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## Standing Buffalo woman makes history

By Kerry Benjoe  
of Eagle Feather News

Stephanie Whitecloud-Brass never set out to make history by becoming the first Indigenous person to be appointed a Territorial Court judge, but that's exactly what she did.

In an exclusive interview with Eagle Feather News, she shares her journey in hopes of inspiring other Indigenous youth to always dream big and take chances.

Growing up on the Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation near Fort Qu'Appelle, Whitecloud-Brass had a passion for math and science.

"I was actually planning on going into medicine," she said from her home in Yellowknife. "When it didn't happen, I was OK with it. I just

figured it wasn't for me and I needed to shift my focus."

She regrouped and had a talk with her dad.

Whitecloud-Brass's father was an Indigenous court worker for the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council and spent hours talking about the law and justice system with her. Although she was always fascinated with the work he did, she initially didn't consider pursuing a law degree.

After Whitecloud-Brass convocated with a science degree, she worked in the field as an environmental biologist, but eventually curiosity got the best of her.

"I was interested in the area [of law] and so I thought, if I wasn't going to go into medicine, then maybe I could be a lawyer," she said.

*continued page 2 ...*



LORI CAMPBELL

## ATHLETIC ACADEMIA

"Sometimes I competed against people less than half my age," said Campbell. "But they called me 'auntie,' so it was OK."

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March 2023 is our

## Woman's Issue

April 2023 Issue:  
Environment Issue



CANADA'S DRAG RACE

## Chelazon Leroux

"I would much rather have someone love me for who I am than love me for someone I am not."

- page 11



RECONCILIATION ALLY

## Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen

"A good ally will seek consultation with its community in order to ensure they are providing culturally appropriate events and programs. And she does everything to ensure barriers don't exist for the women we serve."

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## A Standing Buffalo woman makes history in the Northwest Territories

... continued from page 1

In 2004, Whitecloud-Brass entered law school, which she completed in 2007 followed by a year of articling.

She began practising law in 2008.

Despite changing career paths, Whitecloud-Brass said what has always motivated her was a desire to help people. Initially, she thought it would be through medicine, but that wasn't the case.

"It just goes to show you that you can't plan every single move in your life," she said. "It doesn't mean you're not going to be successful. For me, it was important to keep an open mind. Always scope out your options and find out what best works for you."

A willingness to take a chance is how she ended up in Yellowknife.

Her husband Mervin Brass received an opportunity they both knew he couldn't pass up.

In 2017, they packed up and moved north with their young son in tow.

Originally, the plan was to spend a couple years in the north then re-evaluate.

"There is something about the north that gets a hold of you," said Whitecloud-Brass. "This is a beautiful place to be. It's a beautiful part of the country, a beautiful part of the world for that matter. It doesn't really matter what season it is, there's always something to do here. It's just a breathtaking place to be."

Her love for the north is one of the reasons she decided to apply to the Territorial Court.

As soon as she was able to share the news of her appointment, the first person she told was her husband, and then her mom.

Sadly, her dad died March 1, 2020 at the start of the pandemic.

"He was such a huge influence in terms of this career path that I decided to take," said Whitecloud-Brass. "It just seemed natural to want to talk to him and call him and let him know. I told [my mom] that and she said, 'He always knew this day would come.' That's all I needed to hear. I knew that he knew."

She was grateful for her family and to the Standing Buffalo leadership, who made the more than 2,000-kilometre trip north for the special swearing-in ceremony on Feb. 3.

Whitecloud-Brass said the courtroom was packed with defense bar



**Stephanie Whitecloud-Brass stands behind the bench wearing her courtroom robe while surrounded by family and supporters during her swearing-in ceremony on Feb. 3, 2023 at the Territorial Court-house in Yellowknife, NWT. (Photo by Stephanie-Whitecloud-Brass)**

members, the Crown Prosecutor's office and courthouse staff along with friends and family.

"It was just a really, really beautiful time and I will cherish it," she said.

Her Dakota heritage was part of the day's events, which included her brother singing an honour song. Whitecloud-Brass received a pair of moccasins before a star blanket was wrapped around her.

Although her new position is a big responsibility, she is looking forward to the experience.

Whitecloud-Brass said one of the things her dad helped teach her through his work was the value of representation, not just in courts, but everywhere. She said many Indigenous people from the area have congratulated her, which means a lot to her.

Whitecloud-Brass said the appointment also means she will likely finish her career in the north and she's OK with that because it's home.



Box 924 Saskatoon, SK S7K 3M4  
306-978-8118, 1-866-323-NEWS (6397)

This issue was shared on:  
**March 9, 2023**  
Next issue to be printed on:  
**April 5, 2023**



**Eagle Feather News**  
is published monthly by *Eagle Feather Media*

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Publications Mail Agreement No: 40027204 | OSSN #1492-7497  
Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: EFN Circ., P.O. Box 924 Saskatoon SK S7K 3M4

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# Regina filmmaker is busy on a new television project

By Jasmine Pelletier  
for Eagle Feather News

Filmmaker Candy Fox is shedding light on Canada's untold history. She is a director and producer currently working on Treaty Road, a new show airing this fall on APTN.

"I've directed for other documentary series, but this series has a certain personal importance to it." Fox has also written and directed her own short films, like ahkameyimo nitanis (Keep Going, My Daughter), a poetic look into the life of a young Indigenous family.

Treaty Road is a six-episode documentary series that explores the extensive and often overlooked histories of Treaties one through six. Each hour-long episode focuses on individuals and communities that reveal what it means to live with the effects of Treaty in the present day.

"[The hosts] speak with experts, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, historians, grassroots advocates, about the Treaties, the history and the current climate today," said Fox.

The show's two co-hosts are Erin Goodpipe and Saxon DeCoqc.

Goodpipe, from Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation, is a long-time television host and theatre artist. DeCoqc, a Métis writer and producer, was inspired to develop the show when he found out his ancestor James McKay was involved in the signing of the Treaties.



Candy Fox second from the left, wearing a black ribbon skirt, stands with crew members from her latest film project Treaty Road set to air on APTN this fall. (Photo supplied)

"I discovered that initially for the first six Treaties, he was a translator," said DeCoqc.

Fox was invited to join the production team because of her distinctive approach to storytelling.

Viewers, however, will have to wait until later this year to see Fox's creative influence on Treaty Road.

"Candy and I worked together on another show," said DeCoqc. "I thought [she] would be perfect to direct this. She just has the right vi-

sion and the right demeanour."

Fox, a member of Piapot First Nation, is from Treaty 4 Territory.

According to both Fox and DeCoqc, once the crew arrived in Treaty 4 Territory, filming the episode was an impactful experience for everyone involved.

"One of the themes is education with Treaty 4 and that's close to my heart," explained Fox.

"I attended school here at First Nations University [of Canada] and my family was also impacted by residential schools," said Fox. "I'm a generational survivor of residential schools. There's a lot of significance in terms of stories that relate to Treaty and how it impacted my own family. I think we were able to touch on some of that with episode four and I really hope that comes across."

