

# Community Contact

Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs



## Welcome

Welcome to this issue of *Community Contact* and our main feature on *Community Economic Development (CED)*. Manitoba is considered a leader among other jurisdictions in the promotion of CED. In this issue we explore the principles of CED, feature some examples of economic development taking place in northern communities and highlight a new initiative designed to get youth involved.

Manitoba has launched an *Aboriginal Procurement Initiative (API)* to increase participation among Aboriginal businesses in providing government with goods and services. We are pleased to bring you an update and details on this initiative.

We are also pleased to feature some volunteers that were recently recognized by the community of Bissett and extend our congratulations to them. At a recent workshop I was reminded of how important volunteers are to community life – and how important it is that we acknowledge their service.

As always, we'd like to hear from you. Please let us know if the *Community Contact* is of value to you. Are there community or development issues you would like to see discussed? Let us know.

## CED Building Sustainable Communities

Manitoba established its *Community Economic Development (CED)* initiative in 2001 as a tool to use in building a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable economy.

CED is a community-driven process that combines social, economic and environ-

mental goals in building healthier, more economically-viable communities. The process aims to revitalize community economies while developing beneficial community resources that meet locally-defined priorities.

*For and  
About Local  
Government  
Development*

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## Building Sustainable Communities – continued

Communities facing serious social and economic challenges such as low employment, lack of income, a poorly-trained workforce and high levels of poverty are often good prospects for CED. Communities vulnerable because they depend on a small number of industries or on variable natural resources may also benefit from CED programs.

CED candidates may lack adequate housing, health and education facilities and their residents may also experience poor literacy, high rates of health problems, addictions and crime.

Such communities may even experience issues of discrimination based on age, ability, class, ethnicity, language and gender.

The role of CED in building sustainable communities is growing in Canada. CED initiatives in Manitoba often use innovative-funding arrangements in co-operation with various levels of government and private funding sources. CED is an important way to lend a hand to inner-city neighbourhoods and northern rural communities where poverty and unemployment exceed provincial norms.

# GOALS & TARGETS OF CED INITIATIVES IN MANITOBA

**B**uilding greater community capacity: Building community capacity involves people working together to develop programs and services that support community economic development (CED). Capacity building requires education, communication, organizational development and strategic development.

**N**urture individual and community pride, self-reliance and leadership: The ability to lead has a great deal to do with one's feelings of self-respect and confidence. The same factors affect people's ability to share and to act with a sense of community. Great care must be taken to ensure that CED policies and programs are designed to encourage and support grassroots innovation and leadership.

**E**nhance knowledge and skills: CED requires that community members have access to education and training opportunities. Education and training contribute to enhanced employability, greater productive capability and social and economic innovation, making them critical to building strong economies and allowing people to live purposeful lives. Education and training enable individuals and communities to adjust to changing circumstances and continuously meet new needs.

**E**ncourage the development of businesses that are responsive to social, economic and environmental needs: When business investment is narrowly focused on commercial profit, there is no guarantee that business development will have a desirable impact on people or the environment. CED principles can be used to re-focus attention on social, environmental and broad economic needs.

**F**ostering balanced, equitable and sustainable economic development: A strong economy needs diversity. Balance is needed between different economic sectors, so that local and regional economies are not vulnerable to being destabilized by the inevitable ups and downs of the market. This balance implies strong linkages between industries and businesses at the community and regional level. Balance also implies reinvesting profit in the economy.

# COMMUNITY

## ECONOMIC-DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

*The following are principles of strong, self-sustaining communities. Using these principles, communities and governments can make better decisions for the healthy development of their communities.*

### Local Employment

- local residents have opportunities for long-term employment
- opportunities exist for greater personal and community self-esteem and self-sufficiency
- incomes are spent in the local economy

### Local Ownership and Decision-Making

- community members have increased ownership and control over local assets
- communities use democratic, consensus-building approaches to decision-making

### Local Economic Linkages

- economic linkages within and beyond a community result in economic diversity and balance
- initiatives fostering economic linkages include priorities to purchase locally produced goods and services, and produce goods and services for local use and benefit

