

In This Issue:

- Athabasca Summer Student, Gessika Laliberte
- Flyer Electric Receives SaskPower's Supplier Recognition Award
- Don Deranger retires
- Kyle Remus joins Points Athabasca
- Lucy Fern selected as Wanuskewin Artist-in-Residence
- Sew & Sew Skills Lab comes to Athabasca schools
- Black Lake band member Rebecca Strong wins \$1 million on Canada's Got Talent
- Authors Miriam Körner and Kristy Jackson visit northern Saskatchewan Schools
- Indigenous-owned Arctic Beverages acquires Oscardo
- Seven ABD Companies donate \$200,000 to Ronald McDonald House of Saskatchewan

Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program takes flight

A new and exciting opportunity has launched in northern Saskatchewan to help Indigenous students become commercial pilots. The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program aims to provide Indigenous students with the skills needed to succeed in the aviation industry.

The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program has garnered significant support from various entities. Rise Air is investing \$690,000, PAGC is contributing \$315,000, and the northern Saskatchewan mining companies Cameco, Orano Canada, and SSR Mining are collectively investing \$300,000. The federal and provincial governments are also backing this initiative with over \$1 million in funding through PrairiesCan (\$631,500) and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Immigration and Career Training (\$375,000). This substantial financial backing will cover the comprehensive training costs, including tuition, flight hours, and resources.

The Dziret'ái Pilot Training Program is not just about flight training. It's a comprehensive initiative that covers not only the technical aspects but also the universal needs of the students, ensuring their well-being and success. The program ensures northern students can focus on their studies without worrying about living expenses, covering accommodation, transportation to and from class, and travel back to their home communities for cultural events. With the support of the Athabasca communities through Ya' thi Néné and PAGC,

the program provides more than just an education. It offers wellness support and cultural guidance from Knowledge Keepers and Elders. With mentorship and mental health support services, this holistic approach acknowledges the unique challenges of being away from home.

"I hear a lot of youth applying and saying they're excited," said Coreen Sayazie, Chief of Black Lake First Nation. "[They're saying] that this is something they've always wanted."

The program will begin in fall 2024 with a pre-education program to prepare all the participants for success. For this first cohort, fifteen students have been accepted into the pre-education program, and 10 will be selected to start aviation ground school in January 2025.

This training will open up new career opportunities in an industry where Indigenous people have been traditionally underrepresented. "This program isn't just about training pilots; it's about helping Indigenous communities grow by offering opportunities and support," said Brian Hardlotte, Grand Chief of the Prince Albert Grand Council. "It gives our young people a chance to lead, succeed, and feel proud of who they are."

The training program was conceptualized in 2018 by Tracy Young-McLean, Rise Air's Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer. It will be



Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, board member of Rise Air, speaks at the Dziret'ái pilot program announcement in Stony Rapids on August 1, 2024

delivered by Rise Air and the Mitchinson Flight Centre in Saskatoon. For Rise Air, one of Canada's largest independent air operators, this program is a way to give back to the communities and grow capacity. Students will be trained and will learn from experienced instructors using state-of-the-art technology. "We're excited to launch a program that can make a real difference," said Derek Nice, President and CEO of Rise Air. "Aviation is important in the north, and we want to ensure Indigenous people are part of it."

What started as an idea over six years ago was met with enthusiasm this summer, with 106 applicants after the launch of the application phase of the program. Fifteen students will take the pre-education, and 10 will move

on through the training program. The students who graduate from the program in June 2026 will have secured their private and commercial pilot licenses and additional ratings required to become First Officers at Rise Air.

"We're so proud of this program," said Grand Chief Hardlotte. "We can't wait to see our young people soar."

"I want to see the day when they land in our communities," said Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, originally from Hatchet Lake First Nation and board member for Rise Air. "I told the Elders here that we're playing the drums when those young Dene pilots land. The drums have to be there to celebrate the success."

Athabasca Basin Development is continuing to look for new opportunities for investments – both to strengthen its existing investments as well as outside of its existing industries. "There are lots of opportunities out there and we are continuing to seek solid investment opportunities. I would encourage business owners who are looking at succession planning to consider us as a potential fit and to contact us to discuss opportunities – there may be a fit either with Athabasca Basin Development or with one of our investments."

Flyer Electric receives SaskPower's Supplier Recognition Award



Pictured (left to right): Rhae Fisher, Flyer Electric; Ward de Bussac, Flyer Electric; Jason Tatlow, Flyer Electric; Howard Matthews, Vice President, Generation, SaskPower; Jason Zabolotney, Manager, Electrical and Control Engineering, SaskPower; Terry Tessier, CEO, Flyer Electric; Rhea Brown, Executive Vice President, Customer Experience and Procurement; Ryan Neufeld, Vice President, Engineering and Construction, SaskPower; Dout Lutz, Flyer Electric; Jasen Louma, Flyer Electric; Emma Blondeau, Flyer Electric; Ryan Fisher, Flyer Electric.

On October 26, Flyer Electric was awarded a Supplier Recognition Award from SaskPower. This award is given to suppliers who demonstrate consistent reliability, quality, and innovation.

"Flyer Electric is so deserving of this award," said Alanna Whippler, Consultant, Indigenous Procurement with SaskPower. "We've had a long and valuable relationship with Flyer Electric. They've consistently done good, high-quality work for us in a competitive industry. Our business units have all given good feedback about the company and their work. Flyer Electric has really differentiated themselves in the electrical space, and we are thrilled to present them with our supplier recognition award."