If all goes well with season one, Fox would like to explore Treaty further through a second season.

"If we are able to continue on in the future with this series, it would be great to focus on contemporary treaties," said Fox. "As well as un-ceded land and what that means to those who are from those territories."

Treaty Road is for all audiences.

"Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can benefit from watching it," said Fox. "It's learning what our history is, as people on these lands... there's a lot of injustices that are still happening to this day. The Treaty promises are not being held up, and never were."

The show will take viewers on a journey through communities across the prairies in search of truth about Treaty and what it means to people living in Treaty territory.

By delivering this knowledge to the public, Fox and the rest of the production team hope the audience can understand the complex relationships between Indigenous and settler communities, at the time the Treaties were signed as well as in the present day.



Crew members on set during the filming of Treaty Road. The six-part documentary series is the latest project by Regina filmmaker Candy Fox. (Photo supplied)



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# Changing direction is a skill some people have mastered

By *Liam O'Connor*  
of *Eagle Feather News*

Dodie Ferguson is not afraid to challenge herself.

She has worn many hats, including aspiring teacher, stay-at-home mom, letter carrier, advocate, curriculum developer and consultant.

Although she's almost 50, Ferguson has returned to university to pursue a degree in environmental studies, proving it's never too late to change career paths.

Originally, right after high school, she enrolled in education classes, but



**Dodie Ferguson, who is turning 50 in April, decided to change directions. She no longer has to get up everyday and put on a uniform for work. She started her own consulting business and, in her spare time, she is pursuing a degree in environmental studies. She decided to take control of her destiny and couldn't be happier. (Photo supplied by Dodie Ferguson)**

after three years, she decided to be a stay-at-home mom.

"I didn't think I could be a good teacher and a good parent at the same time," said Ferguson. "I was doing really well in school, [but] I just realized it wasn't for me. So, I decided to take a break."

At the time, she and her husband were working at a casino when they agreed one of them needed to be at home with the kids while the other worked.

Growing up, Ferguson's family, like many others, was impacted by the Indian Residential School system and faced socio-economic conditions, including addiction, suicide and domestic violence.

As a result, she was determined to make certain she gave her children the best possible start in life.

"We actually did rock-paper-scissors, best of the three, to see who would stay home with the kids," said Ferguson.

In the long run, the decision paid off because her grandchildren are benefitting from two generations of healthy, loving and proactive parenting.

Once her kids were old enough, Ferguson went back to work.

She became a Canada-Post letter carrier, a position she held for 15 years. Rain or shine, each week Ferguson walked a marathon with up to 30 pounds of letters strapped to her body.

During her role as a letter carrier, she became a fierce labour advocate and organizer.

Ferguson was the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) executive committee member relay for Canada Post and the executive member of the Regional District Labour Council.

"I had pride in what I did as a postal worker, but I had immense satisfaction in helping settler folk who were willing to learn [and] understand the Indigenous perspective," she said.

This position gave Ferguson the platform to discuss with other labour leaders how they could help their own workers better understand the conditions that led to Canada's current relationship with Indigenous people.

The once budding teacher began to regularly teach courses for SFL with a curriculum created entirely by herself.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Ferguson made a decision.

"For the first year of the pandemic, I sat at home trying to figure out what to do with my life," she said. "In the fall of that year, I said to myself, 'I need to do something to make change.'"

Ferguson was a part of the Idle No More movement in Regina and met with MPs, MLAs and Senators, but said there was always a barrier when talking to powerful people or institutions about environmental issues because she didn't have a university degree.

"I want to be able to walk in there confidently, knowing what I know and be able to speak and debate," she said.

This time around with no children at home there was no need for a rock-paper-scissors battle with her husband.

She enrolled in classes and also continues to deliver the courses she created to organizations and groups.

Ferguson is hopeful once she's finished her degree, she'll be able to work in policy for the benefit of Indigenous people.



**Dodie Ferguson spent 15 years as a letter carrier for Canada Post, which is a job she enjoyed. In addition to mail delivery, she became an active member in the labour union and developed a love for advocacy work. She made the decision to leave her career and return to university to pursue a degree in environmental studies. (Photo supplied by Dodie Ferguson)**

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**A previous cohort of the Ocean Bridge program gather after completing a water walk. The water education program is currently seeking applicants from the BIPOC community to participate in the next intake. Participants will travel to different parts of Canada to learn about the science of water and water preservation from experts including Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. (Photo supplied by Ocean Bridge)**

## A unique water education program is accepting applications

*By Memory McLeod  
for Eagle Feather News*

Creating opportunities for BIPOC youth to take part in a land and water reconciliation project is more than a job for Jacqueline Watson-Thompson, it's a passion.

"I didn't know I was capable of negotiating reconciliation on my own terms," she said.

That was until she connected with Ocean Bridge, a free volunteer-based program that promotes animal and land stewardship with a focus on ocean conservation and freshwater preservation.

"When youth understand their connection to land and water, they can do a lot of good work," said Watson-Thompson.

It also provides an opportunity for BIPOC youth to learn about Indigenous culture.

"We can teach our youth, along with the protocols of tobacco and sage... water is one of the first spirit medicines we were given," said Watson-Thompson.

She encourages those with an interest in land and water conservation to apply to Ocean Bridge, especially those from northern communities who might not otherwise have access to such reconciliation-focused opportunities.

This year, 160 youth ambassadors will take part in a five-month program. It will include both online and land-based learning, a remote urban learning journey to Ottawa, working with Indigenous communities to understand water connections and learning about traditional historical hunting and fishing practices that protect ecosystems.

For Great Lakes region ambassador Nicole Doray, participating in Ocean Bridge in 2022 expanded her understanding in many ways.

It went from the classroom and laboratories into something tangible, particularly when they interacted with Indigenous Elders of Wikwemikong, Ont., which is the world's largest freshwater island.

"The Indigenous families were so gracious, generous with their time and knowledge," she said "We were welcomed into spaces we normally wouldn't be privileged to experience... This is experiential knowledge that is missing from other non-profit and environmental agencies."

Visiting the ruins of an Indian Residential School helped the environmental scientist connect the dots between individual work towards advocacy and reconciliation, and community and cultural understanding.

"Building connections in a meaningful way takes time," said Doray. "We were able to create a deep sense of community among us through shared values, such as how to protect and promote the health of water ecosystems in a way that respects Indigenous knowledge."

Cultural diversity is built into the program and fostered through efforts toward inclusion of underrepresented youth in the sciences.

"We try to support our youth where they are at," said Watson-Thompson.

Special care is taken to help reduce barriers for any Indigenous youth who is interested in the program, she explained. It could be as simple as taking their application over the phone to providing a childcare subsidy to cover

mileage or provide necessary equipment.

Watson-Thompson hopes to attract a range of applicants between the ages of 19 to 30 from various backgrounds or areas of study for the upcoming intake.

"It's not just for those who are taking classes in environmental sciences, just as long as they are looking toward conservation and working towards that goal," Watson-Thompson said.

Selection of the first cohort of 2023 takes place in mid-March with orientation taking place in April. The next cohort is planned for the fall 2023.

