment) pod and he gets them to modify the pod to build the trucks for what we need,” Gunner says. “The big thing about these trucks is they’re 4x4, so they’re made for off-road in the far north communities where they’re going to be placed. We beefed up the back suspension, we beefed up the wheels and the rims, we wanted to make sure they’re going to last up there. The pods themselves are made to last 25 years, so we can probably keep them and repurpose them on a new truck. The trucks we’re hoping to last between five and seven years.”

Gunner says community-based first response fills a “crucial gap in the chain of survival.”

“By supporting responder training and providing high-quality equipment, we are empowering local teams and improving the continuum of care for residents,” Gunner says.

Community

NDP northern tour stops in Thunder Bay

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa, NDP leader Marit Stiles and MPPs Guy Bourgouin, John Vanthof and Lise Vaugeois recently heard concerns from community members during a town hall meeting on March 9 in Thunder Bay. The town hall meeting was held at the Slovak Legion as part of the Northern Tour: Our Roads, Our Safety that Mamakwa, Bourgouin and Vanthof had kicked off on March 3 in North Bay before travelling on to other communities across northern Ontario along Hwys. 11 and 17.

“This is our seventh day and of all the visits that we’ve had, this is the biggest group that we’ve had so far, so thank you for coming out,” Mamakwa says. “It’s been a difficult trip, it’s difficult to hear the stories of people that have lost people in these tragic accidents. I think one of the toughest days was probably a couple of days ago, we were in Thunder Bay on our way to Dryden — I’d like to acknowledge Nathan, he’s such a strong man, he’s going through it right now. Our intent is to bring the attention to the safety of the highways that we drive on every day, the people that are living along Hwy. 11 and 17.”

Mamakwa says he heard a lot of frustration and hurt from people during the town hall meeting.

“I think there was a lot of frustration, perhaps anger, but lots of hurt (from) people in and around Thunder Bay

because of those deadly crashes that we’ve seen, loss of life,” Mamakwa says. “One of the things they talk about is, what’s the next step, what do we do after the road trip. There’s more to be done — people are organizing, people are planning and I think it’s important that people come together, not just Thunder Bay, it’s people that live across Hwys. 11 and 17. We need to come together as northerners as a way for the levels of government, whether it’s the federal or provincial, to listen to make these highways safe.”

Stiles says she can’t think of a more important nation building project than fixing the highways across northern Ontario and making them safe.

“The number one reason why I think all of us care about this issue and highway safety is because we want to make the highways safe because we want to keep people safe,” Stiles says. “You heard it here tonight, story after story and I know there were so many other stories that didn’t get told tonight, but I don’t think there’s one person that I’ve ever met up here near Thunder Bay who hasn’t lost a friend, a neighbour, a loved one on these highways and it’s getting worse, not better. I think that’s why the pressure is increasing because people are seeing it getting worse every day and I think as traffic continues to increase because of this emphasis on inter-provincial trade, I can’t understand why the government wouldn’t make that a priority.”

Deputy Grand Chief Bobby Narcisse says highway safety is a big concern for the Nishnawbe



Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa speaks during the Northern Tour: Our Roads, Our Safety town hall meeting, held March 9 at the Slovak Legion in Thunder Bay.

Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Aski Nation leadership, noting that three First Nations people, two from Constance Lake and one from Whitefish Bay, lost their lives on Jan. 31 on Hwy. 11.

“That was a very tragic event, and that’s (why) I think all these concerned citizens are here,” Narcisse says. “And I’m sure members of First Nations around the region too share in that worry that there needs to be more significant changes to making our highways safer. But there’s infrastructure that also needs to be supported, twinning the highway, putting in medians as well.”

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler says First Nations people have the same concerns as others do about the safety of using the highways in northern Ontario.

