

FIRST CHOICES FIRST NATIONS

How Aboriginal business is becoming a driving force in BC's economy



ABORIGINAL BUSINESS LEGACY

There is a frequent oversight in the teaching of Aboriginal history. It is the neglect to mention an important aspect of Indigenous culture that existed when Europeans first arrived on this continent. In short, Aboriginal peoples had an economy.

Consider the origin of the name for Canada's capital, Ottawa. It was taken from the Algonquin word "adawe" meaning "to trade". Newcomers found a bustling trading economy among the indigenous people in the region.

The American Constitution, written some 240 years ago, gave the American government sole authority "to regulate commerce with the Indian tribes". Note the word "commerce". Indigenous people were seen as business partners, at least initially.

aboriginal peoples
had an economy

That strong heritage of trade and commerce is re-emerging today among First Nations with thousands of success stories across the country. This magazine salutes a few of those.

This powerful trend may well be the best economic news for our country and province.

90 Years Plus of Helping Community Dialogue

This publication is produced by FORED, a non-profit association that has supported community dialogue in British Columbia since 1925.

That dialogue has always been built around the themes of sustainability and citizen development.

That means helping communities, including Aboriginal communities, achieve growth based on shared values.

As part of this effort, the association has a program called AHEAD, standing for Aboriginal Heritage, Education and Dialogue. AHEAD was created to bring communities together to talk about future economic and career opportunities that respect tradition and ways in which Aboriginal youth could be prepared for those opportunities.

This magazine is part of the AHEAD program.

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It Can Start With A Helping Hand.

Special thanks to Awatin Art for providing the jewelry photos for this issue



We acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia.

ABORIGINAL BUSINESSES SURPASSING STANDARD BENCHMARKS

In the serene, scenic Fraser Valley an economic powerhouse is emerging within a group of 24 First Nations communities.

Those communities, collectively called the Sto:lo, are the owners of the largest non-crown land parcel in the region—approximately 10,000 hectares.

The 15,000 Indigenous community members in the region have launched some 350 businesses owned by both Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal entrepreneurs. These businesses cover diverse sectors including hospitality, engineering, retail, arts and entertainment and high technology to name a few.

What is even more impressive is the durability of these Aboriginal businesses compared to the benchmark survival rates in business. About 40 per cent have been in business at least 10 years, with 11 per cent being operational for 20 years or more.



An energetic force in this success is Sto:lo Community Futures, (SCF) a federally-chartered organization engaged in business lending, training and fostering entrepreneurial achievement. The organization's logo declares "Sto:Lo Means Business" CEO **Mike Watson**, brings to SCF an

extensive leadership career in economic development in both the private and public sectors.

preference for pre-emptive strategies

Under his leadership, SCF has become one of the fastest growing CFs in BC. It averages 30 commercial loans a year in the \$30,000 range with a success level equivalent to commercial banks.

The organization adopts the best economic development ideas from other regions with a preference for pre-emptive strategies rather than reactive. This reflects its understanding that the business world today is beset with disruptive technological change. As the hockey great Wayne Gretzky famously said; "You have to go where the puck will be, not where it is".

a success level equivalent to commercial banks

The younger generation among the Sto:Lo are clearly thinking along those lines. Half of the population is under 25 and there were 450 participants in a recent youth business plan competition.



RISING STARS



A Strategic Vision created by SCF recommended the establishment of a Sto:lo Business Association (SBA). The organization has a focus on membership benefits, business promotion, partnerships and collaboration.

Led by **Louis De Jaeger**, the SBA subscribes to the motto, **“Your Business Your Voice”**.

De Jaeger is a former owner of a five-star restaurant and is earning his stars as he takes the SBA to new heights.

A key deliverable of SBA is to provide a roadmap for the indigenous business economy. The purpose is to encourage sustainable business success and reduce barriers.

450 participants in a recent youth business plan competition

The SBA places emphasis on close contact with its members to ensure that direction and growth reflect their priorities and values. De Jaeger says members have told SBA “it’s not about profit, it’s about prosperity”. That encompasses sustainability, independence, financial stability, education and branding.

A priority is placed on face-to-face meetings in different locations every month in order to foster networking and ensure SBA is current with member needs.