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## Saulteaux language speaker finds an eager audience

By Liam O'Connor  
of Eagle Feather News

Natalie Langan never expected being a podcast host would spur her to become a Saulteaux language instructor.

Her life changed one day when she received a Facebook message asking if she'd come on board for a podcast project with the First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv).

Shannon Avison, the program coordinator of Indigenous Communication Arts, sent the email to Langan. It was Avison's vision to have a network of Indigenous podcasts all under the banner of pikiskwewin.

"It's like a year and a half later and it's still going out there," said Langan. "It's still growing and we're still continuously putting out new episodes all the time."

Pikiskwewin has over 30 different podcasts. Almost all of them are completely in Saulteaux, Cree, Nakota, Dakota or Michif, with only a small amount of English.

Langan grew up on the Fishing Lake First Nation, raised by her grandmother. In their household, Saulteaux was the only language spoken, so fluency came naturally to her.

After 20 years of not speaking it, she lost a lot of the language, so the podcast is helping her to expand her knowledge.

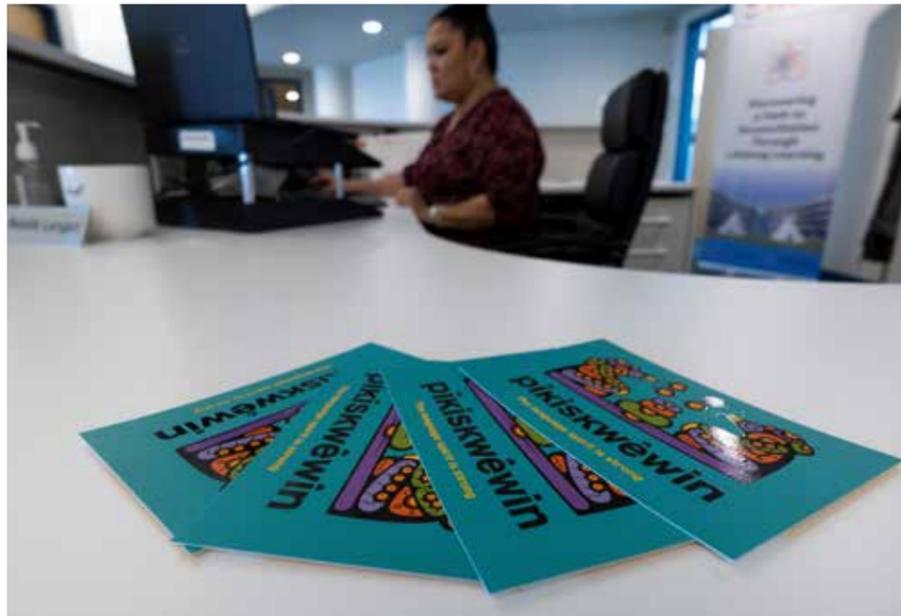
"That is why I wanted to take this on with Shannon," said Langan. "Because I knew that it was going to spark something within me to wake up my language."

Every pikiskwewin podcast is different.

Langan's consist of interviews with leaders because she grew up around many in her family.

"I thought it would be a great way to reach out to them," said Langan. "And ask them, what inspired you, who was your inspiration to be in the position you are now."

"[The podcast] was also a place for people who might have forgotten their



**Pikiskwewin pamphlets lay on Natalie Langan's desk while she works in the background. Pikiskwewin is home to over 30 different Indigenous podcasts that cover a range of topics, such as language and culture. (Photo by Liam O'Connor for Eagle Feather News)**

language and wanted to relearn [it] or simply just hear [it]," she said. "That's why my three podcasts were done primarily in Saulteaux."

Saulteaux isn't the predominant Indigenous language spoken in Saskatchewan.

There are only a few small clusters of areas where people speak Saulteaux, whereas Cree speakers are found in more parts of the province.

Preserving the Saulteaux language is critical because there are few language keepers left, said Langan.

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**Natalie Langan poses for a portrait at the First Nations University of Canada. Langan hosts a Saulteaux language podcast for the pikiskwewin website. (Photo by Liam O'Connor for Eagle Feather News)**

Since joining pikiskwewin, she has become a Saulteaux language teacher at FNUUniv.

Langan has also begun incorporating language learning and lessons into her podcasts.

Other organizations outside of FNUUniv are also asking her to share the language.

The Newo Yotina Friendship Centre (NYFC) has her teaching people from across Canada.

"[At the] beginning of January, we had over 150 people want to join the Zoom class," said Tammy Huget, the community program manager at NYFC. "And they're from all over Canada and the US, so we have someone from Texas that comes on, someone from Nevada [and] South Dakota."

Huget described an elderly student from the Maritimes who attended residential school and lost the Saulteaux language, but now she joins Langan's classes over Zoom with her five grandchildren so they can learn together.

"It's multi-generations of learning the language and bringing it back," said Huget.

The end goal for Langan is to get Indigenous languages to the youth.

"It would be nice to see in the public school system, to have those languages offered," she said.

## Journalist is always up for a challenge

By NC Raine  
for Eagle Feather News

Excelling in one just area of journalism isn't sufficient for Priscilla Wolf.

The awarding-winning journalist, national TV news anchor, and Masters student has a hunger and motivation to constantly push herself to reach new heights.

It's not just about bettering herself, she said. It's about showing other Indigenous people what is possible.

"I've always had the goal of being a role model," said Wolf. "I grew up not seeing enough Indigenous role models, so I would love to be that for someone. To show them, as an Indigenous person, they can pursue whatever it is they want to do."

From Mistawasis Nehiyawak Cree First Nation, Wolf is in the midst of a remarkably well-rounded career, working for Indigenous media outlets like APTN, mainstream media like CTV News, as well as doing communications for the Saskatoon Tribal Council and completing a graduate degree in journalism from the University of Regina (U of R).

Growing up, Wolf was a natural when it came to language and writing, finding herself near the top of her English classes in high school, with teachers encouraging her to pursue writing.

After graduating from the Indigenous Communication Arts (INCA) program at the First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv), she began an internship with CTV News in Edmonton. Intent on expanding her career, Wolf worked with Sharing Circle and at APTN as a reporter and on-camera news anchor.

But perhaps most important on her journey, she said, was connecting with mentors.

"I was extremely shy growing up. I didn't think I had the confidence to be on TV. But meeting ladies like Betty-Ann Adam and Shannon Avison, who took me under their wing really gave me confidence," said Wolf.

The environment at APTN was nurturing, said Wolf, being surrounded by Indigenous people who supported her and encouraged her to grow.

Her confidence and craft followed suit.

In 2010, she was able to host the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics for APTN as their official host of the games. The potential audience each night ranged from thousands to millions.

"I did so much work on camera for a while, so I wanted to then focus on research and writing for a while, and really sharpen those skills," said Wolf.

Her skills were not only sharp, but nationally recognized.

Her work for APTN brought her two first-place awards in 2020 and 2021, respectively, from the National Native Media Awards by Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), an organization of which she was also made a lifetime member.