“I think it’s becoming more and more of a concern, especially this past year just how many road closures and accidents we hear about,” Fiddler says, noting he attended the funeral service for the two Constance Lake citizens who lost their lives on Hwy. 11. “Around that same time there was another accident outside of Thunder Bay where we lost two young women, one was from Poplar Hill and one was

from (Eabametoong), and then around that same time there was another accident involving a family from Webequie. The winter road had just opened up a day or two before that and they were coming to Thunder Bay to visit family. The mother of that family ... subsequently died from her injuries.”

Bourgouin, Mushkegowuk-James Bay MPP, says northern families deserve highways that are safe, reliable and properly maintained.

“I’ve introduced multiple bills on road safety because this is a life-and-death issue in the north,” Bourgouin says. “This

highway tour is about listening to communities, documenting real concerns and pushing the government to act — before more lives are lost.”

Vanthof, Timiskaming-Cochrane MPP, raised the TV show Ice Road Truckers during the kick off of the Northern Tour.

“We don’t need to watch Ice Road Truckers, we live it,” Vanthof says. “We are going to make the trek from Queen’s Park to Manitoba and back to show what Hwy. 11 and 17 is really like and why it needs to be modernized and expanded.”

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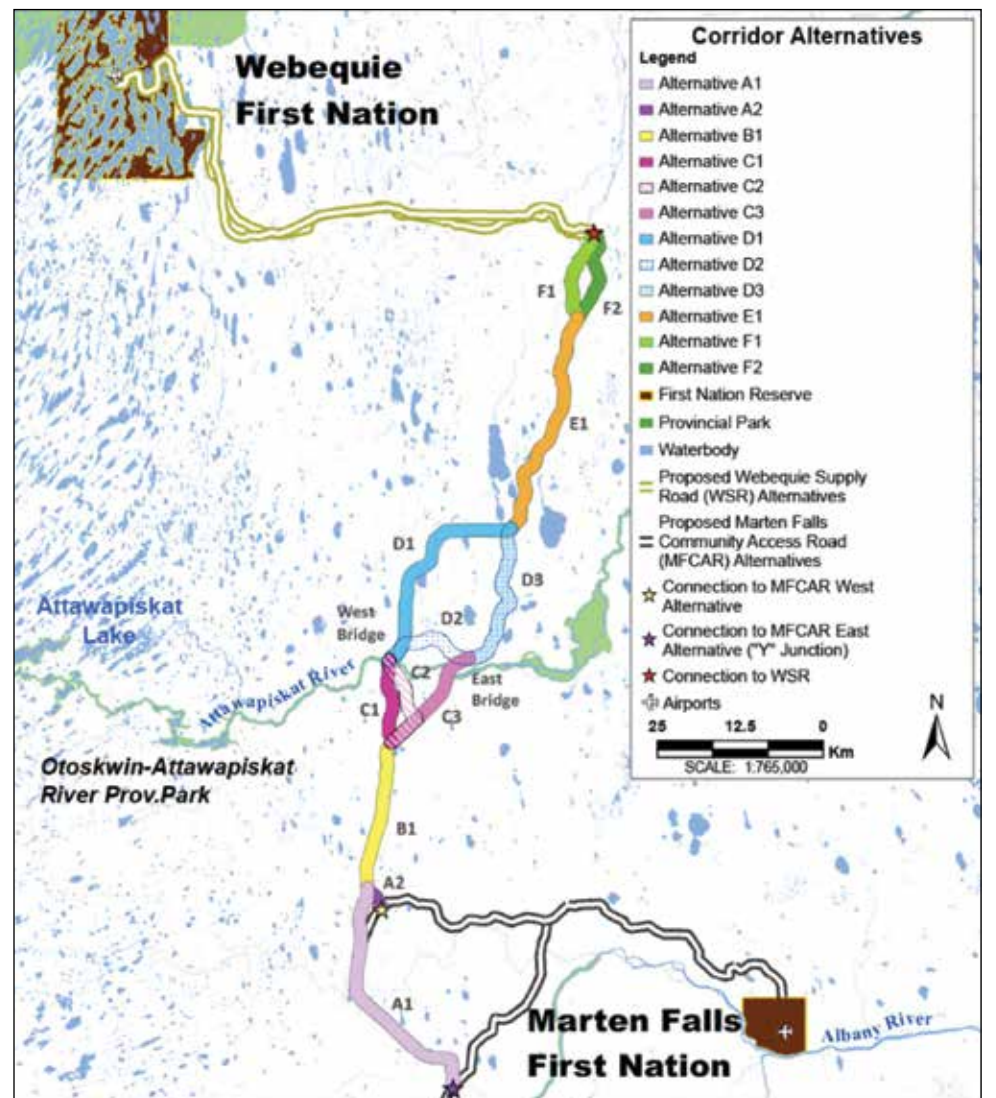
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Community