### Re-Investment of Profits in Communities

- profits are re-invested in the community to expand local economic activity and strengthen community self-reliance

### Local Knowledge and Skill Development

- education and training opportunities are accessible, relevant and affordable for community members
- opportunities for lifelong learning enable the community to adjust to changing circumstances and continuously meet local needs
- enhanced employability, greater productive capability and innovation are promoted

### Positive Environmental Impact

- protecting the environment by building green, clean and safe communities is emphasized
- innovative ways of conserving resources and improving the physical environment are generated

### Health and Well-Being

- physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of community members is promoted at home, in the workplace and in the community
- stimulating opportunities are provided for positive social interaction and healthy physical activity

### Neighbourhood Stability and Community Cohesion

- conditions that encourage community members to live and work in their community on a long-term basis are created
- a strong sense of community based on shared interests, experiences and collective initiative, is promoted so that all community members feel that they have a place in the community and a stake in its future

### Human Dignity

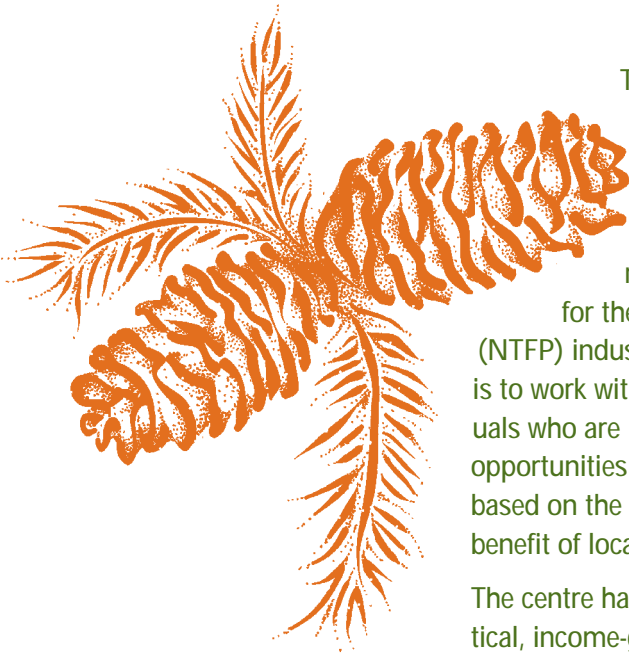
- relationships and interactions are developed to build individual and community pride, self-respect and leadership
- community memberships are recognized as the most important resource for CED

### Role of Government – Greater Collaboration

- interdepartmental and intergovernmental communication, joint planning and co-operative program delivery are improved to provide Manitobans with the best services possible

# NORTHERN FOREST

## DIVERSIFICATION CENTRE IN NORTHERN MANITOBA



The Northern Forest Diversification Centre (NFDC) is a division of Keewatin Community College that offers training, research and a service centre for the non-timber forest products (NTFP) industry. The mission of the NFDC is to work with communities and individuals who are looking to develop economic opportunities aligned with local values and based on the use of local resources for the benefit of local people.

The centre has identified two realistic, practical, income-generating opportunities that can be developed by building on local skills and knowledge: non-timber forest products and ecotourism. It has been estimated that individuals who participate in these opportunities could increase their income by up to \$10,000 per year, depending on the level of their participation.

While there are tangible economic benefits, there are also less tangible, though very real, social and community benefits to engaging community residents in meaningful and profitable activities.

Developing an entrepreneurial culture and empowering communities and individuals is a process, not an event. In this respect the NFDC process is based on a series of five interrelated, interwoven activities.