Throughout all her work, she wants to make an impact and perhaps shift the perception of Indigenous people.

"I think [organizations like APTN] can make a difference in showing Indigenous stories from an Indigenous perspective," said Wolf. "People form opinions in their own way, but I think the media can help shift those narratives about Indigenous people."

This subject is the focus for her master's project.

In her documentary, she looks at the media and the role they play in how society views Indigenous people.

"During my research, Doug Cuthand really opened up my eyes and made me think about the role media plays, especially in Saskatchewan," said Wolf. "He talked about how the stories are always negative of Indigenous people, and decades of these stories being printed has really affected society's view of us," she said.

Her studies are wrapping up and she plans to continue pushing herself and influencing more positive perceptions of Indigenous people in society through her role as a journalist.



**Priscilla Wolf, a long-time journalist with APTN, will soon convocate with a master of journalism from the University of Regina and is looking forward to continuing to tell Indigenous stories. She said her experience in school and in the newsroom have only made her more passionate about journalism. (Photo supplied by Priscilla Wolf)**

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## Two-spirit artist, poet and activist uses their voice to turn trauma into hope

By Memory McLeod  
for Eagle Feather News

Tai Reign, a spoken-word artist and performer, is making a name for themselves in the arts community.

The two-spirit, non-binary, Indigenous youth from the Peepeekisis Cree Nation doesn't shy away from hard topics such as racism, inequality and intergenerational trauma.

With a gentle confidence and wisdom beyond their years, Reign shines a spotlight on things most people have difficulty discussing.

Showing a creative flair at a young age, Reign describes themselves as an "artsy fartsy kid" who put on skits to entertain family, foreshadowing stage performances to come.

During their teen years, as mental health issues surfaced, they discovered a powerful creative outlet in poetry.

"I honestly don't believe I would still be here on earth if I hadn't found poetry," said Reign. "It was a lifeline. When I was learning to identify emotions, poetry created a guideline to express and create connections."

Through Regina Word Up and Creative City Centre, they found a safe space to explore their artistic values and grow in confidence and skill.

Reign's busy schedule means constant performances, which means growth and evolution.

"It started off with just sharing my poems and my challenges with mental health, but as I've grown older it's changed from just sharing to inspiring youth," they said. "My dream is to inspire Indigenous youth to create art. So many of us have bad coping mechanisms and that is normalized. What I want to show is turning something negative or hurtful into something that creates hope. Elders too, everyone can benefit from creating art."

On stage, Reign displays a masterful use of rhythm and rhyme, while still delivering an important social justice message.

Since the pandemic, they have shifted focus from changing the minds of society to the idea that change starts within.

"I think there has been a shift," said Reign. "We tended to focus on the differences within each other. This is how we identified ourselves. That has

changed since the pandemic. At the end of the day, we are all just human and all spirit."

Time spent introspectively helped them to see the vulnerability in others, which has softened their delivery in spoken word.

What was once a driving passion has transformed into an all-encompassing compassion.

"It went from being loud and in people's faces to being comforting," said Reign. "It's okay to feel negative emotions. Energy vampires are everywhere thriving off of negative opinions. I saw that people need comforting and I can help if I am honest about where I am really at."

Their next project is a theater production called "The Rehearsal" where dialogue is used to dissect biases and subtle forms of racism.

The On Cue Performance Hub production is a follow-up to another show Reign co-created to examine microaggressions between Indigenous and settler youth in Saskatchewan.

"I no longer ascribe to a polarization of people," they said. "That system thrives on dividing the population and makes people easier to govern. A lot of ignorance and hatred comes out of fear and confusion. If we had loving conversations, it would be easier to create connections rather than barriers."

Reign remains committed to using their talents to highlight Indigenous experiences as a way to help uplift all Indigenous people.



**Tai Reign is making a name for herself in the arts community because she does not shy away from addressing tough issues. The spoken-word artist believes art saved her because it gave her an outlet to express herself. She encourages other youth to explore the arts for their healing benefits. (Photo supplied by Tai Reign)**



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# It's not your typical yoga session

By Memory McLeod  
for Eagle Feather News

It all begins with a circle.  
It is prayer.  
It is ceremony.  
It is how Shyla Gaebel chooses to deliver her trauma-informed yoga class at the Mamawayatitan Centre in North Central Regina.

Every second week, a group of women sit in the lotus position surrounded by the gentle glow of candlelight, while a smudge is passed from mat to mat before they begin a co-ordinated series of yoga positions with everyone breathing in unison.

"Participants have the option to choose what feels best," said Gaebel. "It means being held in a good way. It's about creating a safe place to explore feelings of vulnerability. We offer the sage-only smudge in case someone is on their moon time."

The class is designed to be a gentle welcome for participants to move and explore their range of flexibility and to take some time to themselves.

"It's like being in a safe container," said Gaebel. "The lights are lowered and I will sometimes move about the room a bit, but there is a respect for space. Letting them explore without worrying about whether or not they are doing it right. It's the energy in the room, greeting them saying, 'I see you; I hear you.'"

She ends each session with a sharing circle and reminds everyone the breathing and movement is the focus.

Gaebel said the class developed organically while she was on her own journey of self-discovery and wellness.

She has traced her paternal roots to the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nation in Manitoba. While she was learning more about herself and her family lineage, she also began yoga training.

By coincidence, there were some women from her father's First Nation taking the same class, which Gaebel took as a positive sign she was on the right path in life.

Once certified, she began teaching classes to groups and was approached by an Indigenous client to bring her style of trauma-informed yoga to her staff.

It was the first time Gaebel led a room full of Indigenous people and it was then she knew she wanted to create an accessible wellness program for urban Indigenous



**Shayla Gaebel, a trauma-informed yoga instructor, preparing for one of her sessions. She conducts her sessions in a dimmed room illuminated by candles. Participants have the option of smudging before each session. She believes there are many benefits to trauma-informed yoga, which is why she tries to make it as accessible as possible for Indigenous women in urban settings. (Photo supplied by Gaebel)**

people.  
"There are so many factors that can create barriers to participating in public programs like this," said Gaebel. "Some can't afford to take a yoga class. So it was important for me to create something for Indigenous people where they can just show up and Creator takes the lead."

Finding a class aimed at community wellness is important to long-time North Central Regina resident Jacqueline Thompson.

She wasn't expecting to find such a deep connection and the healing she experienced in Gaebel's class.

"While smudging and doing breath work, Shyla was softly playing the hand drum and that sound combined with the practice and the atmosphere caused something in me to lift," said Thompson. "Burdens lifted and the air was clear. It recentered and realigned my mental, emotional, physical and spiritual selves."

She said, for her, trauma-informed care includes prayer and recognition of a higher power and that's what sets Gaebel's class apart from other yoga classes.

"It changes the way I am carrying that trauma for that day or week," said Thompson. "We are better to ourselves and our family and that makes it ceremony."

All Nations Hope Network also hosts Yoga with Shyla as part of their MMIWG2S+ Healing and Strengthening Indigenous Sisters and 2 Spirit's Yoga classes and workshops.