In terms of working with non-indigenous partners and associates, the SBA insists that they adopt its Code of Ethics. Integrity, trustworthiness, cultural awareness and honesty are among the values enshrined in that code.

SBA insists that outside partners adopt its Code of Ethics

With over 50 businesses as members the SBA is engaged in a vigorous outreach program both in the region and provincially. The goal is to build mutually beneficial relationships with other business associations, key sectors and governments.



“it’s not about profit, it’s about prosperity”



THE THREADS OF SUCCESS

An interest in fashion design started for Linda Kay Peters when she was a child and her Ojibway Cree grandmother taught her to sew doll clothes. Now a member of the Seabird Island Band in BC, Linda owns Ringing Bell Robes, a fashion design company based in Hope BC and her fashions have been displayed in New York fashion shows.

She has created coats and jackets for men and women and her current work focuses on designing formal wear with aboriginal themes and

her fashions have been displayed in New York fashion shows

traditional dance regalia. Her fashions feature fringes, beadwork and buttons made from antlers and shells.

Her work has been featured in fashion shows across Canada and the USA .

A believer in lifelong learning, she is planning to open an aboriginal fashion store.

A GROWING CROP OF BUSINESSES

The Leqam:el First Nation near Deroche, BC has a growing, diversified business mix operating under its development corporation with more to come.

This year they opened a gas station, store and restaurant close to the main highway near the community. The first nation owns and operates three trailer parks in a true park like setting, unlike some competitors in gravel lots. With the pressure on campgrounds in BC exceeding capacity, they are optimistic for the future.

The nation also has forestry holdings licensed for 10 years and they are in the process of evaluating the revenue generation potential for this resource.

An emerging venture is designed to capitalize on the growing consumer demand for organic food products. They purchased 131 acres of land in 2015 with an eye on agro-tourism opportunities. The following summer they grew a large variety of non-genetically modified vegetables that were sold to consumers in the area. They also began what they called a “ good food box” program that was popular with families wanting to purchase fresh farm vegetables every week. In addition, they developed value-added products for the retail market including seasonings and a soap and candle line.

they developed value-added products for the retail market

Other related business options being studied include deer farming, highland cattle and new value-added food products.

This year, the agri-business has expanded its delivery services to residential customers and supply contracts with commercial customers.



A unique aboriginal business can be found at the juncture of the Harrison and Chehalis Rivers in Agassiz BC. It's a bed and breakfast operating in a 10,000 square foot Victorian-era mansion originally built in 1903. Called Sasquatch Crossing Eco Lodge, it operates under the Sts'ailes Development Corporation and is managed by Denny and Al Stobbart.

The combination of historical architecture located in a pristine natural setting draws an intriguing mixture of visitors.

It has become a popular location for retreats because of its combination of antique décor and quiet setting. Groups such as visiting professors can write papers in guest rooms that offer Wi-Fi but not the distractions of telephones or televisions. At days end, they can stroll the nature paths and visit a private waterfall.

As for non-paying guests, these are attracted as well by the natural setting. They include 167 species of songbirds. There is an annual eagle count with the highest number recorded being 7,000 eagles. The eagles

in turn are attracted because chum salmon use the confluence of the two rivers as a spawning ground.

All of these non-paying guests have made the lodge a "must-see" destination for growing numbers of nature photographers.

In keeping with it's environmental aura, the lodge generates its own power.

When asked what drives their marketing success. Al and Denny say that "word-of-mouth" advertising is the most dominant factor. Based on this success, they are looking at expansion leading to new hiring.



historical architecture located in a pristine

A Very Special Meeting Place

visiting professors can write papers in guest rooms



natural setting

TRADITION, TECHNOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

One of the leading environmental monitoring companies in BC is an aboriginal business that uses leading technology to serve major customers who share a commitment to sustainability.

Six Sto:lo First Nations communities, through a joint venture, own Seven Generations Environmental Services Ltd. (SGES) equally. The Board of Directors numbers seven members of Chief and Council drawn from each community. The company is located on aboriginal territory close to Mission BC.

SGES employs trained environmental monitors who sample water, air and soil. These technicians study the combined environment to determine whether human activity has had an impact.