### Phase 1 – Building Awareness:

- developing a common understanding of the opportunities available and the processes involved in capitalizing upon them
- typically this involves a series of small workshops, community meetings and other public information initiatives

### Phase II – Inventories:

- working with communities to identify forest resources
- determine ecotourism and local opportunities
- create a permanent database of these resources for information and planning purposes

### Phase III – Training:

- providing specific, community-based, hands-on training on how to identify, harvest, process, market and sell non-timber forest products

### Phase IV – Aftercare:

- providing long-term support (1-2 years) to graduates of the training program in the areas of harvesting and value added processing, sales and marketing, research and product development, venture development, brokerage, quality control, business skills and entrepreneurial skills
- the centre would also develop markets and sell products on behalf of communities and individuals

### Phase V –

### Mentorships/Internships:

- teaching participants by example as they work with non-timber forest products alongside NFDC staff, at the centre or in the community, and with NTFP businesses
- performing activities linked to the after-care model
- identifying at least one community-based champion, motivator, organizer and co-ordinator. Specific training in community development, facilitation and organization skills would be provided

*It has been estimated that individuals who participate in non-timber forest products and ecotourism could increase their income by up to \$10,000 per year...*

# WHAT ARE NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS?

**N**on-timber forest products (NTFP) are goods other than timber or firewood that are derived from plants and animals that live in the forest. These include wild foods, medicinals, crafts, floral supplies and other products such as essential oils, soaps and salves. The non-timber industry is a network of community-based and diverse micro-enterprises supported by 21st century packaging and marketing infrastructure.

NTFPs include mushrooms, berries, floral greens, medicinal herbs, crafts and landscaping products and others. In some parts of the world, wild animals are also important NTFPs. Many NTFPs have a long history of Aboriginal use.

Many rural communities are going through a period of transition as some resource-based activities decline in value and importance. Other communities are searching for ways to increase employment through diversification of their local economies. Although the NTFP harvest is already worth hundreds of millions of dollars in Canada, relatively little information is available to individuals or groups wishing to participate in the industry.

The mission of the Northern Forest Diversification Centre (NFDC) at Keewatin Community College in The Pas is to use the emergent NTFP and Eco-adventure Tourism opportunities in all Northern Manitoba communities to create additional income streams and small business opportunities for residents. The basic strategy is to identify NTFP opportunities at the community level, promote interest, train local producers and assist with new product development, packaging and marketing support.

The NFDC offers a community-based training course on NTFP business development for these and other reasons including the belief widely held by industry experts that the NTFP industry will expand dramatically over the next ten years, providing opportunities for new entrants. Capturing the greatest possible value at the local level from these products will require the ability to assess the opportunities these products provide and the ability to encourage entrepreneurial developments.

This program is uniquely project driven and it partners in economic and community development while using local skills, knowledge and resources for the community's benefit. The program focuses on income creation rather than job creation and creates a direct link between learning and income. It combines traditional knowledge and skills with processing and marketing expertise.

The program creates economic benefits by increasing income generation potential for individuals and the communities. Income generation holds the promise of decreasing reliance on support services, creating diversified opportunities and increasing re-investment in communities. It also creates powerful social benefits in terms of enhanced self worth, sustained local cultures, hope for the future and renewed entrepreneurial spirit.

Anyone with a keen interest and willingness to learn about the NTFP industry can participate in the training, but experience in the bush, a love of working out of doors, self-discipline, patience and a land stewardship ethic are all considered positive attributes for course candidates. The course also offers learning opportunities for individuals who want to participate in the industry occasionally or seasonally, but not as a

business owner. The course involves 10 days of classes and field training delivered directly in the community to up to 15 students at a time.

For more information on the cost for this training course in your community, contact the Northern Forest Diversification Centre at 204-627-8683 or email at [info@nfdc.ca](mailto:info@nfdc.ca).

*The non-timber industry is a network of community-based and diverse micro-enterprises supported by 21st century packaging and marketing infrastructure.*





# CREATIVE SPIRITS

There was a time when Barrows, Manitoba resident Brenda Gaudry didn't know much about what she had growing in her own back yard.

Then two years ago she enrolled in a Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) training course offered by the Northern Forest Diversification Centre (NFDC), a division of Keewatin Community College in The Pas. The training opened her eyes and taught her what she needed to know to begin developing a small business producing products based on the local forest resources.

"Living so close to nature, you take for granted your natural surroundings. I had no idea what those weeds out there even were."

Those weeds are now her business, *Creative Spirits*. With a strong product line that includes natural salves and lip balms, three varieties of wild teas, bath

products, native smudging kits, wreaths and candles, Gaudry has turned the training she received into a small home-based business.