For more information on classes, go to Yoga with Shyla on Facebook.

# BUILDING COMMUNITY



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## Indigenous scientist and business owner is focused on clean water and curriculum development

By Lindell Haywahe  
for Eagle Feather News

To say science is a passion would be an understatement for Dawn Pratt. The chemist turned business owner is determined to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and Western science.

Pratt, from the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, holds a Master of Science in physical chemistry from the University of Saskatchewan and, in 2020, she launched her company Askenootow STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) Enterprise Inc.

"[Indigenous people] are the original inhabitants, the original entrepreneurs and the original innovators," said Pratt. "Naturally, we are the original scientists – we based our knowledge and teachings purely on observation and experiences."

She is using her science education to Indigenize curriculum, which is the foundation for her business. Using the innovations of modern science and technology, she can generate a bridge of understanding to connect ideas from completely different areas of knowledge and understanding.

Through her different roles, Pratt advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous language and the validation of the Knowledge Keepers' interpretation of traditional concepts.

The work she completed for her Master of Science in Physical Chemistry from the University of Saskatchewan has been reviewed by several peers.

Pratt has also been featured in the American Chemical Society News for her quest for mainstream and Western academia to recognize innovative Indigenous creations because they can be quantified. Some ancient ways of doing things still exist today, which proves the old techniques can't be improved upon.

Her unique research also attracts international interest. This has resulted in invitations to present and share her knowledge with other scientists and educators. Pratt uses common Indigenous structures like the teepee or canoe and then explains the science behind why they work to validate traditional knowledge.

Indigenous contributions to science have been largely overlooked, but she wants to change that misconception.

Although she's working to build her business by highlighting Indigenous contributions to science and finding ways to include that information in curriculum, she remains a scientist at heart.

Her primary research involves finding a way to extract arsenic from water supplies.

She said Indigenous people are often called the traditional stewards of the land, which is something she takes seriously.

It's no surprise Pratt is looking for a solution to purify contaminated water.

As an Indigenous person and scientist, she knows without water there is no life, so she is using both her Western education and traditional teachings to find a solution to heal the water.

Pratt has spent her educational and professional life working alongside educators and scientists, advocating for the inclusion and recognition of Indigenous technology and science.

It may be an uphill battle to Indigenize the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, but it's a goal she continues to work towards.

One of the ways Pratt does this is to look at Indigenous practices and construct and earmark them for concrete ideas and information that can

be interpreted and deconstructed from an Indigenous perspective.

Pratt hopes the work she does today will help to encourage other Indigenous youth to pursue a career in science because, historically, Indigenous people have a history of being problem solvers.



**Dawn Pratt is working to change the way science views the historical contributions of Indigenous people. She is not only a scientist and curriculum developer but she also owns a business. Pratt knows she has a daunting task ahead of her, but she is determined to keep working towards her goal in any way she can, which includes giving presentations. (Photo supplied by Dawn Pratt)**

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## Everyone loves Chelazon

*By Kerry Benjoe  
of Eagle Feather News*

Since making an appearance on Canada's Drag Race, Chelazon Leroux has become a household name.

She was at the Saskatchewan Science Centre (SSC) in Regina to host a drag show on Valentine's Day and the crowd couldn't be more thrilled.

Sandy Baumgartner, CEO of the SSC, said the adult-only events are held every two months and attract an average of about 200 guests. The purpose of these nights is to drive home the message: science is for everyone.

"But really what is most important, more than the numbers, is the enthusiasm of our guests," she said. "If you were watching the show, you would have heard the screams, the squeals and the cheering. That's what it's about; making sure we're inclusive for everyone and have a good time."

She let her staff take the lead in planning and has no regrets despite not knowing who Chelazon was beforehand.

"The staff brought her to my attention, so I looked up some of her videos and realized I was missing out," said Baumgartner. "I am a huge fan now."

Melanie Rose, a Metis artist, is a big fan of Chelazon's alter ego known as Auntie.

"I am really enjoying myself," she said. "I didn't tell my husband I was taking him to a drag show. I just wanted him to experience something different, which is really fun. And I love the Indigenous humour."



**During a break in the night's programming, Chelazon Leroux, a popular Indigenous TikTok creator and former competitor on Canada's Drag Race, stopped and posed for some photos. (Photo by Kerry Benjoe for Eagle Feather News)**

She learned about Chelazon and Auntie through social media before seeing her on television.

On TikTok alone, Chelazon Leroux has amassed more than 500,000 followers and 6.8 million likes on her videos.

Layten Byhette, 23, from Buffalo River Dene Nation and Fond du Lac, is the person who created both the Chelazon and Auntie personalities. Prior to downloading the TikTok app on his phone, he was working a part-time job in a small, isolated community.

Today, he owns Just Deadly Merchandise, Just Deadly Entertainment and travels around the country and sometimes internationally. In addition to creating social media content, he brings entertainment and laughter to thousands of often screaming fans.

"This journey especially over the past year has been hectic and crazy and sometimes I don't get enough sleep," she said. "But what makes me so happy, especially after doing [Canada's] Drag Race is hearing how people were impacted by that representation. Family members or people from back home were seeing someone like themselves on TV."

As the first Saskatchewan person to make it on the show, Chelazon represented not only Indigenous people, but the province and that increased her popularity.

"I think I showed people it was possible," she said.

Although she couldn't have predicted how drastic her life could change, she always knew she wanted to perform.

"I don't think anyone could have predicted this," said Chelazon. "Creator works in mysterious ways."

For those who are curious, Auntie is Byhette's love letter to the Indigenous



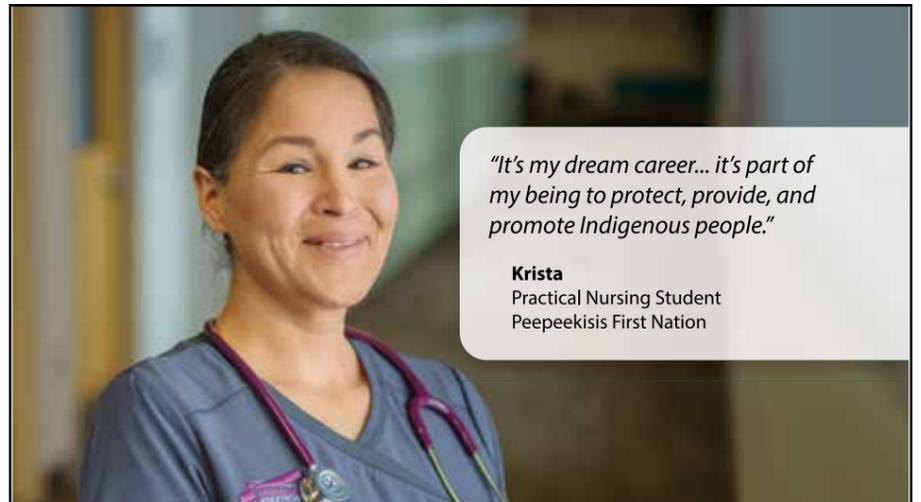
**Chelazon Leroux, a competitor in Canada's Drag Race, made an appearance at the Saskatchewan Science Centre on Valentine's Day. Every couple of months, the science centre hosts an adult night, and in February the staff organized a drag show on Valentine's Day. (Photo by Kerry Benjoe for Eagle Feather News)**

women who raised him.