Flyer Electric started working with SaskPower in 2015. SaskPower had started an Indigenous procurement program, and had set up a full time unit dedicated to the task of implementing the policy. "We want to build relationships and get Indigenous suppliers integrated into our supply chain while also acknowledging their unique value. SaskPower is dedicated to being a leader in Indigenous engagement as an important step towards economic reconciliation," said Whippler. "As some examples, we are certified by the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB), we have a dedicated Indigenous Customer Care team, and we've done a lot of significant engagement activities in the north. We are currently expanding our evaluated Indigenous content for RFPs. We're kicking off a pilot that will evaluate not only ownership and labour but Indigenous capacity building, things like recruitment, scholarships, sponsorships – things that incentivize Indigenous inclusion."

Flyer Electric is majority owned by Athabasca Basin Development and Sakitawak Development Corporation. "We were looking for qualified vendors and Flyer of course had been working with mines, so they had the safety certifications, the bonding capacity, and a lot of experience they were bringing to the table," said Whippler. "We thought, this company was a no-brainer. But it wasn't that simple, because they were in a very competitive space."

In the beginning, Flyer had to prove themselves as a solid, competitive contractor. "Over the years, we have developed a really good working relationship with SaskPower," said Terry Tessier, CEO of Flyer Electric. "We got started, like most companies, where we went after open tendered work, and competitively bid against other companies. We hadn't established a relationship before that. We were successful on some bids. And through that we were able to get to site and execute the projects and show SaskPower what we actually could do as a company."

"In the beginning, Flyer was doing things for us like security installs and other smaller jobs, but they really grabbed the opportunity and really differentiated themselves as a trusted supplier," said Whippler. "Things really took off when they did fire detection and suppression installations at three northern hydro stations. They did a really good job. We've had a strong relationship since, including a recent five-year contract for doing electrical work for the refurbishment of our Coteau Creek Hydroelectric Station. This is a significant, long-term contract and an indication of our trust in their work."

Flyer Electric has become known in the industry for their high quality of work and accurate bidding. "For SaskPower and really, all our customers, we continue to execute," said Tessier. "We treat all our projects the way we think they should be treated: with great care and the quality of the work, and safety. We just maintain a respectful relationship. We make sure that what we say is what we do and I believe we are seen as a company with a lot of integrity."

The award was presented at Flyer Electric's Regina office. A group of about 30 SaskPower members were in attendance, along with Tessier and the other Flyer Electric staff, Rod Favel from the Touchwood Agency Tribal Council, representing Flyer Electric's partnership with their group in Treaty 4, and Kristy Jackson, Director of Marketing & Communications for Athabasca Basin Development.

"Special thanks to the terrific SaskPower team that attended and presented this award to Flyer, and to our guests and staff for attending," said Terry Tessier, CEO of Flyer Electric. "It was a nice event where everyone got a chance to meet our people, see our office, and have some lunch and network together. The people at SaskPower are fantastic to work with. They always make us feel like part of their team. We've had a great partnership with SaskPower for many years, and it is truly an honour for us to be recognized this way."

Don Deranger retires



Pictured (left to right): Geoff Gay, June Verlhurst, Don Deranger, Lyle Bouvier, and Glen Strong at Don's retirement celebration.

Don Deranger has retired from the Board of Directors of Points Athabasca and Cameco Corporation. Originally from Fond du Lac, Don has had a long and impactful career marked by a commitment to Indigenous communities, economic development, and leadership.

Don's influence went beyond corporate boardrooms. As a Special Projects Coordinator for six years with Saskatchewan Northern Affairs in the 1990s, during which he helped set up the Athabasca Basin Development, and as former Athabasca Vice Chief of the Prince Albert Grand Council between 2003 and 2012, he was instrumental in advancing economic partnerships prioritizing community growth and sustainable industry.



His nearly 25-year leadership since the construction company Points Athabasca began illustrates his legacy of fostering meaningful employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples in northern Saskatchewan.

"I have always believed in building strong partnerships that reflect our community's values and future," Don said.

Don is particularly proud of the first large contract that Points Athabasca secured for building the hospital and health centre in Stony Rapids in the early 2000s. "It was special because it was a big project right in our backyard to support our people and made by our own northern Indigenous company," he said.

Don brought a wealth of experience in the mining, construction, and resource sectors when he joined Cameco's board in 2009. Over his 15-year tenure, he contributed towards Cameco's strategic direction, ensuring the company's commitment to sustainable practices, Indigenous engagement, and community investment. "Working with Cameco has been a unique opportunity to ensure that Indigenous voices are not just heard but are integral to decision-making at the highest levels. I was there to ensure that our Indigenous protocols were followed, and that our values were considered when communicating with northern communities," he said.

Beyond his board work, Don was a key advocate for Indigenous training and employment programs, believing local communities should benefit directly from industry presence. His role with Athabasca Basin Development and his advocacy for education, especially for young Indigenous people entering the workforce, have left an indelible mark.

"Our future lies in ensuring that young Indigenous people have access to education and opportunities that will allow them to thrive in today's world. I wish I could have done more for the youth to get them involved in economic development and the communities so they would stay away from alcohol and drugs and instead build themselves up and

support their people and communities. Youth must understand that they must be active and productive citizens. We must help them understand that it is their responsibility to balance economic development and protect our land, culture, and environment for future generations and our Athabasca region. If I could go back in time, I'd spend more time with the youth to tell them all of that," Don said.

