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By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Allan Lafond Jr's love for football has taken him across Canada and while pursuing his own educational goals he's helping to educate others about Indigenous issues.

"As athletes, we're given a platform that we can use for something bigger than sports," the Dalhousie Tigers defensive lineman, told Eagle Feather News.

Lafond, 22, is the first to admit the journey hasn't been easy.

He's battled devastating injuries, and subsequent doubts, but for him, it's never been just about football.

Culture is important to Lafond and so is Rec-

onciliation.

"People see the games – they are broadcast, there's photographers there," he said. "So, I try to do something that helps bring more awareness to important issues."

The 5-foot-10 football player often runs on the field carrying an Every Child Matters flag before games. He wears a painted red handprint over his mouth to symbolize the ongoing silence of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)

"Every year on National Reconciliation Day, I would talk to the team pre-game and tell them what the day means," said Lafond. "A lot of guys would come up to me and ask me questions, they want to know more. So, I did my best to teach people whenever I could."

continued page 2 ...



JORDAN TOOTOO
VISITS TREATY 4 TERRITORY

"Hockey has allowed me to experience a lot in life, but ultimately, it's about sharing my journey with our own people," said Tootoo.

- page 5



MASON FINE
Educating a Sport

"People started asking me about my ethnicity and stuff like that," said Fine. "I was kind of caught off guard by how little or how uneducated they were about the history of the Indigenous [people] all across North America."

- page 10



SASKATCHEWAN ROUGHRIDERS
Reconciliation Allies

"We didn't want to sit back and do nothing," said Cindy Fuchs, executive director of the Saskatchewan Roughriders Foundation. "We have a very loud voice and a very loud brand."

- page 11

December 2023 is our
Holiday Theme

Pasqua First Nation football player excels on and off the field

... continued from page 1

Despite his athletic talents, getting to and staying on the football field has been a battle.

"A lot has happened over the past few years at Dalhousie," said Lafond. "I just try to persevere, but it's been a journey. Not just a physical one but a mental and spiritual one as well."

It all began at Mount Royal Collegiate in Saskatoon.

As a youth, growing up with compromised balance due to ear fluid issues it kept him away from competitive sports like hockey.

However, he found a place on the football field.

Unfortunately, many of his young teammates didn't share his same level of enthusiasm. After several losing seasons, Lafond's grade 11 team at Mount Royal forfeited the season due to lack of commitment.

The experience left a mark on him.

"It was heartbreaking," said Lafond. "That moment I realized I really loved the sport and how much it sucked to have it taken away."

Determined to find more success on the field, Lafond transferred to Aden Bowman Collegiate in Saskatoon. After a successful season, team representatives from Dalhousie University saw a highlight reel of the young football player on the social media site Hudl.

He soon received offers from schools and football clubs including Dalhousie.

"I didn't even know Dalhousie was a university," said Lafond. "I thought it was spam. I had to quickly Google it and found out it's one of the best schools in Canada."

In the fall of 2019, he moved from Saskatoon to Halifax to continue his football career.

In his first year, Lafond who was only 18 was the youngest player on the defensive line.

His second year was shut down due to COVID.

After sitting out a year, Lafond was excited about his third year, but tragedy struck.

"One week before the first game, during a scrimmage, I felt a pop in my knee," said Lafond. "I tried to keep going but I had no power from my leg."

After an MRI, it was discovered he had torn his ACL, his meniscus, and had fractured the cartilage in his knee. His doctor told him it was one of the worst knee injuries he had seen.

Out for nine months, Lafond was left to rehabilitate his knee while his team went on to win the Atlantic Football League championship.

The setback cast major doubts about his future in the sport.

"It was a battle, with so much doubt about returning," said Lafond. "I was considering moving on from football. But I wanted to prove myself and I had a lot of support from my friends and family."

One of his biggest supporters is his mother, Bonnie Missens, a long-time

lawyer from Pasqua First Nation. He is also the grandson of Mervin and Lorna Missens, and Albert and Alphonsine Lafond.

"He never once felt sorry for himself," said Missens. "When he struggled, I reminded him how much he's been through, and how he's stronger than most people."