Advanced field equipment is used as well as analytic programs to evaluate results. The technicians are trained in areas including: wildlife/vegetation monitoring, water quality, habitat restoration, erosion and invasive plant species to name a few.

Among current and past projects using the expertise offered by SGES are the Evergreen Line Rapid Transit Project, the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project and the BC Hydro ILM project.

to serve major customers who share
a commitment to sustainability



A QUEST FOR CREATIVITY



Some entrepreneurs are driven by a quest for creativity.

Ernie Smith and his wife **Darlene** are owner-operators of a successful and growing aboriginal jewelry and art store in Campbell River BC, called Awatin Aboriginal Art.

Ernie is a member of the Ehattesaht First Nation as is Darlene who is an Algonquin from Quebec.



At an earlier stage of their business careers, they operated a sawmill company in Zeballos BC. When they were faced with a shortage of logs, Ernie would take to beachcombing as a way to find them. In a magazine article at the time he explained, “When you are out here and you have no log supply, you have to be creative”.

That creative nature is on display in their business today, both in the aboriginal-themed jewelry Ernie creates as well as the creative approach they take to encourage aboriginal artists.

quiet way of encouraging
struggling artists

Making a transition from a logging business to a jewelry store was not an impulsive move. In addition to running the logging business, Ernie was a Chief and Councilor of the nation and Darlene was an administrator.



They embarked on changing their lives by spending nearly four years looking for a business that would fit their preferences. When that search produced no inspiring results, he decided to enroll at North Island College in the metal jewelry design program while Darlene took up business studies. Ernie was at the top of his class and the school invited him to be an instructor, which he is today in addition to operating their business.

The business started at home but as more aboriginal artists sought them as clients, the home soon became over-filled with art. That pushed the decision to open the store, which is located in a picturesque part of town. It is on the Georgia Quay, overlooking the Strait of Georgia and is thus a magnet for tourists taking a stroll.

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TRAINING LEAVES A LASTING LEGACY

Whether a company is a supplier or project partner with an aboriginal community, an important contribution that endures long after project completion involves training local youth.

This is integral to the mission of **W Dusk**, an indigenous-owned company specializing in large and small-scale projects involving wind, solar and hydrokinetic energy for first nations.

David Isaac, a Mik'maq raised in Listuguj Quebec, now based in West Vancouver, founded the company. According to Isaac, when the company does a solar project in an aboriginal community, it gives tutorials on the technology to local young people and lets them attach sample solar panels. That builds confidence and a sense of relevance for young people who are often spectators on economic development projects

Isaac feels he had a destiny to enter the solar energy industry. The name of his company is an abbreviation of his Miq'maq name that means northern lights. Those

lights, known by their scientific name of aurora borealis are created by solar winds.

~~~~~  
confidence and a sense of  
relevance for young people  
~~~~~

He sees renewable energy as becoming increasingly popular with first nations because it has closer cultural linkages to traditional values.

In that vein, the company's projects are designed to incorporate nature-themed esthetics. For example, a solar school roof built for the Lower Nicola Indian Band reflects the

blue sky and is a source of pride to the community. On the Haida Gwaii, a generator powered by solar panels will be integrated with a traditional cedar carving designed by a local artist.

Renewable energy, youth empowerment, economic development and sustainability form the driving inspiration for the company's work with first nations. All of these in turn contribute to another overarching goal for first nations that W Dusk values: self-sufficiency.



youth empowerment, economic development and sustainability



many aboriginal graduates today are inclined to start their own business

CULTURALLY RELEVANT CAREER BUILDING

The Aboriginal Services Centre at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) functions to serve the needs of some 1400 aboriginal students at the institution.

The Coordinator for the Centre, Joanne Stone-Campbell describes it as a “comfort zone” for students where the goal is to build confidence. The Center encourages a cohort approach as a key element in the confidence-building mission.

The Centre recently had its first career fair. A broad spectrum of employers from the private and public sectors participated by having booths and conducting interviews. Employers were encouraged to adopt a role model approach to help students identify with potential career options. Students, in turn, were required to introduce themselves

at booths. An employer would shout “bingo” for a good self-introduction in keeping with the confidence-building mission.

confidence-building mission

With a lifetime of working in education, Stone-Campbell sees some intriguing trends today. Compared to past eras, many aboriginal graduates today are inclined to start their own business. A majority of those who earn a red seal certificate look forward to returning to their communities to help in the growth process. The emergence of social media means that today, when aboriginal students return to far-flung locations that are a great distance from the communities of their classmates, they no longer lose touch. She

also notes that social media maintains a team spirit after graduation that leads to shared business ideas and potential partnerships after graduation.