In reflecting on his career, Don is both proud and hopeful. "While I am stepping down, I know that the work will continue. We have built strong foundations, and I am confident that our partnerships will ensure that Indigenous communities continue to prosper. I look forward to seeing young people taking leadership roles, and I would be happy to sit down with any of them to share my experience and help them find their way in the future."

Now, Don is finally taking time to relax, go fishing, and go fall hunting. "I just turned 69; hopefully, I can be around well into my 80s and enjoy a quieter life with my family," Don said with a smile.



Pictured: Glen Strong presents retirement gift to Don Deranger.



Kyle Remus joins Points Athabasca

By Glen Strong

Kyle Remus joined Points Athabasca as Vice President of Operations in February of 2024. Previously, Kyle held a Vice President role at one of Canada's largest environmental contractors. With over 15 years of experience in the civil and environmental industries, he actively contributed to some of Canada's most technically challenging and remote environmental construction projects. His experience spans across various industry sectors with a focus on mining, power generation, and civil construction. Kyle recently served as a board member with the Saskatchewan Environmental Industry Managers Association (SEIMA).

"We are happy to have Kyle join our team," said Lyle Bouvier, CEO of Points Athabasca. "Kyle was the Vice President of Environmental Services at QM

Environmental, responsible for their remediation and emergency response divisions, and now brings that expertise coupled with extensive project management experience to Points Athabasca, enhancing our bench strength as we expand into new markets."

"While working in the far north, I strived to help build Indigenous inclusiveness and help develop capacity in the region. Points Athabasca is very focused on "Building Capacity" and giving back to the Athabasca communities. I am committed and pleased to be part of this vision," said Kyle. "I look forward to a great future for the company as well as the regions that we work in."

Lucy Fern selected as Wanuskewin Artist-in-Residence

This fall, Lucy Fern, a talented multi-media artist from Fond du Lac Denesuline First Nation and a single mother of three who now resides in Prince Albert, will be the Artist-in-Residence at Wanuskewin Heritage Park near Saskatoon. The Olivia & Greg Yuel Artist-in-Residence program is a prestigious initiative designed to nurture and showcase Indigenous artists, offering them the space, time, and resources to create and inspire.

This fall residency was made possible thanks to a generous \$6,000 donation from Athabasca Basin Development, which specifically aimed to spotlight artists from the Athabasca region.

"Being selected as the Wanuskewin Artist-in-Residence is both an honour and an incredible opportunity," Lucy said. "It's not just about creating art. It's about telling the stories of my people, preserving our traditions, and sharing our culture with the world. I learned my art from my mother; she taught me everything about beadwork, making gloves and mukluks. She is my role model and my inspiration."

In the past, Lucy didn't always dedicate her time entirely to her art. She obtained a Bachelor of Indian Social Work with a minor in art. She also received a mental health and wellness certificate. After years of serving others as a social worker and participating in healing and sharing circles, she decided to brighten people's lives through her art. "During and after university, I learned different media and wanted to develop that kind of mixed-media art. Now, I love what I do, and I love teaching it," she said.

The residency will allow Lucy to work closely with the Wanuskewin community and visitors, giving her the space to create new works while also engaging with the public. Visitors will have the opportunity to witness her artistic process and learn about the cultural and historical significance behind her work. Lucy's art draws heavily from her heritage, focusing on themes of land, identity, and resilience, making her a fitting representative of the Fond du Lac Denesuline First Nation and the broader Athabasca region.



Athabasca Basin Development's commitment to supporting Indigenous culture was a key factor in their decision to support the residency program. "We are proud to support Lucy and other artists from the Athabasca region. Art is a powerful tool for preserving culture, and Lucy's work will help ensure that the stories of her Dene community continue to be shared with future generations," said Kristy Jackson, Director of Marketing & Communications at Athabasca Basin Development.

During her residency, Lucy will offer beaded jewelry and moccasin-making classes, art therapy, medicine wheel teachings, and school programming. Her residency is set to inspire locals and visitors alike, spotlighting the artistic talent emerging from northern Saskatchewan. Some workshops will even be available over digital platforms to accommodate people who might not be able to visit Wanuskewin during her residency.

"My name, Lucy, means the 'bringer of light,' so I try to do that. Through my artistic installations and

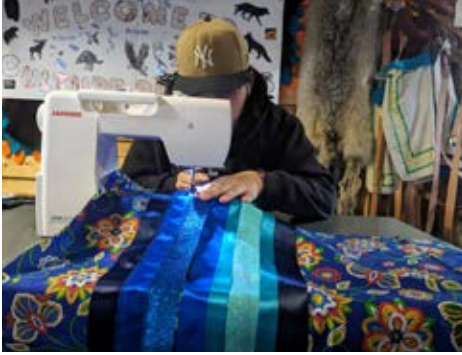


programming, I plan to share our Dene laws, which call us to share what we have, help each other, sleep at night and work during the day, be polite, not argue with others, behave respectfully as young girls and boys, love each other as much as possible, be happy as possible at all times, and pass on the teachings. So, that's what I'll be doing during and after my residency at Wanuskewin; I'll pass on the teachings."

Wanuskewin invites the community to visit the park and experience Lucy Fern's work in person starting on October 1.

"I am proud to represent the Dene people," Lucy said. "It takes a lot of work to do what I do and succeed; I hope that inspires others. I hope young artists see this and continue to grow, never give up on their art and their dreams, and motivate themselves to complete what they start and do more or something different. And with generous support from companies like ABD, everything is possible."