Missens said she was proud of the way he carried himself during his setbacks, and his continued advocacy for causes he believed in, even while injured.

After sitting out a season, Lafond returned to the field and the Dalhousie Tigers won the championship again last year.

"Being one of the only Indigenous players on the team, it gives me a chip on my shoulder," said Lafond. "People out east only know the stereotypes, the negatives, and that we're victims. But not many people know the successes. I want to succeed because of that."

Returning to Dalhousie for his fifth and final year, Lafond will be graduating this spring with a degree in Political Science.

He plans on following his mother's footsteps by pursuing a career in law.

"I think a lot of legal work can be done in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people," said Lafond. "That's where I want to help out."

His mother, sees no reason why he won't achieve everything he sets out to do.

"He really inspires me. He aims to be a role model," said Missens. "He would be good in law because he has this really soft side to him. He really wants to help people."

Unfortunately, in November his team fell short in the championship game losing 31-28 to the UNB Reds.



Allan Lafond Jr. with the red handprint the 22 year-old Dalhousie football player uses his position to raise awareness about important issues. (Photo supplied by Lafond)



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One man on a mission to help those in need in Saskatoon

By NC Raine
of Eagle Feather News

With so many individuals in the winter without warm clothes, food, or shelter, Ralph Nicotine is taking it upon himself to provide the essentials to those in need.

“No one should be cold or hungry,” he said. Nicotine from the Red Pheasant First Nation is a musician, who goes by the stage name Biz Nico, he founded the Church in the Hood Ministry in 2014.

“We knew there was a huge need, so my wife and I discussed it, and decided to do this full time,” he said.



Church in the Hood founder Ralph Nicotine is prepared to run the mobile warm-up station again this winter (photo supplied)

Me page, but the goal is \$20,000. Last year, providing the service five-to-six-times a week, cost about \$6,000 per month to cover food, beverages and fuel.

He paid for the expenses out of his own pocket until donations started flowing in.

Running the warm-up shelter last year emphasized the need for such a service in the city.

They would serve around 50 people on a quiet night, but up to 200 on busier nights.

Sometimes entire families would come for a meal, said Nicotine.

“It was such a positive experience,” he said. “Everyone is so appreciative. We were out there sometimes until four in the morning, so we would get to know a lot of people. They would open up and share their stories.”

A study last year conducted by the Saskatoon Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) showed in April, there were 550 people living without shelter.

But SHIP believes the actual numbers are much higher.

“There’s more and more people every year,” said Nicotine. “There’s more addictions, more drugs, which is sad. The problem is definitely overlooked. We have two shelters here that are doing a great job, but it would be great if there was more.”

He sometimes has volunteers with him but is often in the bus alone during the nights. People have voiced concerned for his safety, but he’s not concerned.

“I serve a God who protects me,” said Nicotine. “I’ve gotten to know a lot of people (who come to the bus). They’re like family.”




The bus the Church in the Hood Ministry is renovating to serve as a mobile warm up station in Saskatoon. (Photo supplied)

According to the Church of the Hood Ministries Facebook Page, an old school bus has been purchased and work is being done to get in ready for service by Dec. 1.



The plan is to start out at three-to-four times a week, which will increase as the temperatures get lower.

It will be running at City Centre Church on 20th Street West, which Nicotine said is a good, well-lit, and safe location.

Donations to Nicotine’s ‘Church in the Hood’ warm-up bus can be made here: https://www.gofundme.com/f/bus-for-winter-warm-up-saskatoon?utm_campaign=p_nacp+share-sheet&utm_medium=copy_link&utm_source=customer



Wishing you and your family
a very happy holiday!



It’s in his blood

By NC Raine
of Eagle Feather News

As a fourth-generation, Cree, thoroughbred horse trainer, legacy is important to Tom Gardipy Jr.

“This is probably just what I was meant to do,” he said. “I think it’s the same as a hockey player or football player. You have to have that passion, that drive to keep you going. I’ve always had that passion.”

His fascination began with ‘Black Diamond’ – a champion racehorse owned by his great-grandfather.

It made such an impact that Gardipy named his own facility, Black Diamond Stables, in honour of his family’s history.