"I started small, marketing my products through the Northern Forest Diversification Centre. I've also worked with NFDC to expand my market into Swan River and Dauphin," said Gaudry. Her products sell in Riding Mountain National Park during the summer and she hopes to expand into Brandon soon.

Gaudry recently took part in a small business trade show held in Swan River. She was pleased to discover that other women were interested in the NTFP program and her business, and she expects a few new participants for area workshops.

Harvest time is year round for Gaudry. She says her house is always cluttered

with the makings of her art and she is always excited to try new things. This year she's working on natural candles. Gaudry didn't expect to be a business owner when she enrolled in the NTFP training program two years ago. The course was what excited her about starting her own business.

"Before I took the course," she said, "I was blind to what was out there in nature. It was all weeds to me. During the course I began learning what those weeds are and how I can use them."

Brenda's success demonstrates the value of the NTFP program and provides proof of opportunities for communities and individuals to become successfully involved in an industry that continues to grow... just like *Creative Spirits*.

## Fifth Annual WINTER FISH DERBY

Matheson Island Community Council  
Matheson Island, Manitoba  
Saturday, February 28, 2004  
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

There will be three prizes in each category, plus door prizes and a silent auction.

For information, entry forms, registration and prizes call the Matheson Island Community Council: Mona at 204-276-2150

Registration Fees:

**Category One (no age limit):**

\$40 until February 13, 2004

\$50 after February 13, 2004

**Category Two (12 and under):**

\$10



# TEAM UPDATE

**TEAM**, an initiative of the Communities Economic Development Fund (CEDF), assists individuals and groups of micro-entrepreneurs by offering technical assistance and micro loans. Technical services provision is TEAM's major service, offering:

- assistance developing business plans
- marketing and accounting training for groups or individuals
- path-finding to capital
- organizational strengthening and support for groups of local artisans
- access to markets by facilitating sale of group fine arts and crafts
- micro loans to viable business ventures

TEAM is now in its third year of operation and has members in 26 communities. It is currently working with over 100 individuals and nine craft groups representing about 120 members. The program has worked with a wide variety of micro businesses including convenience stores, bookkeeping services, forestry and photography.

Individuals in the craft and fine art industries represent about 50 per cent of TEAM's membership list. In the last year TEAM has also recognized the full economic potential of the craft industry in Northern Manitoba. One initiative involves putting together a gift catalogue that will focus marketing efforts on the corporate and government gift-buying

sector. The Quality Gifts from Northern Manitoba catalogue highlights five local artists and groups. The catalogue was mailed out in early December to various government departments.

TEAM has also been actively involved in the Uniquely Manitoba trade show. The trade show gives producers direct contact with retailers and wholesalers. Uniquely Manitoba's goal is to enlist Aboriginal people as 70 of the 200 participants. TEAM has already recommended 12 Aboriginal entrants for adjudication and is looking at 20 to 30 additional entrants. This would also result in TEAM being responsible for 46 to 60 per cent of rural Aboriginal participants.

TEAM has also actively facilitated group efforts in the craft industry. Crossroad Co-op based in Churchill, Manitoba recently finished a pilot featuring \$11,000 in sales in just over five weeks. The group had 13 members from Churchill and York Landing.

TEAM is progressively active with group training. Partnership with Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) has fostered joint efforts. A recent workshop on business planning drew 13 participants and the TEAM group training program is currently working with those individuals. TEAM is planning additional joint projects with MKO. For further TEAM program information please contact Oswald Sawh, toll free at 1-866-778-8887.

# Regional and Community ROUND TABLES UPDATE

**M**anitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Community Support Services, North Central Region has been working with 13 Northern Affairs communities, assisting with the development of Community Economic Development (CED) plans. Community Choices Program funding has been secured through the Intergovernmental Affairs Community Round Table process for each of the community and regional round tables. The funding covers cost incurred in hosting community meetings and planning meetings.