Sew & Sew Skills Lab comes to Athabasca schools



This spring, schools in Hatchet Lake (Wollaston Lake), Black Lake, and Fond du Lac joined the “Sew & Sew Skills Lab” community.

Created by the non-profit organization I Love First Peoples (ILFP), Sew & Sew is a program that equips remote community schools across Canada with sewing labs, including quality sewing machines and supplies, so they can teach a valuable life skill through traditional projects in the school. ILFP has numerous sponsors for this program, including Janome Canada, PVH Evolugen American Eagle, and Manitoulin Transport, as well as many more in-kind and individual supporters.

“Before they approached us, I Love First Peoples and Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority had done a lot of work sourcing equipment, human resources and materials, and just needed a sponsor to help them fill in some gaps,” said Kristy Jackson, Director of Marketing & Communications with Athabasca Basin Development. “We were happy to be able to help them bring these opportunities to youth in the Athabasca communities. I had an opportunity to see students using the sewing equipment first-hand while I was in Fond du Lac, and I was so impressed with the students and their dedication to their projects.”

Students worked on a variety of projects, including toboggan covers, ribbon skirts, bags, zippered pouches, baby clothes, mittens, drawstring bags, doll clothes, and more.

ILFP Sew & Sew Program Coordinator Jenny Ambrose traveled to the Athabasca communities in January and February 2024 to help the schools get everything set up and worked with teachers to help them get the most out of their new equipment. “We are thrilled to partner with ILFP,” said Brenda Gabriel, Superintendent with Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority. “Our students were ‘sew’ thrilled with Jenny’s visit and are excited to start their next project! Thank you for venturing into our northern Saskatchewan communities.”

Jenny Ambrose thoroughly enjoyed her time in the Athabasca region. “These trips have been full of adventure, learning, and growth,” said Ambrose. “I am overwhelmed by all the amazing people I have met and hearing the community around me speaking Dene every day was so inspiring. There is a resilience up here that is truly unique to the North.”

<https://www.ilovefirstpeoples.ca/sewandsew>



Black Lake Band member Rebecca Strong wins \$1 million on Canada’s Got Talent



On May 14, Rebecca Strong won a million dollars in the nationwide talent show, Canada’s Got talent.

21-year-old Rebecca Strong said she’s always been a fan of Canada’s Got Talent and dreamed of appearing on the show one day. In 2023, she sent in an audition video of her singing cover songs. And when she got the call telling her to come audition for the judges in person in Ottawa, she was ecstatic. “When this opportunity came up, I had to take a hold of it,” said Rebecca. “It’s my dream.”

Singing is her dream and her passion. Strong has been singing since she was five years old. She comes from a family of musicians – her father, Glen Strong with Points Athabasca, and her sister Allison Strong with Optek Solutions, are also accomplished musicians. “We are extremely proud of her,” said Allison Strong, one of many family members who went to Ottawa to cheer Rebecca on. “We’re all so excited for Rebecca and all she’s accomplished and where she’s gotten to – this is a once in a lifetime opportunity!”

Rebecca is no stranger to the stage, having been featured at the SaskTel Youth Awards, Voices of the North, and Search for the Stars PA, to name a few. Even so, she still gets nervous before every performance, and the stage at Canada’s Got Talent was the biggest venue she had been at so far. “This kind of thing makes me very nervous,” said Strong. “And just being up there and representing my people made me very proud of being Indigenous.”

Rebecca also built an impressive Tiktok following of over 250K before Canada’s Got Talent. In 2019, Glen Strong took a video of Rebecca practising singing Demi Lovato’s Sober on his Facebook page. The video garnered over 1M views on Facebook. “I couldn’t believe how many views that video got,” said Glen. “I think it was our first hint that people really connected with Rebecca’s voice and her talent for singing.”

The contest was judged by Canadian performers Howie Mandel, Trish Stratus, Kardina Offishall, and Lilly Singh. Rebecca was featured on episode 2 of the show, which aired on March 24, and received the golden buzzer from Lilly, guaranteeing her a spot in the semi-finals and giving her a cash prize of \$25,000.

Rebecca sailed through the semi-finals with a powerful performance of Oliva Rodrigo cover Drivers License. The live finale was on May 14, which went to a vote that was open to the public.

Rogers gave this year’s winner \$1 million, the largest cash prize in Canadian television history. Catch up on episodes of Canada’s Got Talent on-demand or stream on Citytv+.

In the meantime, Rebecca plans to create music and share it with the world. She hopes her journey will inspire Indigenous youth to follow their dreams. “Anything is possible,” she said. “The only way you can really fail is not trying. It doesn’t really matter the result, as long as you try it.”

Rebecca will be coming to the Athabasca communities in January 2025! Watch our social media channels for details.

Author Miriam Körner visits schools in Fond du Lac, Hatchet Lake, and Black Lake



Earlier this year, renowned author and illustrator Miriam Körner completed a tour of three schools in the Athabasca Basin. The tour, organized with the support of Athabasca Basin Development, Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority, and Rise Air, aimed to inspire students and promote literacy in remote communities. Körner, well-known for her works celebrating nature and Indigenous culture, brought her storytelling and artistic talents to life during the presentations, captivating students and teachers alike.

The tour was a collaborative effort, with Athabasca Basin Development playing a key role in making the event possible. Emphasizing their commitment to empowering local communities and fostering education in the region, Kristy Jackson, ABD's Director

of Marketing & Communication, who accompanied Miriam on tour, said, "We value initiatives like this one and do what we can to contribute to the community in a meaningful way."