From the Beardy’s and Okemasis’ Cree Nation, he’s kept the trade alive.

Gardipy, a successful horse trainer, was recently inducted into the North American Indigenous Athletes Hall of Fame (NAIAHF).

“After I went to the (awards) ceremony, it hit me,” he said. “Seeing what it meant to my family and friends, how much it meant to the people involved



Tom Gardipy Jr. stands with his wife Cheryl who he credits for his success as a horse trainer. (Photo supplied)

... it’s special.”

Gardipy’s storied career started first with riding, then with racing before moving on to training horses when he was around 17 or 18 years old.

Since then, he’s racked up quite the record.

In 4851 horse-racing starts, Gardipy has 872 wins, 842 second place finishes, and 721 thirds, with a total earnings of \$4,925,535.

He’s been named Top Trainer from Marquis Downs in Saskatoon in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

In 2003, he received the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations Circle of Honour Award for Sports.

In the 19 years he’s trained at the Assiniboia Downs in Winnipeg, Gardipy has ranked in the top-three trainers every year and has won the Top Trainer title six times.

“When you do this, it’s pretty much your whole life,” he said. “You put in a lot of hours, often getting up very early in the morning.”

These distinctions throughout his career play a big role in allowing Gardipy to continue doing what he loves.

One of the biggest challenges of horse training is financial stability, he said, and success largely comes by way of building a name for yourself.

Things became easier after he won his first Top Trainer award in 2000.



Gardipy dressed in red sits on one of the horses he has trained. He has been working with horses his entire life and has been very successful in his career. (Photo supplied)

“It’s easy to be overlooked if you’re not a known name,” said Gardipy. “I have to be very grateful to the clients who believed in me while I was first starting off. I see a lot of people struggle because they haven’t yet built a name for themselves.”

As such, he’s committed to helping younger generations learn the trade.

Not only does he work with his own sons and daughter in caring for and training racehorses, but he also mentors Indigenous youth interested in horse training.

“I think it’s important to keep this tradition going,” said Gardipy. “Everyone who has success in what they do should give back.”

He opened Black Diamond Stables in the 1990s on his First Nation. Gardipy trains there until May, before heading to Winnipeg for the horseracing season.

He currently runs approximately thirty horses but has had as many as 55. Although it’s hard work, Gardipy said it’s been rewarding in many ways.

“I believe that horses have a special healing power,” he said. “You find



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May your holiday season be filled with joy, laughter, and cherished moments with loved ones. Happy holidays!



Off-Ice inspiration from an Indigenous Role Model

By Campbell Stevenson
for Eagle Feather News

PASQUA FIRST NATION – Retired NHL player Jordin Tootoo made some rounds in Treaty 4 territory during the month of November.

One of the stops he made was in Pasqua First Nation for its National Addiction Awareness Week.

Tootoo, the former NHL right-winger, author and motivational speaker is most known for being the first Inuk hockey player to make it to the NHL.

During his 13-year career he played for the Nashville Predators, the Detroit Redwings, the New Jersey Devils, and the Chicago Blackhawks before officially retiring in 2018 to focus on other passions.

But Tootoo wasn’t in Pasqua to just talk sports.

“Hockey has allowed me to experience a lot in life, but ultimately, it’s about sharing my journey with our own people,” said Tootoo.

It was during his final years of playing hockey, he decided to shed the weight of alcoholism and enter rehab.

In addition to rehabilitation, Tootoo credits land-based healing and spirituality for aiding in his recovery.

“I’ve always allowed myself to reconnect with the land,” he said. “Each individual has their own journey, for me, as an Indigenous person, it was the land where I’ve always felt whole, comfortable and content.”

Tootoo said reconciling with oneself is the first step of overcoming addictions. The next step is to uplift your community by raising awareness.

“Having clarity and being content in your own body and being present will have a lot of beneficial outcomes for people who are wanting to change their lives,” he said. “A lot of our people are afraid of change, but we are resilient. Whatever is put in front of us we’ll overcome, but it takes a community, you can’t do it on your own.”