Non-aboriginal students at BCIT also demonstrate a strong interest in linking with aboriginal students and learning about their culture. Stone-Campbell says this is because non-aboriginals see the rising entrepreneurial success of first nations as a potential opportunity in their future careers.

With all of the emphasis on careers and confidence-building, aboriginal students at BCIT have a quiet place to ease the pressure of career planning and studies. The Aboriginal Services Gathering Place is a quiet haven on campus with a kitchen, computer lab and lounge for aboriginal students.

A NATIONAL MISSION FOR ABORIGINAL BUSINESS

There is a growing understanding that if indigenous communities and businesses reach their economic potential, Canada's national prosperity will grow. There is also a consensus that those communities and businesses have great growth potential, which can best be achieved if serious research is applied to that goal.

It is against that background that the National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development (NCIED) was established at the University of Victoria. The program is directed in collaboration with leaders from aboriginal communities, business and government. It is an initiative of the Peter B. Gustavson School of Business and Faculty of Law at the university.

insight to support aboriginal business and community development

An extensive national research initiative under the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) has established a research advisory committee to learn more about the aboriginal economy in a national context. A national board of directors engaging business leaders from all major sectors including aboriginal businesses governs CCAB.

learn more about the aboriginal economy in a national context

Brent Mainprize who is faculty champion (Business) of NCIED at the university is an academic member of the research

committee. Former Prime Minister Paul Martin heads the committee. The goals of the research are to provide industry partners, policy developers and academic institutions with insight to support aboriginal business and community development.

THE RESEARCH INCLUDES:

Identifying aboriginal businesses across Canada.

Gauging the scope and growth capacity of these businesses.

Creating panels and working groups comprised of relevant stakeholders from the private and public sectors, academia and first nations.

Understanding how aboriginal businesses are performing nationally including profitability, growth and perception of success.

Learn more about what challenges and success factors come into play in aboriginal partnerships.

This national initiative will help form the framework for policies, partnerships and achievement of optimal potential for aboriginal businesses across Canada.

GOLD STANDARD FOR ABORIGINAL PARTNERSHIPS



With the rapid pace of aboriginal business momentum, many non-aboriginal businesses aspiring to partnerships are seeking guidance on models.

While partnerships are as varied as diverse aboriginal cultures and multiple business sectors, there are three fundamentals evident in exceptional partnerships.

These involve consultation, co-determination and commitment. Together, they move a partnership along the path to achieving a gold standard.

the path to achieving a gold standard

Regarding the duty to consult, volumes have been written and barely a week passes without a conference on the subject featuring inspiring speakers. Thus, no outside investor could be unaware of this requirement. However there remains much uncertainty about the best approach to consultation with First Nations. While there is no standard formula, two factors are deemed important. First, the outside entity needs to acquire advance cultural literacy about the potential aboriginal partner. Second, consultation should not commence in the later stages of project planning.

Regarding co-determination, it means the business model should be inclusive. It should be designed and implemented in a way that makes the

aboriginal community active decision-makers in the strategic direction of the business. The days are gone when the outside business can restrict itself to making a short, PowerPoint presentation to chief and council twice a year.

there remains much uncertainty about the best approach to consultation with First Nations



The third gold standard element involves a commitment by the outside investor to help the First Nation make a business transition when the current enterprise peaks. For example, the resource sectors are cyclical. So, a

partnership based on a resource should bestow management training for the first nation that gives it the ability to succeed in new ventures should the resource sector hit a downturn. In today's economy, that kind of cyclicity is present in every sector.

the business model should be inclusive

New technologies and consumer spending habits are changing sectors like retail that have been stable for years. First nations businesses will not be shielded from that type of disruption in future. By helping them develop management skills that can be vested in new business sectors, the corporate partner is moving towards a gold standard.