During the visit, Miriam engaged with students through interactive storytelling sessions, where she shared the creative process behind her books. She also encouraged young people to pursue their own artistic and literary talents. "I believe that every child has a story to tell," Miriam said. "It's important for them to see the value in their own experiences and the stories that come from their communities."

For many of the students, this was a rare opportunity to meet a published author and illustrator in person.

"It's amazing to see how much creativity is out there," Miriam noted. "These kids have a deep connection to the land and their heritage, and that's something truly special."

In addition to Miriam's engaging presentations, the event was supported by local educators and school leaders, who expressed the value of these experiences for their students. The tour received high praise from the communities and its sponsors, helping nurture a love for reading and storytelling in the next generation of Athabasca Basin youth.

Through efforts like this, Athabasca Basin Development continues to support educational initiatives that create lasting impacts in the region.

Indigenous-owned Arctic Beverages acquires Oscardo

As of January 25, Arctic Beverages LP is the owner of Oscardo, a leading souvenir and gift supplier based in Toronto whose products feature artwork by Indigenous artists.

"This is definitely a new area for us in terms of products, but Oscardo is a great fit for Arctic Beverages," said Sean Post, CEO of Arctic Beverages. "Oscardo's products are high quality items with designs that feature amazing Indigenous artwork. As a distributor with a significant territory across the country, we are well positioned to help grow Oscardo from its already impressive reach across Canada."

Arctic Beverages services over 2,500 customers across 45% of Canada, providing a one-stop shop for grocery, convenience, and wholesale retailers for a wide variety of premium consumer packaged goods. The company is entirely owned by Indigenous-owned entities representing ownership by 13 First Nations and four remote northern communities.

"When I started thinking about retirement, I wanted



Pictured (left to right): Susan Lulka and Oscar Lulka with Oscardo; Kristy Jackson, Athabasca Basin Development; Sean Post, Arctic Beverages; Geoff Gay, Athabasca Basin Development.

to make sure the company we spent so long building would always be in good hands," said Oscar Lulka, President, and former owner of Oscardo. "It was also important to me to look for Indigenous owners in the spirit of reconciliation and to help carry on

the strong relationships Oscardo has established with 23 Indigenous artists and our valued clients. I am very excited to have found Arctic Beverages. They are a solid Indigenous-owned company with a long history and a strong balance sheet, and they are highly experienced and successful in distributing a wide range of products. I am confident that this new ownership will strengthen the company and ensure its legacy continues and provides benefits to Indigenous communities."

Oscardo employs 10 people at its Toronto location and has eight sales reps across the country. Lulka will stay on with the company during the transition. "Oscar has agreed to stay on and continue to operate the business as usual. We will eventually transition to a new CEO so that Oscar can enjoy retirement," said Post. "The focus for all of us is taking care of employees, customers and artists and continuing the spirit and legacy that has been established that grew the company to where it is today."

Giving Back

“Building a future through investment” is accomplished by building wealth for the Athabasca communities, donations, community distributions, building a reputation and, building capacity. The key to making all benefits possible is in building wealth for the communities – without this foundation, the other benefits would not be possible. Here are a few recent examples of the ways Athabasca Basin Development and its investments give back.

This year, we’ve continued our tradition of giving back by supporting several community events. We sponsored the PAGC Gathering of Nations on August 28-29, contributing \$6,400 as the Arts and Crafts sponsor. This festival celebrates Indigenous culture, and we appreciated the opportunity to support a space where artisans showcased their talents. Similarly, at the PAGC Fine Arts Festival, we donated \$10,000. Kristy Jackson, our Director of

Marketing and Communications, served as a literary judge, celebrating the work of kids from First Nations communities across the north.

Geoff Gay, our CEO, attended the Fond du Lac Treaty 8 125th Anniversary celebrations, where we contributed \$10,000 to honour this historic milestone.

In sports, we sponsored the Tony Cote Summer Games with \$10,000, helping youth athletes from across the province come together for a friendly competition hosted by the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. The event was a great success, fostering community spirit and athletic excellence with the support of Sask Sport. We also provided \$2,000 for the Camsell Portage Fishing Derby and \$2,500 for the Black Lake Fastball Tournament, where youth were selected to compete in La Ronge in early June.

Additionally, we continue to support ongoing community programs, including \$1,500 for Fond du Lac hockey tournament fees, \$2,500 for the Fond du Lac Community Garden, \$15,000 for graduation activities, and \$15,000 for Connected North. These programs enrich the lives of community members, fostering opportunities for growth and celebration.

The Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority held its first ever literacy camps this summer. United Way for Literacy ran the camps, and ABD contributed \$20,000 towards events in Athabasca communities.

By supporting these events and programs, Athabasca Basin Development is helping to build a brighter future for everyone in the Athabasca region, creating lasting impacts far beyond financial contributions.



The Black Lake Warriors. Pictured top row, left to right: Robert Mercredi, Darwin Bouvier, Mark Thatcher, Darian Eddibar, Mason MacDonald, Dorion Medal, Michael Sayazie, Steven Echodh. Bottom row, left to right: Bradley Stalthanee, Jonovan Broussie, Delvin Gaterauxe.



Black Lake hockey team, The Black Lake Bolts.



ADEA literacy camps were held in Black Lake, Wollaston Lake, and Fond du Lac in summer 2024.



Connected North connects students at Father Megret School with a jigging instructor. ABD has been a supporter of this program connecting students in remote communities with online learning opportunities since it was introduced in Saskatchewan in 2018.