Jordin Tootoo speaking at Pasqua First Nation’s Annual Addiction Awareness Week. (Photo by Campbell Stevenson)

Following his retirement from the NHL, Tootoo has been on a mission to give-back to Indigenous communities by sharing his life story.

Giving back to the community was something his late brother Terrance, who was also a hockey phenom, talked about doing.

His brother committed suicide at the age of 22.

In 2017, Rankin Inlet - where the Tootoo brothers are from - renamed its annual Avataq Cup the Terrance Tootoo Memorial Cup.

Earlier this year, Tootoo released his second-book, Mind Over Matter: Hard Won Battles on the Road to Hope- a story depicting his healing process in the wake of his brothers’ passing.



Tootoo with students from Pasqua First Nation. (Photo by Campbell Stevenson)

“As men, we don’t need solutions or answers, we just want to be heard. So, it’s important to allow a space for that,” said Tootoo. “It’s not about wins or losses in life, it’s about community, being one. Uplifting your own people, rather than dragging them down.”

His first book is All the Way: My Life on Ice released in 2015 is a national best seller.

Tootoo was also a keynote for Kahkewistahaw First Nation’s Addiction Awareness Week.

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Province and the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan agree to work together

By NC Raine
of Eagle Feather News

Several major announcements were made at the 2023 Métis Nation Legislative Assembly (MNLA) over November 25 and 26 in Saskatoon.

Day one of the gathering was headlined by the signing of two memorandums of understanding (MOU) between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S).

The first MOU signed was to collaborate on Firearms Safety Education. The collaboration will see the MN-S and the Government of Saskatchewan coordinate education efforts to Métis citizens on existing and incoming firearms laws, as well as to encourage and facilitate members in becoming fully licensed and legally compliant firearms owners.

The MOU also states the two parties will work to minimize unnecessary criminalization of individuals for regulatory offences.

The Government of Saskatchewan will also provide funding for an agreement for a position within the MN-S aimed at firearm education.

"It is important to us as politicians – we come and go, but relationships between (these governments) last so much longer," said Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe during the assembly.

The second MOU signed between the two governments was Educating the Saskatchewan Public Service about the Métis. The purpose of the MOU will be to formalize, enhance, and expand the relationship between the MN-S and the Saskatchewan Public Service Commission (PSC).

"We will continue to work and collaborate and examine ways that the public service and (the MN-S) can work together on increasing the presence of Métis people within the provincial government," said Moe. "Not only will this focus on increasing Métis presence, but also education throughout the (PSC) on the importance of Métis people in Saskatchewan."

The MOU also states the two parties will create a shared understanding of the

current educational resources in the public services to educate employees about Métis history and collaborate on developing and delivering those resources.

"This was a pivotal MNLA for our government as we continue to see the fruits of our labour come to be," said MN-S President Glen McCallum.

In McCallum's state of the nation address, he stated they now have over 30,000 members registered in Saskatchewan out of roughly 80,000 Métis people in the province, and about 15,000 Métis

businesses in Saskatchewan.

He said the MN-S will continue to work on building connections with the provincial and federal governments, and speaking with one voice that earns people's trust and respect.

"We will support the regions, the locals in regards to what they need," said McCallum. "We have a track record that we can get the best deal. There's nothing we cannot do in this province."

Saskatoon Mayor Charlie Clark also addressed the MNLA. He said the city deliberated about creating a new shelter for people struggling with addictions. The facility will focus on helping people connect to supports and transition to housing, rather than being kept in police cells, he said.

"The more we can work together and recognize that these are health-related, not about criminality," said Clark. "People need help."

Cassidy Caron, President of the Métis National Council, updated the MNLA on talks with the federal government on Bill C-53, an act respecting the recognition of certain Métis governments, give effect to treaties, and make consequential amendments to other acts.

"We look forward to the passing of Bill C-53 as our next step forward of the Métis nation," said Caron.

"Self-government is an inherent Métis right. We have always had self determination as Métis people. And with Bill C-53, that is now creating a pathway for the implementation of self-government. It is not giving us our rights, we have our rights as Métis people," she said.