screenshot

A map of the Northern Road Link corridor alternatives from the Northern Road Link website.

Marten Falls and Webequie hold Northern Road open house

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Marten Falls and Webequie recently held a new series of open houses across northern Ontario to seek further input into the preferred corridor for the proposed Northern Road Link. The open houses, which were scheduled on Feb. 19 in Timmins, Feb. 24 and 25 in Thunder Bay and Feb. 26 in Geraldton, were the fifth series of open houses held for the proposed Northern Road Link.

“The Northern Road Link is right now undertaking the provincial Environmental Assessment (EA) and federal Impact Assessment (IA) and we’re now at that stage in the process where we’ve received a lot of feedback and information on our alternatives available that we can choose from,” says Qasim Saddique, project co-lead representing Marten Falls. “We’ve also collected significant baseline information and field data which we’ll continue to do as the process moves forward. We’re now at that stage where we’ve conducted that analysis and we’re seeking feedback on our analysis so we can confirm the preferred (road corridor) that we move forward with.”

Participants at the open houses will have the opportunity to learn about the evaluation of corridor alternatives, ask questions and provide feedback before a final corridor is selected.

“At this stage we’ve analyzed all the data and information and we have one alternative that we have identified that we

believe is the way to go based on the information that we’ve collected, the data we have, the feedback that we have received,” Saddique says. “At this open house, we’re seeking feedback on the analysis that we’ve conducted. After these open houses, shortly after based on the feedback we get, we will consolidate our analysis and move forward with the choice of the preferred.”

“Feedback at this stage is essential and will help inform the final corridor selection...”

– Qasim Saddique

A key focus of the open houses is the project’s Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Program, which is informing the EA/IA. Funding remains available to support Indigenous communities in conducting Indigenous Knowledge studies and sharing information related to land and resource use, cultural practices and values, and rights and interests within the project study area.

“The Indigenous Knowledge Program is a foundational element of the environmental and impact assessments,” says Michael Fox, project co-lead representing Webequie. “IK study plans help assess potential effects on Aboriginal and treaty rights, the environment and cultural heritage. This

knowledge, combined with community feedback, allows us to identify ways to avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts while enhancing positive outcomes for Indigenous communities.”

Saddique says they have received Indigenous Knowledge and information confidentially from a few First Nations.

“As we near the completion of the corridor alternatives evaluation, we are seeking further input from Indigenous communities and stakeholders,” Saddique says. “Feedback at this stage is essential and will help inform the final corridor selection and the next phase of the EA/IA.”

The open houses also featured a 3D physical model and an interactive digital model of the proposed all-season road.

“When we talk about the Northern Road Link, a lot of people have questions around what’s the road going to look like physically and we’ve in the past described it through words and different pictures as well,” Saddique says. “But what we’ve done to sort of help with visualization is we’ve made a 3D model. It’s sort of the size of a coffee table and you can see what the road will end up looking like. And similarly, we’ve made a digital model — you can put on 3D goggles and it takes you into sort of a digital realm where you can turn around and you can see what the road will physically look like, so we’re just using these tools to help with the conversation around what the road will physically look like.”



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Arts & Entertainment

Thunder Bay Art Gallery calls out for juried show submissions

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Thunder Bay Art Gallery is calling out for submissions from artists living and practicing in northwestern and northeastern Ontario for the 2026 Northern Ontario Juried Show, which runs from July 5-Sept. 13. The gallery is also reaching out for applicants for its new TD associate curator Indigenous ways position, which is supported by a \$300,000 donation from TD Bank Group through the TD Ready Commitment, TD's corporate citizenship platform.