VICTOR GODIN has worked with First Nations as an advisor on economic growth, partnerships, management development and community relations. In the course of this work, he has engaged with representatives from over 80 aboriginal communities.

The opinions in this column are his, offered on the basis of his consulting experience. He can be reached at startbc@shaw.ca



RESETTING ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS

The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board was established to provide policy advice to the federal government on issues related to economic development among indigenous peoples.

It is comprised of 10 members from these communities.

The board was created with the recognition that indigenous economic development is critical to the renewal of the nation-to-nation relationship. There is now a growing recognition that first nations must be key players in growing the Canadian economy so that future needs of all Canadians can be met.

To make that contribution, indigenous peoples must first reach parity. In 2012, the Board set a 10-year target that this group should have economic opportunities and outcomes on par with other Canadians by 2022.

first nations must be key players in growing the Canadian economy

In 2015, the Board published the Aboriginal Economic Progress Report to track progress against benchmarks that it set in 2012. That report showed that gaps between indigenous people and the rest of the country continued to grow. The shortfalls were in areas including employment, economic participation and education. On employment for example, it found that over one-third of the total indigenous population 15 years old and over, relied on government transfers as their main source of income.

THE BOARD HAS CREATED A STRATEGIC PLAN THAT SETS OUT FIVE KEY PRIORITIES. THESE INCLUDE:

Enhancing Indigenous Community Readiness for Economic Opportunities

Access to Capital

Building Economic Potential of Our Lands While Minimizing Environmental Impacts

Supporting Indigenous Business

Promoting The Importance of Indigenous Economic Development.

It has become a priority in the national interest of all Canadians to support strategies for first nations that will bring them to the same outcomes, both economic and social that are enjoyed by Canadians as a whole.

indigenous peoples must first reach parity



Building Economic Potential of Our Lands While Minimizing Environmental Impacts

LEADERSHIP BUILDING MISSION

The Aboriginal Professional Association of Canada (APAC) is a national association comprised of business and professional leaders of aboriginal heritage. A key element in its mission is to open career paths for the emerging generation.

The programs and services of APAC are grouped under three categories: Professional Development, Expanding Opportunities and Showcasing Excellence.

Professional development is supported through incorporating a strong learning component within special events.

Expanding opportunities for APAC means giving members an opportunity to connect with professional leaders in supportive settings.

In terms of showcasing excellence, APAC understands the importance of role models in terms of being incentives to career building. To accomplish

this it showcases success stories from aboriginal professionals and students at special events across Canada.

opportunity to connect
with professional leaders
in supportive settings

A program called Network Accelerator is in place to help members bridge connections with aboriginal professional leaders.

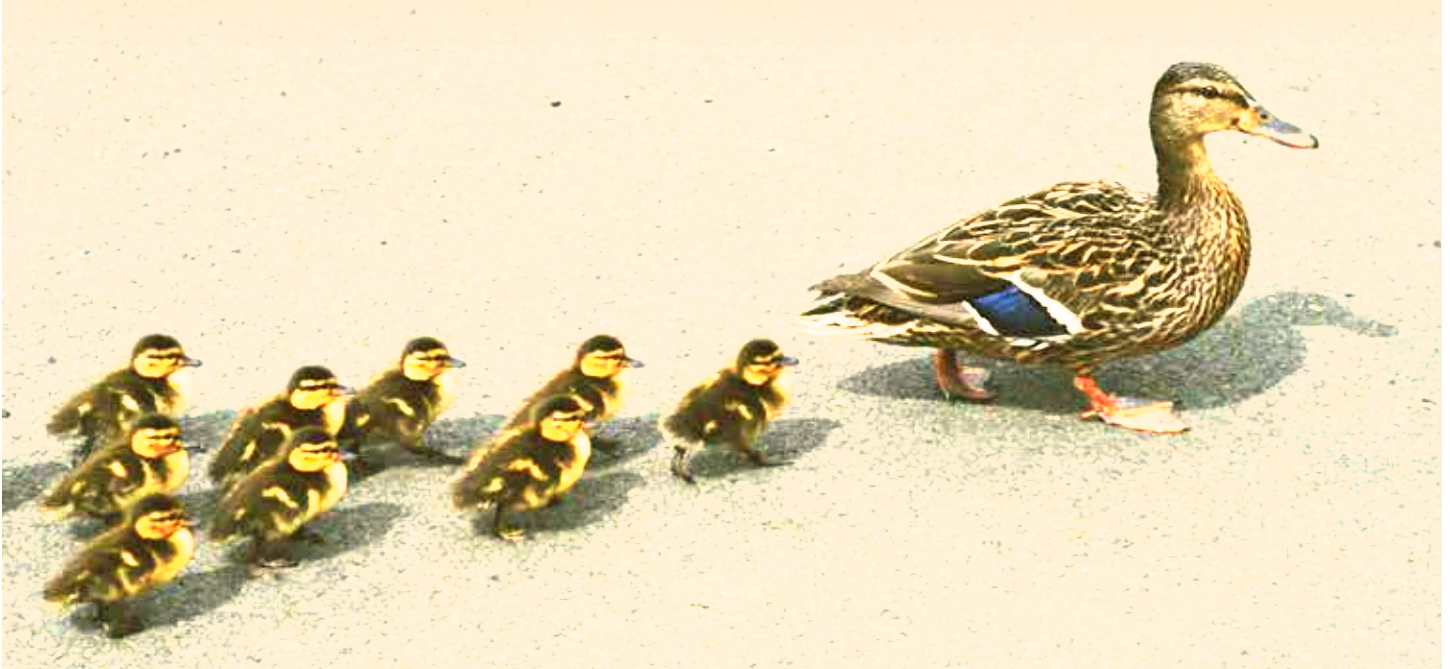
APAC is positioned at an important turning point in Canada's economic development outlook. In a rapidly changing economy where change is driven by disruptive technology and new trade relationships, there