North Central Region's holistic grassroots approach takes into consideration the social, economic, environmental and cultural concerns of the community in developing the CED plan. The process begins with an open community CED workshop featuring discussions on "what is CED?" It proceeds with development of a community vision and identification of the community's assets and opportunities. The community is then assisted with developing action/implementation plans for identified opportunities. Assistance is also provided to identify human and financial resources for further developments. Once the community has identified its opportunities information sessions are organized so the community can make informed decisions on directions they would like to take to achieve their goals.

Open community CED workshops held have included:

- Highway 77 Regional Round Table (Barrows, Powell, National Mills, Baden and Red Deer Lake)
- Seymourville
- Manigotagan
- Bissett
- Matheson Island
- Duck Bay
- Camperville

All are now working on action plan implementation. The most recent CED workshop took place October 30, 2003 when over 20 people participated in a well-organized and well-attended strategy development meeting in Camperville.

In addition, a new regional round table was created with neighbouring First Nation communities participating in working on a more regional CED strategy. The Nopiming United Round Table was developed with input from the communities of Seymourville, Manigotagan, Bissett, Aghaming, Loon Straits, Hollow Water first Nation, and Little Black River First Nation.

Some common threads identified include examining ways to increase tourism development, encourage establishment of local stores, develop non-timber forest products (NTFP) businesses and increase housing.

Highway 77 Regional Round Table hosted a tourism symposium during October 2002 and it was decided that tourism development should be co-ordinated over larger areas to be effective. The Highway 77 round table has developed a tourism committee with neighbouring municipal and First Nation communities. The tourism committee is working on a tourism strategy with the assistance of Parkland Tourism.

On the NTFP front, Barrows area leads the way with the establishment of the Porcupine Wildcrafts Association. Already a profitable venture, they have begun to offer training in other Northern Affairs communities. Tina Munro and Brenda Gaudry of Porcupine Wildcrafts Association visited Duck Bay November 14, 2003 to deliver a six-hour session on wreath making that was well received. Duck Bay planned to use wreaths made at the workshop for a Christmas gift BINGO to help more people understand the potential of NTFPs and inspire more members of the community to participate.

Local resources has been a topic at all the round tables and regional round tables to date, and work is proceeding to identify value-added initiatives to insure more local participation and creation of more local jobs. The Highway 77 Regional Round Table recently conducted a field trip to a number of small lumbering mills to encourage development of additional value-added ideas and initiatives for local resources.

*Progress may seem slow at times, but the important thing to remember is that there is definitely forward movement.*



Regarding local store development, North Central Region has been working to set up meetings in a number of North Central communities and expects to work with Manitoba's Co-operative Development branch and Arctic Co-op to provide information to the communities about developing co-operatives.

Because unincorporated Northern Affairs communities are not legal entities, they are limited in the pursuit of economic-development ventures, but possible solutions to overcome this barrier are being considered. One solution involves working with Intergovernmental Affairs and communities to set up Part XXI Community Development Corporations

(CDC). These CDCs would be the economic-development arms of each community. In the North Central Region, Matheson Island, Seymourville and Manigotagan have each set up and incorporated CDCs and more northern communities are expected to follow their lead in 2004.

It is noteworthy that CED initiatives would not be nearly as successful in the north without the dedicated community volunteers who organize, participate and donate their time to see continued improvements in the overall quality of life for their families, communities and regions. Progress may seem slow at times, but the important thing to remember is that there is definitely forward movement.

# www.getinvolved.ca

## **Manitoba Youth Will Benefit** FROM NEW GUIDE AND CONTEST

Manitoba youth now have a tool and the incentive to get involved in their community. Parkland Community Futures Development Corporation and Dauphin Youth Service Canada have created a community economic-development guide to assist youth in getting involved and making a difference in their communities.

The CD-ROM guide titled 'GET INVOLVED: How Youth Can Create Community-Based Initiatives' has been developed for youth, by youth in order to provide information in a user-friendly format. The guide encourages youth to volunteer and offers them the tools to focus their time and effort on developing community based projects.

"We have found that there are many youth in our communities who want to get involved or start new projects but don't know where to begin. The guide was designed to lead them through the process starting with defining your idea all the way through to fundraising and evaluating the project after completion." explains Nicole Yunker of Dauphin Youth Service Canada.