"Artists from across the region can submit work, which a jury of three artists are looking at, and out of those submissions are going to prepare an exhibition of the best work in northern Ontario," says Matthew Hills, executive director at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. "We wanted people to be aware that may not see our newsletters or see our communications regularly about that opportunity for the juried exhibition, that they can submit work and be part of an exhibition here. The details are on our website and the deadline is the end of this month (March 31), so there is still lots of time to submit possible work and images if anyone is interested in being in the exhibition."

Hills says the artists are only required to submit images of their work by the deadline.

"If they are picked for the exhibition, the gallery reaches

out and figures out how to ship the work and get it here," Hills says.

Information about submitting works for the exhibition is posted on the Thunder Bay Art Gallery website at: theag.ca/2026-northern-ontario-juried-exhibition/.

"The show is really a showcase of all kinds of different art practices, all kinds of different people who are making art in the region," says Penelope Smart, curator at the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. "This is really a chance for the gallery to get the word out as far and wide as we can because we know that artists are working all across the region — so we really want to encourage anyone who's interested."

Smart says some of the art practices include sculpture, drawing, painting, photography, digital art, sound art, video art, beadwork, quill work and wood sculpture.

"All of that is considered really exciting art practice in the region," Smart says. "(The show) is really a way to gather together a wide variety of art that's being made in different materials and in different ways and in different places across the region to celebrate it and to kind of get a sense of what people are making and what people are excited about out there."

The TD associate curator Indigenous ways is a dedicated position that will focus on fostering and sharing the



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

The Thunder Bay Art Gallery is calling out for submissions from artists living and practicing in northwestern and northeastern Ontario for the 2026 Northern Ontario Juried Show.

knowledge and expertise of the Indigenous community throughout the Thunder Bay Art Gallery.

"Art has a unique way of bringing people together and creating space for shared stories and perspectives," says Terry Copenace, senior regional manager, Indigenous Banking Group, TD Bank Group. "Through the TD Ready Commitment, we're proud to support the Thunder Bay Art Gallery as it creates opportunities for voices from Indigenous communities to be

shared and heard."

The new position responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action for art museums and advances decolonization in alignment with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, guided by the Canadian Museums Association's Indigenous-led Moved to Action framework.

"We are deeply grateful for TD's visionary support of this position," Hills says. "Their investment in the work of the gallery in our 50th

anniversary year, at a time of transformative growth for not only our institution but our broader community, reflects shared values and commitment. We look forward to working alongside TD to create new pathways, opportunities and change in our sector."

Hills says the Thunder Bay Art Gallery has a nationally renowned collection of Woodland Art, including artists such as Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Roy Thomas, Carl Ray and Carl Beam.

"In our 50-year history, we

have supported and collected these artists and we're now in our 50th year able to have a really strong collection, one that we loan around the world," Hills says. "We get inquiries from institutions in the States, institutions in Europe to loan this work now that it's recognized as culturally significant and viable, so we're really fortunate to have that kind of collection, and from our perspective to be part of such a vibrant and vital cultural region as Thunder Bay and northern Ontario."



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Education

NAN hosts best practices in education forum

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Hip hop artist Drezus was featured at Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Best Practices in First Nations Education Forum, held Feb. 18-19 at the Superior Inn Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

"I was born in the city, Saskatoon, Sask., the west side of Saskatoon, a lot of drugs, alcohol, all these different addictions, violence," Drezus says during his How I Was Introduced to the Drum presentation. "And I grew up thinking that was normal, you know to have low self esteem, to be always second guessing myself. But the drum changed all that."

Drezus says he began collaborating with his Plains Cree Elder about a year ago in the lodge and has since started co-hosting sweat lodges.