is a growing understanding that it is in the national interest to accelerate leadership opportunities for aboriginal professionals.

Aboriginal population in Canada is expected to account for 7.4 per cent of the Canadian working age population by 2026. It will also account for 12 per cent of labor force growth and 11 per cent of employment growth in that time period.

in the national interest
to accelerate leadership
opportunities for
aboriginal professionals

As Canada will need the best professional workforce possible to meet the challenges of change in the coming decade, APAC is working to ensure the maximum participation of aboriginal professionals in that goal.



FIRST NATIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

First nations were in Canada when the last major climate change event was in progress. That was the withdrawal of the glaciers. That's traditional knowledge on a global scale.

It is fitting that the Canadian government has established a program to help first nations assess and respond to climate change impacts on community infrastructure and emergency management.

climate change related to sea level rise, flooding, forest fires and winter road failures

Called the First Nation Adapt Program, it works with communities to identify region-specific priorities, impacts and opportunities for climate-change projects. The program gives priority to first nations impacted by climate change related to sea level rise, flooding, forest fires and winter road failures.

CATEGORIES OF PROJECTS ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING INCLUDE:

Vulnerability assessments of climate change impacts on community infrastructure or emergency management.

Development and assessment of adaptation options

Cost-benefit analysis of options

Applications will be accepted from aboriginal communities, indigenous organizations, universities, colleges and NGOS.

The funding is through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and is ongoing, meaning there is no deadline.



to help first nations assess and respond to climate change impacts

> continued from page 8



The store features a variety of paintings, carvings and prints from other artists in addition to Ernie's jewelry. Ernie and Darlene have a unique approach to encouraging new aboriginal artists. Simply stated, if they want to buy a piece from the artist, they pay what the artist asks. There is no bargaining and they do not take items on consignment.

from a logging business
to a jewelry store

This is their quiet way of encouraging struggling artists who might otherwise be tempted to take a loss in order to have their product displayed.

they pay what
the artists asks

Awatin Aboriginal Art is a store where compassion and creativity are blended for success.

That's me wearing the watch.



IT CAN ALL START WITH LENDING A HAND.

Life-changing decisions can be made at unexpected moments. Back when I was deciding whether to move to British Columbia from eastern Canada, I spent six weeks driving throughout the province to decide.

On a particular day, I was driving in the Haida Gwaii when I saw a traditional canoe launch. I asked if I could help and the Haida people said "of course". That's me wearing the watch. It was the moment I decided to make the move.

Businesses often ask how they can create relationships with First Nations. Sometimes it can start by simply lending a hand.

VICTOR GODIN.