Artist rendition of the inside of the arbour. (Photo supplied by Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation)

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Powwow Arbour Receives Global Recognition

*By Campbell Stevenson
for Eagle Feather News*

A powwow arbour design earned the province its first international nod at this year’s Holcim North American Region, Sustainable Construction Awards in Venice, Italy.

Saskatchewan-based Oxbow Architecture picked up the Acknowledgement Award for the building they designed for the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation on Nov. 18.

To get to the awards, involves a strict screening process. This year, seventy countries participated with 2,300 submissions made, and of those, only 500 met the sustainable-construction criteria.

“Only four were chosen per continent,” said Myke Agecoutay, Presi-



Artist rendition of the inside of the arbour. (Photo supplied by Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation)

dent and CEO of Muscowpetung Saulteaux Business Developments. “So, Muscowpetung sits in the company of great projects worldwide.”

The community was invited to witness the awards via video stream and although it placed fourth it was still a momentous occasion for everyone.

“Going back to our initial intent of this project, we originally created it because of the need to have powwows in our community...but the accolades it’s picked up since is just overwhelming,” said Agecoutay. “It’s nice to feel appreciated and that our project has hit the world’s stage again.”

The design earned the Award of Excellence in 2022 from the Canadian Architect Awards in Montreal and the 2022 Future Projects – Culture Award at the World Architecture Festival in Lisbon, Portugal.

Agecoutay said it was the first time an architectural firm from Saskatchewan won the Canadian Architect-Award of Excellence.

Brad Pickard, the Project Architect recently returned from the award presentation in Venice.

“This recent award really speaks volumes, because it’s a sustainable construction and design award,” he said. “Working with indigenous communities, and Muscowpetung in particular, their values are already aligned with sustainable design.”

Under the mentorship of renown architect Richard Kroeker at Dalhousie in Nova Scotia, Pickard has integrated Indigenous beliefs and traditions into his work.

“There’s a lot of low carbon intensity materials that we’ve been introducing into the project, like timber,” he said. “So just trying to find ways to really embed sustainable design practice into their projects.”

Pickard has witnessed the transformative impact of Indigenous design in architecture and is seeing a notable evolution in the field.

“When I did my undergrad, it was very Eurocentric... high design was through the lens of European high technology,” he said. “But now there’s

Indigenous knowledge that is actually getting us to rethink the complex way that we tackle buildings.”

Pickard appreciates the shift.

“It’s super interesting how Indigenous values are aligned with the most relevant projects of our time right now,” he said.

Projects of this caliber prove to be difficult, and more expensive than projected.

However, Agecoutay remains determined to see the project through.

“We received 100% funding from CHRT (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal) and that was to the tune of \$3.187 million,” he said.

However, due to inflation and rising costs the budget has increased by 20 per cent.

“The nation will be having to coupe those extra costs,” said Agecoutay. “We’ve never had this much spotlight on Muscowpetung, and we’re certainly going to embrace it and take that responsibility seriously.”

The site of where the powwow arbour is located one-kilometre east on South Valley Road.

The official groundbreaking ceremony took place on Nov. 9.

Construction is expected to continue throughout the winter and to be completed by the end of summer.

The inaugural powwow is on track to happen late fall next year.

A graphic for a road safety campaign. At the top, the text "Find A Safe Ride" is written in a stylized, hand-drawn font. Below the text is a photograph of the interior of a car at night. Three people are visible: a man in the driver's seat, a man in the passenger seat, and a woman in the back seat. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The car's interior lights are on, and the windows show a dark night outside.

You’ve got options! A designated driver, a hired ride, or even mom. Always find a safe ride – how you do it is up to you.

sgi.sk.ca/stickwithsafety

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Take care out there.

MN-S announced where it plans to invest

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

With a commitment to strengthen communities and their local chapters, the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S) announced a \$7 million community investment to support language revitalization, culture programming, and land-based wellness programs, directly to the MN-S locals.

The announcement was made by MN-S Chief Executive Officer Richard Quintal during day two of the 2023 Métis Nation Legislative Assembly (MNLA) and marks historic empowerment for the MN-S locals, said Quintal.

“This is monumental progress that will propel us forward as a community and government,” he said.