Profile: ABD's Kristy Jackson becomes published author



Kristy Jackson presents to students at Uranium City on an author tour in northern Saskatchewan.

When she isn't busy with her roles as Athabasca Basin Development's Director of Marketing and Communication, volunteer, wife, and mother of two boys, Kristy Jackson spends her spare time writing. She released her debut novel, *MORTIFIED*, published by HarperCollins Canada in spring 2024, which was named as Indigo's Staff Pick of the Month book in June, was featured in CBC's 15 Canadian back-to-school books for kids and teens, is a finalist in the Ontario Library Association's national Forest of Reading program, and is a Governor General Literary Award finalist.

"Storytelling is a huge part of my role at Athabasca Basin Development," said Kristy. "I love that I get to help tell Indigenous success stories as part of my role. There are so many good stories out there. I'm always interested in stories of all kinds, and it's been a dream of mine to publish a novel since I was a kid."

Kristy has worked for Athabasca Basin Development since 2011. She looks after the marketing and communications activities as well as the donations program. A member of Whitefish Lake First Nation #128 in Alberta, who grew up near Saskatoon, it was important to her to work for an organization that gave back to Indigenous communities. "I've always greatly appreciated that a core part of who Athabasca Basin Development is as a company is that it gives back to its shareholder communities," Kristy said. "We are who we say we are. We really follow what the leadership envisioned when the company was formed, and it's exciting to play a small role in helping to achieve that community-led vision."

Kristy's first author visits after *MORTIFIED* was published were to Athabasca communities Stony Rapids and Uranium City. "Kids in remote communities rarely get a chance to have guest presenters, so we try to help make something happen each year, like



Persephone Theatre, or Miriam Körner and David A Robertson, who toured the Athabasca communities. It's so important for students to have a chance to meet and connect with authors," said Kristy. "Even if they aren't interested in becoming a published author, it helps encourage kids to read more. And I'm a huge supporter of anything that encourages literacy."

Kristy is also the Vice Chair of the board for Foundations Learning and Skills Saskatchewan, a

non-profit organization that has a 40+ year history of helping adults, kids and families improve literacy and financial literacy skills. "I was drawn to Foundations because of the strong results they achieve in their programming," Kristy said. "They have taken their successful programs and are expanding across Saskatchewan, including the north, and I was interested in helping them make that happen."

She has also been a member of the Athabasca Education and Economic Development Committee since its inception in 2018. AEEDC is a group that works together to advance education and training initiatives in the Athabasca region and is made up of Ya' thi Néné, Athabasca Densuline Education Authority, the Permanent Residence Organization, and the leaders of Black Lake Ventures, Hatchet Lake Development LP, and Fond du Lac First Nation Development LP.

Since 2022, Kristy has been Chair of the Rise Air Advisory Committee, which brings Athabasca community members together with the Rise Air management team to discuss items that are important to the communities. "I'm happy to give my time to these committees that were put in place to improve communication and ensure community voices are heard on these important matters," she said. "I always hope that my time and my skills are helpful to others who are doing such great work."

Kristy has plans to continue writing, and her next book is already drafted and scheduled to come out in 2025. "I'm very excited about the next one. I worked closely with a few people on it, and I can't wait to share this next story with the world."

MORTIFIED is for ages 8-12 and is available wherever

Summer Student Profile: Gessika Laliberte



Gessika Laliberte, a proud member of the Fond du Lac First Nation, has made the most of her summer with the Athabasca Basin Development summer student program by working at Optek Solutions in Prince Albert. As she approaches graduation with a degree in Education, Gessika reflects on her valuable experience and the skills she gained during her time with the company.

Gessika said, "Having the opportunity to work in this program has given me a chance to gain employment during the months of not being in class and gain knowledge of the technical side of computers and photocopiers. This experience has taught me to appreciate the machines that will be used daily in the future. If I were allowed to work for this company again, I would and, without hesitation, would encourage others to do as well. The staff at Optek Solutions are very welcoming and easygoing, making the place a great place to be."

The Athabasca Summer Student program started in 2021. In partnership with PAGC Dene, Athabasca Basin Development organizes the program, matching students from the Athabasca region with

employment opportunities within its investments and with the community economic development corporations. Participating organizations have included Points Athabasca, Flyer Electric, Optek Solutions, Arctic Beverages, Tru North Recreation Superstore, Team Drilling, Points North, Athabasca Basin Security, Hatchet Lake Economic Development, Black Lake Ventures, and Fond du Lac First Nations Development."

"We want to extend our congratulations to Gessika and to all our summer students," said Treena Fosseneuve, who oversees the program. "Gessika's story illustrates the importance of the program for students who are furthering their education. Her dedication will surely lead her to a successful future, and we look forward to seeing what she achieves in the years to come."

The program opens to student applications January each year and is exclusively for students from the Athabasca communities.

For more information, visit: www.athabascabasin.ca/summer-students

Congratulations to scholarship winners!

In addition to our annual Athabasca Student dinner, support for community-led graduation programs, and the Athabasca summer student program, we also providing funding each year for scholarships.

Ya' thi Néné Land and Resources has offered scholarships for Athabasca students since 2017. \$65,000 in scholarships were awarded in 2024 to recipients. Cameco, Orano, Ya' thi Néné, and Athabasca Basin Development contributed to the program, with Flyer Electric also contributing \$5000 towards the Denise Bougie Scholarship for trades students. Congratulations to this year's recipients!

