Circles of Light

July-August 2000 – Number 4

Up-Market Restaurant Trade Loves Nunavik Caribou

by Raymond Lawrence

Nunavik Arctic Foods, based in Northern Quebec, knows it has a solid market for caribou meat, the company's principal product.

Since its inception, the caribou supplier has steadily developed its client base, making sure that it can always meet the demand. That demand comes largely from up-market restaurants in metropolitan centres.

"We implemented a plan two years ago that essentially said we have to get our harvest numbers up to the point where we can say to our clients that we can sustain you," says **Neil Greig**, Nunavik Arctic Foods' General Manager for the past three years. "We had to show the market that we could provide that level of products. The problem in the food service market for caribou is that it is a very expensive product to harvest, and it then becomes a very expensive product to market. Then we and our distributors cater to high-end restaurants in Montreal and Toronto, and to the resorts in Banff, Whistler and Colorado."

Traditionally, restaurant customers have asked for prime cuts from the hindquarters. Now the company is introducing new products that make use of the front quarters of the caribou.

"We've developed other products from the fronts...we have a paté, sausages, and burgers. It's taken a year to get that developed and market-tested. That is a different clientele, although it's still high-end in places like delicatessens and in cruise ships," Greig explains. "We had no idea the paté would take off the way it has but in terms of a business, it's not huge. If we can bring in between $1 and $2 million, we'll be happy."

The company is looking at developing a Web site to market these new products, but is proceeding cautiously. "With the development of a Web site, products will be available on-line, but we have to be sure that we have the product ready," Greig emphasizes.

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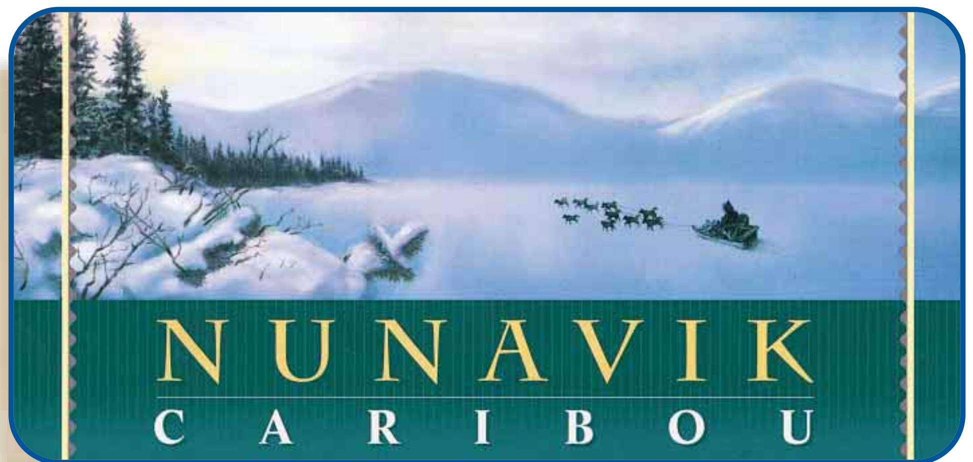
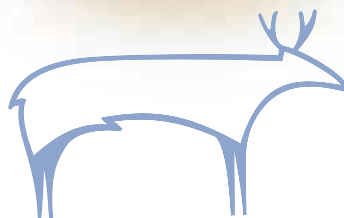


Aboriginal people in Canada have very strong cultural and spiritual ties to their ancestral lands. They see these lands, and the natural resources they contain, as the foundation of their economy. Growing participation in resource-based economic opportunities, ranging from eco-tourism to resource development and value-added resource processing, is proving to be the path to self-sufficiency and wealth creation for many Aboriginal communities.



Labrador Inuit Development Corporation Looks to Lumber and Granite for Local Economies

by Raymond Lawrence

Although Voisey's Bay nickel is on hold, the Labrador Inuit are making the most of other natural resources they have available.

The Labrador Inuit Development Corporation (LIDC) is continuing to develop and maximize its profitable granite mining operations, for example. At the same time, LIDC has its eye on the forest industry, with long-term plans to produce high-grade lumber.

The granite mining has generated jobs, as well as significant spin-off capital. LIDC believes its forestry venture can provide the same multi-faceted benefits, bringing money into the area, and creating long-term employment and spin-off opportunities.

"We do 4,000 tonnes of granite each year and we're just in the process of putting up two small plants to process second-grade material. This material can be made into furniture, tombstones, and strips for tiles and counter tops," says **Fred Hall**, LIDC Managing Director. The corporation's main market is Italy where they use the unique stone for large slabs of building material, among other things. "We ship out some blocks that are up to 25 tonnes. We have one quarry operating and we're currently sending a crew out to start the second this year."

"It's a very special stone which is why an operation like this can work in such a remote location. Its light-grey granite colour is very nice, but it has scattered throughout small blue inclusions of Labradorite crystals. The dark-blue crystals are what drives the price up," Hall explains. "Basically, 4,000 tonnes comes out to around 1,000 cubic metres, or about $2 million for a year's production." Each year in mid-March, a management and mechanical team of about a dozen people starts work. Full crews of about 40 people work 12-hour days from June to mid-November.

The Labrador Inuit Development Corporation's granite mining has generated jobs, as well as capital.

The mining operation's various needs also pump outside money into local business. "I think it's fairly significant because we buy drill bits, we buy steel rods, we buy food, we have transportation of crews, and Inuit employees spend their wages in Inuit communities," says Hall.

In terms of its forestry plans, LIDC is looking at purchasing a portable sawmill that rides on tractor-trailer beds to make the long-term harvest lucrative. "We need 12,000 cubic metres of wood to harvest a year in order to make it profitable. And in order to be competitive, we need to bring in machinery," Hall says. "In order to pay for the machinery, we need that volume."