During the announcement, Quintal said funding for local programming includes up to \$50,000 for opportunities in early learning and childcare, and up to \$10,000 will be allocated to support language revitalization programs and language camps in local communities.

“We are changing the way we deliver our programs and services to include direct funding opportunities to our locals,” he said. “It is an investment in our citizens, our community, and our future.”

There will also be funding for social infrastructure to prevent, and reduce homelessness for Métis citizens, as well as funding for land-based learning.

“Education is a key pillar of our nation and will be instrumental in achieving our goals as a government,” said Quintal.

In keeping with supporting community at the grass-roots level, the MN-S also provided an update on the work they are doing with implementing Bill C-92.

Bill C-92 is legislation that will ensure Indigenous people will have jurisdiction over their children and family services (CFS).

If an Indigenous community enters into a coordination agreement with Canada and the applicable provinces, the communities’ CFS will have the force of law as federal law and will prevail over conflicting or inconsistent federal, provincial, territorial laws.

More than 20 communities in Canada have requested coordination agreements since Bill C-92 became law. Thus far, five Indigenous communities have entered into agreements with Canada, the first of which was Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan.

The MN-S are in the beginning stages of constructing a request to enter into such an agreement with Canada.

“We are at the pre-development of a framework for Bill C-92, the first part of that is consulting with our communities,” said MN-S Vice-President Michelle LeClair.

Kathie Pruden-Nansel, MN-S Minister of Child Family Services said so far, they’ve conducted 27 community consultation sessions across 27 communities.

During the consultation sessions, Pruden-Nansel said they have consistently heard Métis people talk about the loss of culture and language and feeling disconnected from their Métis community.

Many grandparents reported having to care for grandchildren without receiving any financial support.

“We also heard about the grief of children being apprehended from communities, and these communities never seeing them again,” said Pruden-Nansel. “We will never sacrifice our right to look after our own children.”

Typically, the process of entering a coordination agreement takes anywhere from one to five years, and the MN-S is in the first year of that process, said LeClair.

The MN-S is giving notice of intent to the federal government of their desire to enter into an agreement.

MN-S will continue to have community consultations and wants to hear from youth.

“We need to have the youth involved (in the process),” said LeClair. “We need to talk to the people who have lived experience. The youth voice will be integral in this whole process.”



The opening ceremony at the MN-S Annual Assembly in Saskatoon. (Photo by NC Raine)

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PAINTED HORSE
CASINO
Yorkton

Pasqua First Nation stand together for Annual Addiction Awareness Week

By Campbell Stevenson
for Eagle Feather News

PASQUA FIRST NATION - To commemorate National Addiction Awareness week, organizers of chose to gather, celebrate, and motivate their community.

On Pasqua the community planned several events for the week It began with ceremony on Nov. 13 with a pipe ceremony.

The following day students, council and community members met at the at the Chief Paskwa Education Centre, then walked along the road escorted by RCMP to the Chief Ben Paskwa Memorial Hall.

After the walk the community gathered to hear the opening remarks from organizers, Elders and leadership.

It was also a day for sharing.

Chief Matthew Todd Peigan shared how addictions impacted his life.

“My oldest brother passed away from a car accident from being intoxicated,” he said during his opening remarks. “We don’t think about these repercussions on our family. We don’t think about our actions when we’re on drugs and alcohol. It’s up to you to say no, it makes you a bigger person.”

Day two the events focused on land-based healing.

Delmar Chicoose, National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) Coordinator, finds that a spiritual approach to recovery is integral to Indigenous people who are battling addictions.

“The physical, spiritual and mental approach,” he said. “So, we broke each day down to represent those components to enlighten everybody on an honest model of recovery.”

According to the Saskatchewan’s Coroners Service, the suspected drug toxicity deaths from January 1, 2023 to November 2, 2023 has reached a total of 193 people. Substance abuse, specifically opioids, is most common people between the ages of 20-29, but those numbers are increasing amongst youth between the ages of 10-19.

Kyle Chicoose, Health Director of Pasqua First Nation, believes the idea



Drug and Alcohol Awareness Walk on Pasqua First Nation during National Addiction Awareness Week. (Photo by Campbell Stevenson)

of reasoning, especially in the context of addictions, is crucial.