The overwhelming response to the first distribution of the guide and request for more CDs across the province has sparked the creation of the [www.getinvolved.ca](http://www.getinvolved.ca) website. The site features the guide which can be viewed or downloaded, full contest details, and ideas for projects that could be done in any community.

The contest has been designed as a way to recognize the contribution that youth are making to their communities and to share their stories. The contest is open to all youth in Manitoba ages 15-30 who have created a community-based initiative. Full contest details can be found on the website. Prizes will be awarded and the winning project will be announced at the Annual Community Futures Conference September 24, 2004 in Dauphin, MB. Deadline for entries is May 3, 2004.

"The City of Dauphin is extremely proud to be involved in this initiative and believes the CD-ROM is a useful tool for other municipalities and organizations interested in increasing and/or enhancing youth participation in their community. We expect a tremendous response to this innovative initiative." said City of Dauphin Mayor Alex Paul.

CDs have been distributed to municipalities, economic-development agencies, school divisions, and community groups across the province. The project is sponsored by Community Futures Partners of Manitoba, Western Economic Diversification Canada, and Government of Canada through the Dauphin Human Resource Centre. For more information contact Parkland Community Futures at 1-888-987-2332 or send an email to [carissa@pcfcd.mb.ca](mailto:carissa@pcfcd.mb.ca) or [nicoleyunker@hotmail.com](mailto:nicoleyunker@hotmail.com).

# HOMETOWN MANITOBA TO ASSIST RURAL AND NORTHERN COMMUNITIES WITH INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

*"Many of Manitoba's communities have main street areas and community gathering places that need improvements," said Wowchuk. "When we support community-driven projects and promote the use of local products, services and talents, we can enhance important local amenities, help build community pride and foster local economic activity."*

Main streets and public spaces in rural and northern Manitoba will soon be rejuvenated said Rosann Wowchuk, Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. Wowchuk spoke November 27, 2003 at the Association of Manitoba Municipalities annual convention in Brandon.

"Many of Manitoba's communities have main street areas and community gathering places that need improvements," said Wowchuk. "When we support community-driven projects and promote the use of local products, services and talents, we can enhance important local amenities, help build community pride and foster local economic activity."

Hometown Manitoba is a new program announced in the 2003 budget and available to smaller rural and northern communities. The program will assist communities and organizations to enhance community gathering places and build exteriors. The program also aims to promote unique identities and themes that define a community.

Hometown Manitoba will offer a total of \$500,000 in funding support under two program components, Hometown Meeting Places and Hometown Main Streets Enhancements.

Hometown Meeting Places supports community projects that enhance or establish green community main street areas and public places. Projects may include developing or upgrading outdoor spaces and outdoor public and

non-profit facilities accessible to the general community. This may include parks, community gathering places, seniors' and youth centres, hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, schools, libraries, museums, public administration buildings and other similar facilities.

Hometown Meeting Places will contribute up to one-third of total eligible project costs to a maximum of \$5,000 and requires a partnership involving local government and at least one community group. For Northern Affairs communities, Hometown Meeting Places will contribute up to half of total eligible costs with the balance of the funds being provided by the community group behind the project.

Hometown Main Streets Enhancements supports non-profit organizations, small businesses and co-operative projects that focus on upgrading the appearance of building exteriors, structures and exterior spaces in main street areas. Projects may include building facelifts and upgrades, signage and landscaping enhancements.

Hometown Main Streets Enhancements will contribute up to 50 per cent of total eligible project costs to a maximum of \$1,000. Businesses or co-operatives will provide the balance of the funds.

Deadline for applications is February 15 for projects to begin in spring, 2004. For projects in fall, 2004, the application deadline is April 15. For eligibility details and an application, call Leo Prince at (204) 945-2427.

# API

## Aboriginal Procurement Initiative

Manitoba Procurement Services Branch has introduced an Aboriginal Procurement Initiative (API) to increase participation among Aboriginal businesses in providing government with goods and services including construction services. A key component of the initiative involves development of a new Aboriginal Business Registry that will help government buyers identify Aboriginal businesses as bidders and potential suppliers of goods and services requirements.