"I'm used to co-hosting shows, performances, events, but now I've moved into a healing space where I'm co-hosting sweat lodges," Drezus says. "What I mean by co-hosting is I talk to my Elder, I go through the proper channels, the proper protocol, to let him know that I want to hold a sweat for the people. And what I do is invite other creatives from all over North America and I've been able to enjoy some success in my time and I've met up with a lot of really big hip hop artists and producers, entertainers."

Drezus says he has been on TV shows like Yellowstone and



Hip hop artist Drezus speaks during his How I Was Introduced to the Drum presentation at Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Best Practices in First Nations Education Forum, held Feb. 18-19 at the Superior Inn Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

has connected with people like Drake and Kendrick Lamar.

"To the youth these are huge names, and I invite these people to the sweat lodge," Drezus says. "Most recently I co-hosted a sweat just east of Calgary where I now stay and we had

about 20 people out there, and my special guest was AJ McQueen from Houston, Texas and he brought his people out to the sweat lodge — it was actually their first time meeting Native people."

Drezus says he shared the

sweat lodge protocol with McQueen and his people.

"I let them know you don't drum in there and this and that," Drezus says. "He's a really good content guy — as soon as he got out he was on his phone saying how beautiful the culture

was and how beautiful the healing that he had."

Drezus says his guests for the sweat lodge also included fans and young people.

"So not only do I invite big hip hop artists and big artists and movie stars, I also invite

the youth," Drezus says. "And one of those youth came out to a show about two months ago in Calgary, Alberta, a show of mine at this fashion show called Wear the Storm by Sacred Thunder, where we reclaimed this space in downtown Calgary that used to be called the Hudson Bay Company. We had an Elder come out and bless it and I also did a performance."

Drezus says he recently met a young woman who gifted him the drum that he brought with him to the forum.

"She said it was from New Brunswick, elk from New Brunswick and cedar from out that way," Drezus says. "When I got this, it reaffirmed my journey and my path, that I am on the right path now."

The forum also featured keynote presentations by Northern Nishnawbe Education Council's Dobi-Dawn Frenette; Sandy Lake Elder Teri Fiddler on My Partner's Dream; Fort William's Corine Bannon and Naicatchewenin's Orville Councillor on Epigenetics and How We Can Change the Code; Morning Star Tom on Rooted in Care: Matriarchal Pedagogies and Student Wellbeing; and Henry Coaster Memorial School's Tom Recke, Dave Simard, Orville Councillor, Brenda Daniels and Felipe Pereira on Mino De'e Mino Maanji'o Walking in Balance: Building Educational Foundations Through Culture, Community and Connection.

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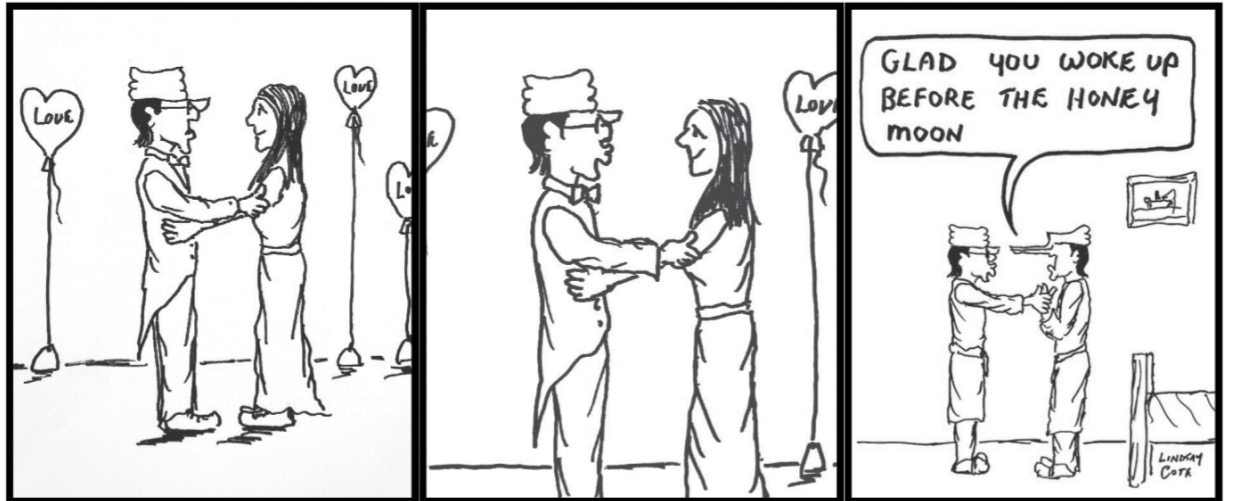
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Community