“We’re in such a crisis state, with fentanyl and opioid overdoses, especially in a post-pandemic era,” said Chicoose. “So this week is all about creating education awareness for them (youth), we just hope that we can give them the tools to make correct choices.”

Pasqua First Nation chooses to be proactive because it confronts the blunt statistics and focuses on an inclusive and holistic approach to healing and addiction awareness.

Over the course of the week guest speakers including sports figures like former NHL player Jordin Too, professional wrestler Cory “Sabastian Wolfe” Cyr and other motivational speakers like Pierre Morais, Colby Tootoosis, Kendra Weenie and yoga coach Shyla Gaebel shared stories and worked with the community.

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Mason Fine shares his Indigenous connection

*By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News*

Mason Fine’s love of football helped him connect with his own Native American heritage.

The 26-year-old quarterback born and raised in Pegs, Okla. is a member of the Cherokee Nation.

He said being born into a family of football enthusiasts he was aware of the Canadian Football League but admits his knowledge of the provinces was limited.

“I didn’t know anything specifically about Saskatchewan,” said Fine. “But I knew they loved their football.”

And that’s all he needed to know.

“Where I’m from football is king,” said Fine.

His earliest memories revolve around football.



Mason Fine Saskatchewan Roughrider Quarterback on the field. (Photo supplied)

and made him the quarterback.

From that moment he knew it was what he wanted to do and trained every day to develop his skills.

“We really didn’t know what the heck we were doing, to be honest with you,” said Fine. “We went to, the OU Sooners camp and the quarterback coach at the time was Josh heel. I listened to what he was saying. At the time we didn’t have a whole lot of money to have a quarterback coach or go to all these camps.”

Fine took lots of notes and when he got home, he typed them up, printed them off and stuck the page by his bed.

“From then on, it was really just me and my dad playing catch out in the yard, but working on throwing it the correct way and just technique wise,” he said. “By the time high school came around I had pretty good fundamentals.”

Fine remains dedicated to the sport and admits he doesn’t do very much other than train while he’s in Regina, but it makes him happy.

Another thing that makes him happy is playing for a progressive team like the Roughriders.

Fine said growing up in a state where there’s a high population of Native American people, he didn’t think about his identity very often.

It wasn’t until he moved to Texas to play college football questions of his heritage came up.

“People started asking me about my ethnicity and stuff like that,” said Fine. “I was kind of caught off guard by how little or how uneducated they were about the history of the Indigenous [people] all across North America.”

He educated himself and those around him about his heritage and culture in hopes of making it easier for others coming up behind him.

“When you’re a Division one quarterback, a lot of kids look up to you,” said Fine. “You’re a role model for other kids so, you try to go back into the community and make a difference in any way you can.”

“I had uncles that played it, in high school,” he said. “So I kind of grew up watching them, going to Friday night games and just enjoying the atmosphere.”

It was a family tradition to gather at his grandfather’s house to watch football. .

“I remember specifically watching one man by the name of Adrian Peterson,” said Fine. “He was a running back for the Oklahoma Sooners in the mid-2000s and the way he just ran the football, I just became an instant fan of him...and I was like Dad, ‘I want to play football.’ ”

He was about 10 years old and already active in baseball, basketball and track.

His dad found a nearby little league and enrolled him. The coach recognized Fine’s talent for throwing



Mason Fine Sask QB wearing orange jersey for Kisiskaciwan game. (Photo supplied)

He was impressed with the Roughriders’ commitment to Reconciliation.

“I really didn’t expect anything,” said Fine. “Once I got up here and I noticed it, it gave me a sense of pride. I was proud to be a part of an organization that had so many efforts towards (Reconciliation) whether that’s community involvement, whether that’s events...I’m grateful to be a part of the club.”

He said wearing the orange jersey to celebrate Indigenous people really helps instill a sense of pride in his own heritage.

“At the end of the day, it makes you giddy about being a part of an organization that is doing all that,” said Fine.

In 2021, he signed a three-year contract with the team.