The first part of the initiative, Aboriginal Business Sourcing, is currently being applied throughout government. It informs current Aboriginal businesses about tender opportunities that may interest them. The Aboriginal Business Registry will improve the process and will also enhance awareness of government business opportunities among Aboriginal business owners who register.

Starting in the spring of 2004, more API enhancements will be added with the first being Set-Asides. A Set-Aside is a goods or services requirement that has been reserved or set-aside for competition among Aboriginal businesses. Other enhancements will include guidelines to allow larger contracts to be broken down into smaller parts, making it more possible for smaller operations to bid. Future enhancements may also include new rules that require bids for some contracts to specify the percentage of Aboriginal participation to be used in fulfilling the contract.

There will be continued consultations with Aboriginal suppliers and organizations prior to development of new procurement strategies and purchasing methods. Workshops for Aboriginal businesses will also be offered in partnership with community economic-development corporations and similar organizations to help increase knowledge of government-purchasing practices and to receive feedback on the initiative.

Aboriginal businesses are encouraged and invited to register for the Aboriginal Business Registry and participate in Manitoba's API. To receive your information package and registration form for inclusion in the Aboriginal Business Registry or to locate an API workshop you can attend, please contact Mark Freedman, Vendor Relations Co-ordinator, at 204-945-0826 or [mafreedman@gov.mb.ca](mailto:mafreedman@gov.mb.ca).



Left to right: Anthony Kacperski (15 years), Jack Waite (5 years), Mark Wynne/Deputy Fire Chief (20 years), John Bilcowski/Fire Chief (15 years), Mike Wynne – not shown (20 years).

## Congratulations to Bissett Volunteers

On behalf of the Bissett Community Council and our grateful residents, we'd like to thank the members of the Bissett Volunteer Fire Department for their continued support, dedication and valued service to the community.

This department highlights the critical role volunteering plays in northern communities like ours. Without sacrifices by leading residents like these, Bissett simply wouldn't be the same. Their inspiring example shows us all that, by depending on each other, we can transform our community into the kind of place we'll always be proud to call home.

The Bissett Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1977 with six members and at its peak had 22 volunteers. Changing circumstances mean these numbers fluctuate yearly. The department currently has five members.

Several years ago, the fire department and ambulance service combined to form Bissett Emergency Services. But with the recent transfer of the Bissett Ambulance Service to the North Eastman Health Association, these services now operate independently.

Our volunteer firefighters are all dedicated individuals. Many have served the department for years. Mark and Mike Wynne have 20 years each as volunteers, making them the longest-term members of the department. Fire Chief John Bilcowski and firefighter Anthony Kacperski have both been members for 15 years. Jack white has volunteered for five years.

Meetings are held every two weeks and involve continuous training exercises and regular maintenance of the equipment. Emergency services recently switched to a paging system, a response system upgrade that's proving extremely effective.

## Appointments

# Appointments

Effective December 1, 2003, Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister Oscar Lathlin appointed Donna Chéné as principal electoral officer and Roger Stagg as deputy electoral officer under The Northern Manitoba Elections Regulation.

The principal electoral officer co-ordinates elections in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs communities and ensures they are held according to The Northern Manitoba Elections Regulation. The officers conduct election inquiries, maintain election records and documents, supervise recounts and report annually to the minister on election results and issues.

## REUBEN BLACKWATER joins Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs



The Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs regional office in Thompson is pleased to welcome Reuben Blackwater to fill a term position as a municipal development consultant. His previous experience in accounting, economics and administration make him an excellent choice.

Most recently, Blackwater worked for the British Columbia Ministry of Forests as a liaison officer for Aboriginal affairs. He was also an active member on provincial committees that explore cultural and occupational issues.

Blackwater has worked as an economic development officer for a tribal council on Vancouver Island and gained band council administrative experience as a general manager and financial officer. His most extensive accounting experience came during the 11 years he spent in the accounting department of MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., a major pulp and paper company in B.C.

Blackwater is a member of the Gitksan First Nation from the village of Kispiox, B.C. He is married and has three children.

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Community Council members, community residents and departmental staff are strongly encouraged to submit feedback (comments and questions), suggestions and ideas to the editor.