Neeganii Iishawin holds business showcase

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Omekanahkay Partnership's Village Corner property acquisition in Vermilion Bay was highlighted during the First Nations Business Showcase at the Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering in Thunder Bay. The showcase was held on the third morning of the gathering, which was hosted by five tribal council partners representing 34 First Nations on Feb. 10-12 at the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel and Conference Centre.

"I'm here today on behalf of Omekanahkay," says Ben Raison, a partner at Spruce River Construction Management and Engineering, noting that Omekanahkay is a joint venture group owned by three First Nations, Deer Lake, North Spirit Lake and Poplar Hill. "Omekanahkay was formed to capture subcontracting opportunities related to construction of the Wataynikaneyap transmission line. It was formed by the three First Nations and their representatives and the late Ed Hoshizaki, he was the advisor working with them to get this off the ground."

Raison says Omekanahkay was the vision of the three First Nations long before the Wataynikaneyap transmission line was reaching construction.

"It was something they were already looking at for economic development, capacity building and capturing opportunities within their traditional territories," Raison says. "The Wataynikaneyap project just provided a very good platform for them to start capturing these opportunities — they had a vision beyond the Wataynikaneyap project, so these construction opportunities would be used as stepping stones for



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

A First Nations Business Showcase was featured at the Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering.

Omekanahkay to become an Indigenous-owned service entity to support economic development, capacity building and revenue generation for the three First Nations, now looking beyond and into equity participation, property development, property management, spinning off other businesses and things of that nature."

Mitchell Farrell Malcolm, a partner at Spruce River Construction Management and Engineering, says as Omekanahkay grew and started to look at expanding their business portfolio, the group of directors began discussing the need for more service stations along the Hwy. 105 corridor and along the Hwy. 17 corridor.

"There's a lot of folks travelling those corridors all the time, a lot of folks from the northern remote communities use that corridor in the winter road season and there's really limited services for people to stop and get fuel, take a rest, have some snacks, get some food," Malcolm says. "So that was really where the vision came from, was identifying the need of community members to have better services along those highway corridors."

Malcolm says the Omekanahkay directors decided to look into whether the property of the former Village Corner business at the corner of Hwys. 17 and 105 that burnt

down in 2010 was available for sale.

"We found out within a month that it actually was for sale and it was just listed," Malcolm says. "So we brought that back and talked about it as a group and we actually jumped in and secured that property pretty quickly. And that's now what's becoming the Keewaytinook Corner property. So it started with a vision of how we could better service the folks that use those corridors and it's now turned into a real generational bricks and mortar business."

Malcolm says Omekanahkay owns 100 per cent of the property and the buildings, adding that they will also own 100 per cent of the fuel station and convenience store that they are planning to operate at the property.

"So it started with the vision of need and it's also filling the vision of growing Omekanahkay and expanding their business portfolio and creating that generational wealth," Malcolm says.

Vincent Nabigon, CEO at Biigtigong Dbenjgan, also discussed the challenges that First Nations face when developing businesses, and he highlighted the industrial laundry facility that they established to serve industries in the region during the First Nations Business Showcase.

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Community

Neeganii Iishawin showcases youth leadership panel

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering featured a Youth Leadership Panel discussion by Birdtail Sioux Dakota Nation Chief Tréchelle Bunn, Mattagami Councillor Devin Naveau and Crawford Mechanical Ltd. co-owner Connor Dube-Crawford. The panel discussion was held on the first morning of the gathering, which was hosted by five tribal council partners representing 34 First Nations on Feb. 10-12 at the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

"My journey in leadership started probably in an unconventional way — growing up I never really thought of myself as a leader," Bunn says. "It wasn't until I was part of an Indigenous student leadership group at the University of Manitoba and an Elder had kind of shared with me that there's different forms of leadership — some leaders can be people that lead by example and just consistently show up and do the right thing, and that

really resonated with me."