- Elden John Sayazie, Black Lake – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Shelby Alphonse, Black Lake – B Social Work
- Shantelle Robillard, Black Lake – Pre-Nursing
- Jenna Powder, Camsell Portage – Automotive Service Technician
- Gabrielle Toutsaint, Fond du Lac – Masters of Indigenous Languages
- Todd Adam, Fond du Lac – Carpenter, Red Seal
- Raylen Adam, Fond du Lac – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Giselle Mercredi, Fond du Lac – Masters of Indigenous Education
- Shannia Mercredi, Fond du Lac – Masters of Indigenous Language
- Lorine Randhile, Fond du Lac – B Indigenous Social Work
- Gessika Laliberte, Fond du Lac – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Victoria Fern, Fond du Lac – Construction Electrician
- Robbin Hanson, Fond du Lac – B Social Work
- Rita Laurent, Fond du Lac – B Social Work
- Hailey J Mercredi, Fond du Lac – Mental Health and Wellness/Addictions
- Deht'anuhzeh Noey, Fond du Lac – BA
- Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, Hatchet Lake – Doctor of Philosophy (languages)
- Ilene Shaouille, Hatchet Lake – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Bernadette Besskaystare, Hatchet Lake – B Ed Denesuline Teacher Education Program
- Anne St. Pierre, Hatchet Lake – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Tiffany Hanson, Stony Rapids – B Indigenous Social Work
- Peyton Lenko, Uranium City – Pre-Social work

- Jessica McDonald, Black Lake – B Ed Indigenous Education
- Candy Robillard, Black Lake – B Indigenous Social Work
- April Beavereye, Black Lake – Nursing
- Michelle Throassie, Black Lake – B Social work



Jenna Powder, Camsell Portage, Sask Polytechnic Automotive Service Technician Apprentice, was a 2024 Denise Bougie Scholarship recipient.

"I was raised and have spent the majority of my life living in Camsell Portage. It is the smallest and most northern community in SK. Getting to continuously explore the land and this way of life is the most amazing and rewarding experience so it was important for me to find a career where I can still live in the north and commute to work from here.

Getting a scholarship in Denise Bougie's name is very meaningful to me. Growing up I always viewed her

as a strong and inspirational woman. There wasn't a lot of women in the trades in my life, especially from the northern communities so that sparked this idea that I also wanted to pursue a trade and do something different that I never considered before.

I chose automotive because I believe it will be a useful trade that I can also put to use living where I am when things break down. It's something completely new and exciting for me. I want to develop a good understanding of how everything works together and be able to troubleshoot and repair issues as I come across them."

– Jenna Powder

The Annual ABD and Points Athabasca Golf Tournament raises \$18,000



In August, ABD and Points Athabasca hosted the third annual golf tournament for charity. At this year's event, \$18,000 was raised towards Prince Albert Grand Council's Tiny Homes project to help address the needs of homeless people in Prince Albert, a need that we learned from PAGC's presentation has significantly increased.

Special thanks to Glen Strong at Points Athabasca and Allison Strong at Optek Solutions for all their work organizing the event, and to Athabasca Summer Student Dee Noey, the Optek staff, and the ABD staff for all their work as well. We would also like to recognize our event sponsors – without you, this tournament would not be possible:

- Athabasca Basin Security
 - Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership
 - Optek Solutions
 - Long Lake Insurance
 - Cameco Corporation
 - East Hill Esso & Car Wash
 - First Nations Insurance Services
 - Flyer Electric
 - Graham Construction
 - Lonona Contracting
 - Orano
 - Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies
 - Points North
 - Rise Air
 - Arctic Beverages LP
 - Points Athabasca
 - Symmetry Public Relations
 - Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority
 - Team Drilling
 - Tru North Recreation Superstore
 - Ya'thi Néné Lands and Resources and Resources
 - QM Points
 - Scoles Fine Arts and Framing
 - Midwest Sportwear
 - Saskatchewan Research Council
- And thank you to everyone who came out and enjoyed a fun-filled day and helped raise money for a good cause.

QM Points Scholarship Winner List

QM Points made \$42,000 in scholarships available to Athabasca students. This is the fifth year of the program. Congratulations to this year's recipients:

- Madison Pacquette
- Shantell Robillard
- Jessica McDonald
- Deht'anuhzeh Noey
- Angela Stenne
- Raelynn Adam
- Roxanne Mercredi
- Robbin Hanson
- Michelle Throassie
- Candy Robillard
- Shelby Alphonse
- Gessika Laliberte

QM Points has offered the Scholarship Program totaling \$42,000.00 annually since 2020, making the Gunnar Project's Grand Total \$210,000.

ABD Summer Student Gathering



In July, we gathered our Athabasca Summer Students and some of our managers together to learn how to paint, guided by professional artist Kevin Peeace. It was a great team building event for everyone.

Pictured (from left to right): Front row: Dan Gold, Rise Air; Alison Strong, Optek Solutions; Kristy Jackson, Athabasca Basin Development. Back row: Chad

Ireland, Points Athabasca; Gessika Laliberte, Optek Summer Student; Glen Strong, Points Athabasca; Kevin Aebig, Optek Solutions; Rochelle Robillard, Rise Air Summer Student; Kevin Peeace, Artist and Facilitator; Vanessa Gerard, Athabasca Basin Security; Robin Hanson, Points Athabasca summer student; Dee Noey, Athabasca Basin Security Summer Student.