"She's that humour, she's that tough love type person and she is the type of woman who always accepted me for who I was," Chelazon explained.

On a serious note, she said growing up in a small community as an Indigenous person was difficult at times, not knowing if it was OK to be different or if it was OK to be gay or queer.

"Sometimes it was met really negatively, but I always knew I had to be authentic to myself," said Chelazon. "I would much rather have someone love me for who I am than love me for someone I am not."



*"It's my dream career... it's part of my being to protect, provide, and promote Indigenous people."*

**Krista**  
Practical Nursing Student  
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Allen Augier	Leadership	Verna McCallum	Community
Cary Bannerman	Leadership	Marguerite Sophia McDougall	Culture, Community, Religion
Michael Bell	Leadership	Adam McInnes	Community, Health, Medicine, Entrepreneurship, Technology, Science and Innovation
Yvonne Boyer	Leadership	Darlene McKay	Leadership
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Candice Debray	Community	Jerry Morin	Community, Leadership, Volunteer Services
Leah Dorion	Arts	Doris Morin-McArdle	Volunteer Services
Shea Drouin	Leadership	George Natomagan	Leadership
Phillip Durocher	Community	Mike Natomagan	Leadership, Community
Doreen Lavina Kathleen Egeland	Agriculture	Wanda Neufeldt	Leadership
Barry Falcon	Leadership	Chance Parenteau	Leadership
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Leroy Fiddler	Leadership	Marilyn Poitras	Business, Community
Curtis Fiss	Leadership	Melanie Pritchett	Leadership
Norman Fleury	Culture, Community, Education, Religion	Calvin Racette	Culture, Community, Religion
Beau Froquette	Protective Services	Crystal Racette	Leadership
Victor Guillet	Leadership	Lynn Regnier	Leadership, Business, Volunteer Services
Eugene Hamilton	Leadership	Karen Rondeau	Leadership
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Violet Herman	Leadership	Kelvin Roy	Leadership
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Emilien Janvier	Culture, Community, Religion	Keith Shewchuk	Leadership
Helene Johnson	Leadership	Louise Simard	Leadership, Community
Jacqueline Kennedy	Community	Dean Smith	Arts, Protective Services
Percy Kenny	Leadership	Kimberly Smith	Community
Dwight King	Sport	Linda Sopp	Leadership
Dwayne King	Sport	Lucille Tetarenko	Leadership
Kelly Kwan	Leadership	Becky Trotchie	Leadership
Marlene Kyplain	Volunteer Services	Perry Vermette	Business, Community
Glenn Lafleur	Volunteer Services	Wendy Vermette	Business, Community
Eugenie Lafleur	Leadership	Beverly Vermette	Business, Community
		Sheila Yip	Leadership

These individuals have given of themselves for the betterment of their communities, province, country and our Métis Nation. Thank you and congratulations from MN-S.

## The voice behind Regina’s CJTR radio station

By Tegan Chester  
for Eagle Feather News

Elvie Stonechild likes to keep busy, but since creating her own radio show, Indigenous Vibes, you can find her on CJTR 91.3 FM every Friday afternoon starting at 1 p.m.

She says the show is a way for her to help share Indigenous people’s voices.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to do Indigenous Vibes on the CJTR radio station because prior to that there was no Indigenous programming,” said Stonechild. “I created this program to bridge our cultures and also to help in reconciliation, to teach non-Indigenous people that our Indigenous peoples have a story.”

She is not one to shy away from a challenge, so jumping into a career in broadcasting wasn’t intimidating.

Stonechild loves to paint, and this creative side has helped her to launch the new show for Regina listeners.

She says factors such as a love for her mother and love for her family keep her motivated. The Cree values and lessons she was raised with do influence how she approaches life.

“I know myself as a Nehiyaw Indigenous woman, Red Thunder Bird woman and mother of four children,” said Stonechild.

From the Nekaneet First Nation, she lived on the Piapot Cree Nation before moving to Regina.

While in the city, Stonechild pursued post-secondary education and raised a family. After completing her degree, she spent six years as a corrections officer. She is also a powwow dancer and practises her culture.

Indigenous Vibes is Stonechild’s baby because, not only is she the brainchild behind the show, she single-handedly works to keep it going.

She volunteers and manages all Indigenous Vibes’ content, from writing her own scripts, editing her music and organizing guest interviews.

The content focuses on the Cree language, powwow songs and music by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists as well as special guest speakers and performances.



**Elvie Stonechild is the creator and voice behind Regina’s Indigenous Vibes an Indigenous variety show that’s part of the CJTR’s lineup. She believes Indigenous people need outlets to share their stories, knowledge and voices so she created a radio show. She is not only the on-air personality, but she does all the work behind the scenes to keep Indigenous Vibes on the air. (Photo supplied by Elvie Stonechild)**

Stonechild knows she’s producing something the community wants.

“Oh, I love your show! I’m glad you’re teaching me about your culture and helping me to understand,” she said are some of the comments she hears from callers.

Stonechild said there is importance in sharing her teachings, especially with those in an urban setting.

This is our inherent land – Treaty 4 Territory – and it’s important that we share our stories, she said, adding relationship building is an integral part of Indigenous Vibes.



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## Being an athlete and an academic can be a winning combination

By Kerry Benjoe  
of Eagle Feather News

Lori Campbell loves a good challenge and she's not afraid to show it. She's one of the players in a new reality TV show called Canada's Ultimate Challenge. Six teams comprised of four athletes compete against one another in a series of physical challenges. Each team is coached by a Canadian sport hero.

"We got to compete in challenges with a twist, it's different from regular sporting stuff," said Campbell. "It was awesome."

She's part of Olympic gold medalist Donovan Bailey's Red Team.