Bunn says that was a pivotal turning point for her.

"I started being able to see that we all have a gift of leadership in some shape or form and we have that responsibility to answer the call to leadership when we are called upon," Bunn says. "Prior to being elected chief of my community, I was the former youth chief of the Southern Chiefs' Organization. I served in that role as youth chief for two years and I ended my term last March. And then a month later I was elected as chief of my community, so that was a huge honour."

Naveau, CFO at Mattagami Aki, says he also never thought of himself as taking on a leadership role.

"But eight or nine years ago, I was nominated to run for council," Naveau says. "At that time I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do — I always kind of knew I wanted to either work for or with Indigenous people, work for community and I wasn't really sure in which capacity or which way I could do that."

Naveau says he was unsuccessful that first time

when he ran for council.

"At that time we had two year election cycles, and it gave me time to reflect and have conversations with community and just really think about taking a leadership (role)," Naveau says. "Two years after that we had another election and that year I was successful — it's been almost seven years now where I've been serving on Mattagami First Nation as an elected councillor. It's been a real privilege to be in that position to take on the work and over the years my nation has really started to focus on economic development and I've been stepping up into that role too and now leading the corporation called Mattagami Aki for the last five years."

Dube-Crawford says he and his brother Garrett Dube-Crawford started up Crawford Mechanical Ltd. in 2022.

"So we've only been in the economic development game here as Indigenous owners for three or four years," Dube-Crawford says. "We're forefront, leading the way, leading the pack really kind of opening new doors and avenues showing other youth that it's possible to create your



submitted photo

Birdtail Sioux Dakota Nation Chief Tréchelle Bunn speaks onscreen during the Youth Leadership Panel discussion at the Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering, held Feb. 10-12 at the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

businesses and get into these procurement factors with these large organizations with help from our community, with our IBA structures, with the support of mining sectors in our

region and also just guidance from our community."

Dube-Crawford says they are also very blessed to work with Mattagami First Nation.

"It's definitely a blessing to

be able to do that and we're very grateful to the Creator for giving us the opportunity to do so," Dube-Crawford says.

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Community

Neeganii-Iishawin hosts third annual economic gathering

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Deputy Grand Chief Bobby Narcisse delivered the opening keynote and Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa shared his perspective at the Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering, held Feb. 10-12 in Thunder Bay.

"I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Fort William First Nation, Anemki Wajiw, and to recognize that discussions about economic development while in their territory must always begin with respect for First Nations sovereignty, culture and lived experience," Narcisse says during his keynote on the first day of the gathering, which was held at the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel and Conference Centre. "I want to talk about the importance of economic development within Nishnawbe Aski Nation and in all First Nations in the area as well, not as an abstract policy concept but as a living urgent issue tied to dignity, self determination and the future of entire generations. This is not simply a conversation about jobs or infrastructure, it's a conversation about justice, it's a conversation about opportunity and ultimately it's a conversation of how we navigate and carefully weave ourselves into the colonial systems of development while protecting who we are."

Narcisse says northern

remote First Nations are often described using statistics, distance from urban centres, limited road access, higher costs of living and smaller populations.

"While these facts are real, they do not define our communities," Narcisse says. "What defines northern First Nation communities is resilience. For thousands of years Indigenous peoples in the north sustained sophisticated economies rooted in land stewardship, trade networks, governance systems and cultural knowledge. These were not marginal economies, they were successful, sustainable systems perfectly adapted to northern environments."

Narcisse says the economic challenges faced today are not simply the result of geography, they are a result of colonial policies that disrupted Indigenous economies, restricted mobility, imposed external governance systems and deliberately limited economic autonomy.