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Warm wishes for a festive season and a New Year filled with hope and prosperity for all.

www.athabascabasin.ca

Reconciliation Ally

By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News

The road to Reconciliation is not an easy one, but the Saskatchewan Roughriders Football Club is proving collaboration and inclusion does work.

As part of National Day of Truth and Reconciliation some CFL teams unveiled Indigenous inspired jerseys to mark the day. The Saskatchewan Roughriders chose to do something a little different.

Since 2021, the organization has been actively and quietly working on its own Reconciliation path.

Cindy Fuchs, executive director of the Saskatchewan Roughriders Foundation and co-chair of the Indigenous Advisory Group, said that following the discovery of the unmarked graves in Cowessess the football organization decided to act.

“We didn’t want to sit back and do nothing,” she said. “We have a very loud voice and a very loud brand.”

Fuchs, who has experience working with Indigenous communities through her work with the Red Cross, was tasked with helping to develop an action plan.

“I said, ‘First off you need an Indigenous Advisory Group, so I reached out to people I knew throughout the province,’” she said.

The group started with three community members and has doubled in size and worked on Calls to Action 87 to 92 and 14 because they are related to sports and sports organizations.



Riders Anthony Lanier and Jamal Morrow wearing their Orange jerseys take some photos with some fans during the Saskatoon powwow last year. (Photo supplied)

Fuchs said all the work that’s happening wouldn’t be possible without President and CEO Craig Reynolds. She said he is the one who made the decision to focus on Reconciliation.

“He’s given us total leadership on it and said the only way you can educate is by experiencing the community,” said Fuchs.

The Reconciliation initiatives go beyond Orange Shirt Day, instead the organization focuses on year-round efforts.

This includes the creation of the kisiskâciwan game day, which is a celebration of Indigenous culture and heritage, a northern youth football camp and community outreach.

In 2023, the team has become more visible in the community and have participated in powwows, feasts and other community activities.

“A lot of groups will say, ‘We will give you money for your (event).’ Well, we will give them money, but we also want to be there,” said Fuchs. “We want to interact with the community. We want to find out what’s going on in the community. We want to make friendships. So it’s not just our players. Our players are very visible, but our staff also attends all the events as well.”

She said the organization chooses not to publicize the work they do because it’s not about giving themselves a pat on the back, it’s about connection and education.

Saskatchewan Roughriders organization commits to Sports Reconciliation



Former Cowessess Cadmus Delorme shares a laugh with Saskatchewan Roughriders President and CEO Craig Reynolds during the kisiskaciwan game in Regina. (Photo supplied)

Her co-chair Jacqueline Hurlbert, director of marketing, echoed Fuchs’ sentiments.

“It’s good to know people are starting to see what we are doing, but it’s not why we do it,” she said.

Holbert said the Indigenous Advisory Group has representatives from the different departments within the organization. She said this is because everything overlaps and in order to create something successful, they must work as a team.

“From the marketing brand standpoint, we look at how we incorporate it into our game days,” said Hurlbert. “How are we looking at inclusion in terms of fans, but also inclusion in terms of representation in our games whether that’s our in-game entertainment or what we are doing in terms of language.”

An example of this is the kisikaciwin game, which they started last year.

“We leaned into the Cree name for Saskatchewan and what it meant not only to our team but to our province,” said Hurlbert.

The entire day is dedicated to celebrating Indigenous people and culture and led by the Indigenous Advisory Group.

“We are learning and we want to do this properly,” said Hurlbert. “We are walking with it. It’s not a race. We are just making sure that our staff is also being educated as we go through this so everyone is aware.”

Staff activities include beading workshops, history lessons and all staff have been offered the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation training.

Fuchs and Hurlbert say the work is always evolving.

On National Truth and Reconciliation Day the organization released a YouTube video detailing its Reconciliation efforts (<https://youtu.be/xoSZkalim4Q?si=foxc-uC8ycUALOTj>).



Jacqueline Hurlbert left and Cindy Fuchs are co-chairs of the Indigenous Advisory Group. They say the Riders are committed to Reconciliation and will continue to work to become an inclusive and diverse organization. (Photo supplied)

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