**"I became an apprentice because I wanted to break barriers."**

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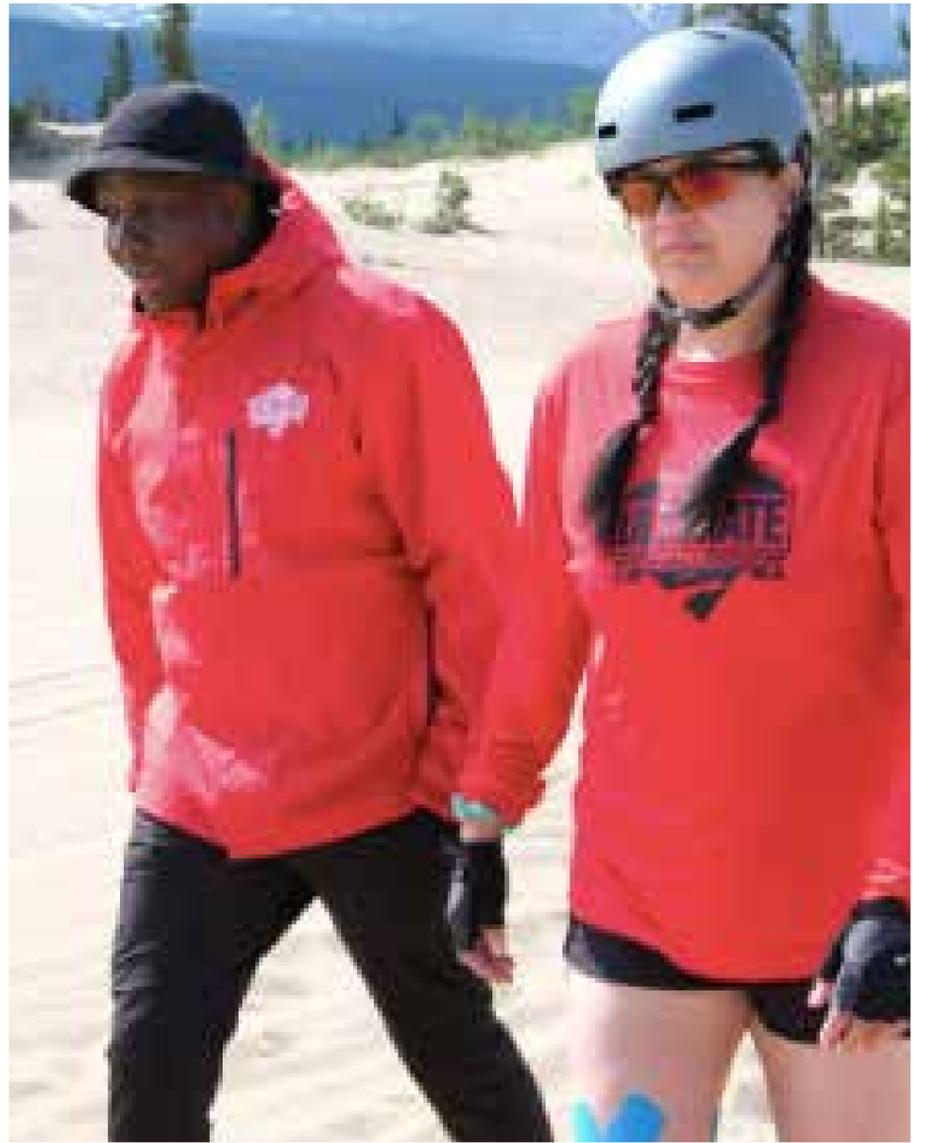


At 50, she is the oldest female and the only Indigenous two-spirit competitor on the show.

"Sometimes I competed against people less than half my age," said Campbell. "But they called me 'auntie,' so it was OK."

In her day job, she is the associate vice-president of Indigenous Engagement at the University of Regina. Campbell, a former college basketball player still works to keep fit, but hasn't been involved in competitive sports for decades.

When she was approached on social media to put her name in for the show, it took a fair amount of convincing for her to do it. Even after Campbell put her



**Regina's newest reality TV star Lori Campbell walks alongside Olympic gold medallist Donovan Bailey during an episode of Canada's Ultimate Challenge. Campbell was the oldest female player and the only two-spirit player. When she's not competing she is the associate vice-president of Indigenous Engagement at the University of Regina. (Photo supplied by CBC)**

name forward, she second-guessed her abilities.

"I also kept thinking, we don't get to be in some of these spaces and who am I to throw away that opportunity to bring visibility to some of our issues and also some of our strengths," she said. "So I chose to do it."

As an Indigenous woman and, even more so, as an Indigenous two-spirit woman, Campbell never felt represented in mainstream media.

The eight-episode TV show premiered on Feb. 16. The winning team will win a trip to the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

It's halfway through its season and is gaining popularity. Each week, more people tune in to see the drama and the competition.

Campbell knows millions are watching and hopes Indigenous youth are part of that audience.

"The message I hope to get across, especially to Indigenous youth is, 'We deserve to be in all spaces,'" she said.

In addition to being an Indigenous academic and athlete, she is also a 60s Scoop Survivor.

Campbell has a bachelor's degree in Indigenous Studies, a bachelor's degree in Psychology, a graduate degree in Adult Education and is pursuing a doctorate in Social Justice Education.

Despite her long list of academic credentials, it was her love of sports that motivated her to enroll in university. Campbell is grateful for the opportunities sports continue to provide.

New episodes of Canada's Ultimate Challenge air every Thursday at 8 p.m. on CBC and CBC Gem. Past episodes are available on CBC Gem.

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# Reconciliation Ally

Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen

By NC Raine  
of Eagle Feather News

The YWCA Regina, under the direction of CEO Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen, is not sweeping its colonialist history or privilege under the carpet.

Rather, in one of their many efforts to advance reconciliation in Saskatchewan, they are taking steps to directly acknowledge their past in order to create a brighter future.

"It's an act of truth telling," said Coomber-Bendtsen. "Early in my reconciliation journey, I was told people often forget about the truth-telling part of reconciliation. I realized truth-telling is so important, and I think it needs to become before any action."

In the spirit of truth-telling and reconciliation, the YWCA has recently commissioned a truth report about their organization's involvement in colonial history. It will be released once it's complete.



**Chelsy Lemke, Melissa Coomber-Bendtsen, Donna Mirasty and Lt-Gov Russ Mirasty at Government House. Coomber-Bendtsen is dedicated to creating a better future for everyone and one of the ways she does that is by actively working towards reconciliation in both her professional and private life. As the CEO of the YWCA, she has made changes throughout the organization that reflect true acts of reconciliation. (Photo from Facebook)**

Since Coomber-Bendtsen was hired in 2015, the YWCA has created more programs, provided more services and spaces, and formed a more diverse staff – all through consultation with Elders and local community members.

"When Melissa got hired, things shifted quite considerably, and quickly," said Nina Wilson, Knowledge Keeper at YWCA and member of Kahkewistahaw First Nation. "We started doing more ceremonies and things like medicine picking. We have an exposure to culture that wasn't there before, and [are] educating people on the importance of that culture."

Wilson said Coomber-Bendtsen also encourages staff to continue their cultural development, which goes above and beyond the role of CEO.

Coomber-Bendtsen, the youngest CEO in the organization's history, is a graduate of the University of Regina. The self-described social justice advocate's goal has always been to make the world a better place.

Inspired by a trip to South Africa when she was young, she began to understand the interconnect-

edness that exists between everything.

"It really pushed me to recognize the inequities in the world and pushed me to see how I can create spaces, be a good person and live my life in a way that supports others," said Coomber-Bendtsen.

She began her career in education but found it difficult to make significant impacts on her community when working within a large institution. However, at the YWCA, she found a place where she could not only work in crisis intervention and early childhood education, but where she could advocate for the community.

One of the most important changes made is that the YWCA's staff reflects the community they serve, said Coomber-Bendtsen. The staff is now 25 per cent Indigenous, with 27 per cent of their board, and 15 percent of their executive team identifying as Indigenous. They also have full-time Knowledge Keepers on staff, as well as someone who is responsible for Indigenous relations.