"Any discussion of economic development must acknowledge this history, not to dwell on the past but to understand the present," Narcisse says. "Economic development in northern remote First Nations matters because economic exclusion has real human costs. When communities lack accessible sustainable economic opportunities, the impacts are felt everywhere, in overcrowded housing, in food insecurity, in underfunded education systems,

in limited health care access and the outmigration of our youth."

Narcisse says economic development is not just about addressing deficits, it's about unlocking potential especially within the northern remote First Nation communities.

"When communities have control over their economies, they gain the ability to invest in their people, strengthen cultural continuity, protect their lands and plan for the long term," Narcisse says. "Economic development is not a nice to have, it's a foundation for self determination."

Mamakwa, who spoke on the second day of the gathering, says the way Prime Minister Mark Carney spoke during his special address at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Jan. 20 sounded all too familiar to him.

"He spoke about how great powers exploit, coerce and use economic integration as a weapon, how the rules are enforced unfairly and the laws are applied based on who is accused and who is the victim," Mamakwa says. "That is exactly what Canada and Ontario are doing to First Nations. We see this mostly and clearly in the recent actions like the passing of Bill 5 in Ontario and Bill C-5 in Canada. As Carney said, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu, accommodating and trying to get along."

Mamakwa says much of the power imbalances Carney mentioned can describe the political relationships between



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Deputy Grand Chief Bobby Narcisse and Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa posed for a photo with Regional Chief Melvin Hardy, emcee JP Gladu and keynote speaker Bava Dhillon at the Neeganii-Iishawin 3rd Annual Northern Economic Development Gathering, held Feb. 10-12 at the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

First Nations and the federal and provincial governments.

"But also in some cases corporations who profit off our lands and basic needs," Mamakwa says. "These are the prime minister's words, and I quote: 'This is not sovereignty, it is the performance of

sovereignty while accepting subordination.' First Nations and First Nations peoples have the right to self determination, by virtue of that they freely determine their economic, social and cultural development. And this right that you have as First Nations is affirmed by the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is recognized in Canadian law. But self determination is an inherent right given to us as First Nations by the Creator, not Canada."



JOB OPPORTUNITY

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Marten Falls First Nation

Employment Community Coordinator in:
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Background:

KKETS provides culturally appropriate opportunities for education, training and employment by providing professional advisory, support services, relevant systems and programs to empower individuals to take initiative for change in their own lives.

Position Summary: Reporting to the ISETS Manager and the Miijim Director, the Employment Community Coordinator shall assist their respective community membership with the employment and training strategies as set out by the KKETS Program. The Coordinator will implement programming that enhances the community situation pertaining to employment and training and will liaise on behalf of their community membership. The Coordinator will also establish and maintain partnerships with the community, Aboriginal organizations and all levels of government as required.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)

Wawatay Communications Society is currently looking for a dynamic and results-driven Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who brings management expertise and embodies the mandate and mission in service of Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities.

Wawatay Communications Society serves the communication needs of First Nations people and the communities of Nishnawbe Aski Nation. It does this through the distribution of a monthly newspaper, daily radio programming, other communication services and a multimedia website that seeks to preserve and enhance indigenous languages and cultures of Indigenous people in northern Ontario.

Mission

"To provide media capabilities and content that address the unique needs of the Nishnawbe people."

The membership of the Society – 49 First Nation communities within the territory of Nishnawbe Aski Nation – formally adopted the above mandate and mission statement at an Annual General Membership Meeting on May 5-6, 2004.

Location: Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout, Timmins

Position Summary:

The CEO serves as the chief executive of Wawatay Communications Society and in partnership with the Board, is responsible for the success of the Wawatay Communications Society. Reporting directly to the Board of Directors, the CEO is responsible for creating and implementing a clear sense of direction for the Wawatay Communications Society and its related businesses by defining, communicating, and overseeing the Corporation's mission, goals, operating principles, and strategic actions.

The Position will be Posted until Filled Start Date: ASAP

Applicants can send their resume, cover letter and contact information for references (in confidence) to:

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