Seven ABD companies donate over \$200,000 to Ronald McDonald House Saskatchewan's Miles to Go Campaign



Pictured (left to right): Tammy Forrester, CEO Ronald McDonald House Charities Saskatchewan; Geoff Gay, CEO Athabasca Basin Development; Allison Strong, Communications Coordinator, Optek Solutions; Robert Fleming, CEO Team Drilling; Sascha Sasbrink-Harkema, CEO Athabasca Basin Security; Glen Strong, Community Relations and Training Coordinator, Points Athabasca; Kristy Jackson, Director of Marketing & Communications, Athabasca Basin Development; Kevin Aebig, CEO of Optek Solutions; Terry Tessier, CEO of Flyer Electric. Missing: Sean Jesse, General Manager of Tru North Recreation Superstore.

Seven companies with roots in northern Saskatchewan teamed together to donate a total of \$212,500 to the Ronald McDonald House in Prince Albert. The announcement was made on October 29th.

Flyer Electric, Team Drilling, Points Athabasca, Tru North Recreation Superstore, Athabasca Basin Security, and Optek Solutions are all owned in part by Athabasca Basin Development. The seven entities all pitched in to contribute to Ronald McDonald House's Miles to Go campaign to raise funds for a new House in Prince Albert. "As an Indigenous organization owned by shareholders in the Athabasca region, we are committed to giving back in ways that benefit our communities," said Geoff Gay, CEO of Athabasca Basin Development. "Many people from the north stay at the Ronald McDonald House in Saskatoon, and we are thrilled to see plans for a House in Prince Albert, the gateway to the North. Prince Albert plays a significant role in healthcare for Athabasca and northern residents, and this new facility will be well positioned to help out many families in many communities."

"This gift to the future RMHC - SK Prince Albert House is a significant contribution which will enable family centered care to families that are traveling from northern Saskatchewan to Prince Albert for the medical needs of their child or children. We are truly grateful for the relationship RMHC - SK has developed over the many years with Athabasca Basin Development, as they were instrumental in supporting the Saskatoon House in 2013 with a major capital gift. We continue to be humbled by their commitment to be community partners in support to Saskatchewan families. Together we are building homes which keep families close," shared RMHC-SK CEO Tammy Forrester. Athabasca Basin Development and some of its investments also contributed to RMHC-SK in 2012 for

its Saskatoon house expansion. "The Ronald McDonald House provides a way for families to support their loved ones when they have to travel away for medical care," said Robert Fleming, CEO of Team Drilling. "They have done great work for families across Saskatchewan for many years. We were proud to support this important organization in 2012 and we are proud to support it again today."

The Ronald McDonald House provides a "home away from home" for families of sick children travelling away to receive medical treatment. RMHC-SK prides itself on maintaining a warm, comforting, and safe atmosphere where families have the opportunity to connect with other families in similar situations. In 2024, Ronald McDonald House Saskatchewan kicked off the "Miles To Go" capital campaign, to build a facility in Prince Albert and in Regina to ensure that they are able to accommodate all families who must travel over 40 km for their child's medical treatment.

"Flyer Electric is thrilled to come on board as a sponsor for this important initiative for Prince Albert," said Terry Tessier, CEO of Flyer Electric. "Our head office is in Birch Hills, which is very close to Prince Albert. For us, we can travel to PA easily for healthcare if needed. But for many families, and in particular for those in the north who have to travel a long distance, it is difficult to be away from home when your child needs care. We'd like to invite everyone in Saskatchewan to join us in this effort to raise funds for a much-needed facility in Prince Albert as well as Regina."

"Families that come to stay at a Ronald McDonald House have to leave their home at a time when they are already feeling vulnerable," said Kevin Aebig, CEO of Optek Solutions. "As a business based in Prince Albert, it's important for us to support initiatives that

benefit people in Prince Albert and beyond."

"We all hope we never need to stay at a facility like Ronald McDonald House," said Sean Jesse, General Manager for Tru North Recreation Superstore. "We provide service for many clients who live in small towns or rural areas, and it would be difficult for many of them to face this kind of situation. We're happy to support Ronald McDonald House and the good work they do for the people across Saskatchewan."

"We are proud to be among the first group of organizations to contribute to the Ronald McDonald House Miles to Go Campaign," said Sascha Sasbrink-Harkema, CEO of Athabasca Basin Security. "And we are proud to have grown to where we can together make a significant impact on important initiatives that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities."

"Points Athabasca contributed to the Ronald McDonald House expansion in Saskatoon 2012 and that was a good investment in our community," said Lyle Bouvier, CEO of Points Athabasca. "Taking a tour of the Saskatoon house shows you the great work this organization does with families across the province. I would encourage any organization to consider investing in a similar facility for Prince Albert, which will provide a tremendous benefit for the north."

For more information about Ronald McDonald House Charities Saskatchewan, visit www.rmh.sk.ca.

5Buds keeps growing



5Buds opened its eighth location this year, in Meadow Lake. 5Buds is 100% Saskatchewan owned by Athabasca Basin Development, Peter Ballantyne Group of Companies, and Prince Albert Development Corp. It has grown to become the third largest cannabis franchise in Saskatchewan.

About Athabasca Basin Development

Athabasca Basin Development is an investment company committed to building and investing in successful businesses. Investments include partial or complete ownership in construction, industrial security, electrical, diamond drilling, logistics, road maintenance, aviation, and more. The company is owned by the seven communities in northern Saskatchewan's Athabasca region.

Watch for our next newsletter Spring 2025.

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