"Nothing about us without us is a motto she follows," said Chasity Delorme, YWCA Regina Board Member and member of Cowessess First Nation.

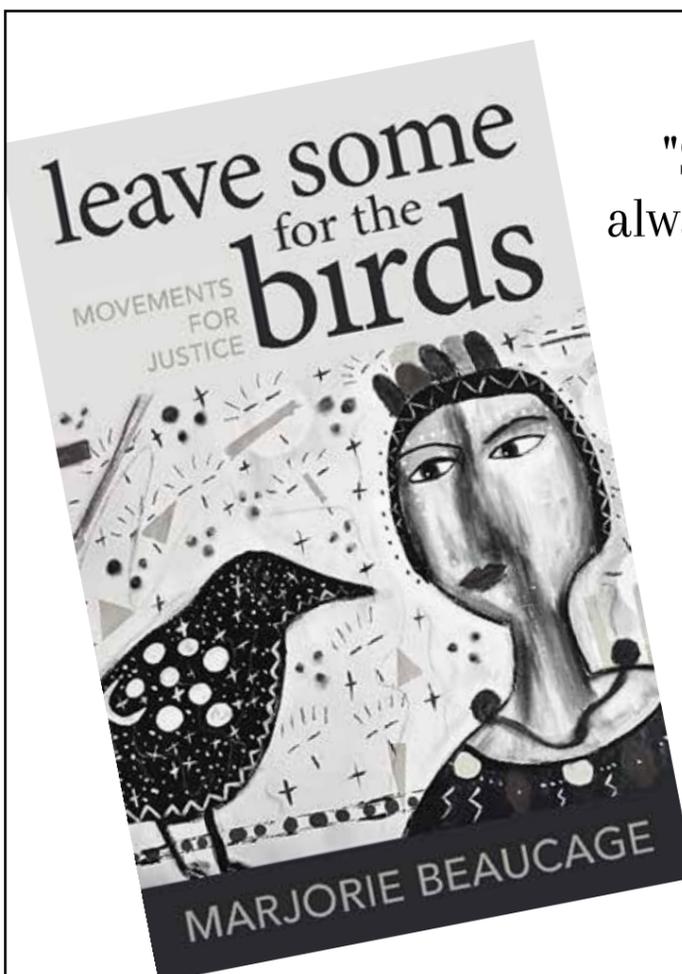
"I think the most important thing is that she doesn't make decisions on behalf of the Indigenous population that she provides programming for," said Delorme. "A good ally will seek consultation with its community in order to ensure they are providing culturally appropriate events and programs. And she does everything to ensure barriers don't exist for the women we serve."

This year, construction has been started on a new building in Regina, which will house the Centre for Women and Families. It will contain crisis services and childcare, as well as a healing centre and lodge space for the community to access.

The term "ally" is often applied to Coomber-Bendtsen, but it's one she accepts with humility – and is the first to admit she makes mistakes and is still learning.

"She's really down to earth and will attend ceremonies in order to learn," said Wilson. "She's not in some office where she can't be reached, she makes herself available. She's always open to learning."

At the YWCA, action is more important than words



"Some part of me has always heard the music of a greater dance."

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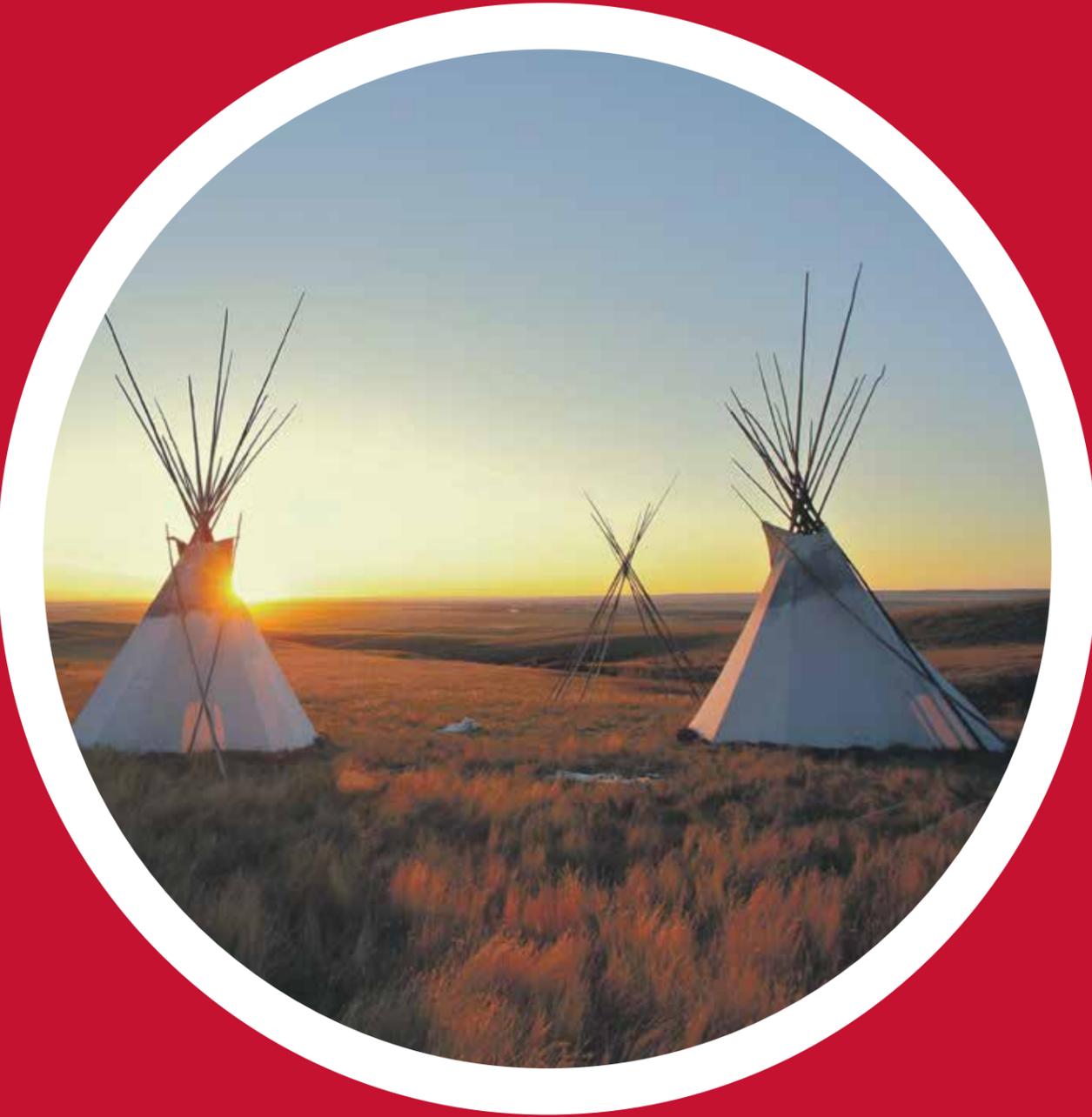
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