The resource is more than adequate Hall adds, and the plus side of the short Labrador growing season is a stronger lumber product, which is generally of higher quality.

The forestry operation is expected to produce about 20 long-term jobs in cutting and skidding, with other direct and indirect employment opportunities. ✷

White Bear Oil and Gas, Ltd. — Big Business Meets Culture

by Lisa Nidosky

What happens when you strike oil on your reserve?

According to White Bear Oil and Gas in Carlyle, Saskatchewan, you try to find a way to make money, while maintaining respect for First Nations culture, the environment and the community.

This is something President **Terry Little Chief** struggles with every day — finding a balance between the benefits for the company, and for the White Bear First Nation.

"You feel torn...this is all the land we have, and to see oil wells going up is hard and it hurts your heart," says Little Chief. "But you know it's going to do well for your people. How else are we going to make money? That's the balance you weigh every time an oil well is drilled. However, we are thankful the Creator has blessed us with this non-renewable resource within our lands' boundary."

Little Chief, who became President of White Bear Oil and Gas in 1993, has been with the company right from the beginning. As President, he is responsible for all dealings and negotiations with Tri Link, the company's private-sector partner, as well as any emerging issues.

One of the issues he is facing right now is land conservation in delicate areas around White Bear Lake.

"The lake has been there, provided for us — hunting, fishing, recreation — and we're scared that if something happens, like a spill, we'll contaminate our lake, and that will fall on White Bear Oil and Gas's shoulders because we're the ones that drilled it," Little Chief says. "As Natives, we hold so much reverence for the land and Mother Earth that we've stayed away from the lake. We've stayed away from the northwest corner (of the community) for the same reason. That's where a lot of moose and elk stay and we don't want to disturb that."

White Bear Oil and Gas does not drill areas that have been declared heritage sites. Company officials consult with community Elders before constructing wells or drilling. To date, every site has been approved and blessed by an Elder.

The company's desire to give back to the community also sets it apart. It has donated up to $40,000 as one of the sponsors for the annual White Bear pow-wow. The company sees the pow-wow as a positive way to bring together First Nation members living both on and off the reserve. It has also financially supported school field trips, and helped to purchase essential equipment.

Terry Little Chief is President of White Bear Oil and Gas.

Little Chief is also working with the school, on the company's behalf, to develop a radio station for disabled and physically challenged youth on the reserve. In addition, the company works closely with other First Nations schools and non-First Nations communities to teach them about the industry and its potential career opportunities.

White Bear is one of the most progressive First Nations in Canada, according to Little Chief. He believes it's essential for his company to demonstrate the balance between making a profit and meeting the community's needs. ✷

"Up-Market Restaurant Trade...."
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"The market in Quebec is the best in North America," he adds. "There's a high caribou consumption rate and a number of distributors who have traditionally promoted the product for longer than we've been in existence. People in Quebec are not afraid to experiment and fortunately for us, Toronto is becoming like that."

During harvest, the industry provides six weeks of work for 40 people, in addition to longer-term jobs.

"We've got the harvest to the level where it's viable," says Greig. "We know we need so many animals to make it viable and we know we're in an area where we can double that and not affect the resource at all." To date, Nunavik Arctic Foods has never exceeded half its allotted quota for caribou. ✷

Raymond Lawrence is a freelance writer of Ojibway and European ancestry.

Photo credit: Pierre Faucher

Cowichan First Nation Program Helps Keep Salmon Running

Sports fishers always have tales of the one that got away. The Cowichan First Nation deliberately lets millions of salmon go each year.

Bears, birds, outfitters, and commercial fisheries in British Columbia all harvest tonnes of salmon, many of which were first released by the Cowichan Salmon Enhancement Program.

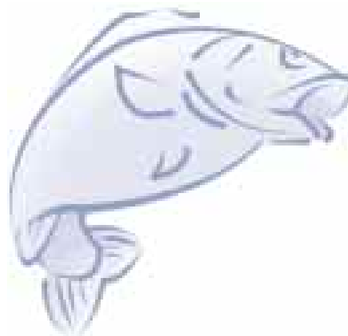
Focusing on the Cowichan and the Koksilah rivers, the goal of the 24-year-old enhancement program is not huge harvests for the Cowichan people, but rather the assurance that salmon will exist for future generations. The Enhancement Program collects and extracts eggs and milt from chum, chinook and coho salmon which the First Nation then raises at its hatchery and eventually releases back into the rivers — some two million annually.

The Cowichan First Nation's key traditional foods are Chinook and coho salmon. However, much of the salmon it currently uses is sockeye, through agreements with Fisheries and Oceans.

"When we first started, we were only allowed to incubate chum salmon because they're heartier. There are more of them, and they're easier to raise," says **Ernie Elliott**, Self-Government Co-ordinator and Manager of the Salmon Enhancement Program. "We had to prove ourselves with the chum salmon. Then we got into chinook which is our spring salmon here, and we also started incubating coho which is an endangered species of salmon on the West Coast with whole runs that no longer exist."

"We've always maintained that it is not our fault that stocks are depleted," Elliott emphasizes, adding that commercial fisheries, sports fishers and natural predators all reduce salmon stocks. "We've always argued that we gave up a lot for conservation, but that's not always taken into account when it comes down to food fish."

This past March and April, for example, the Cowichan First Nation released 1.1 million chinook salmon fry, and 1.4 million smolts (young salmon) into the Cowichan River. "That sounds like a lot and we get good returns, but sometimes we feel that we've released those fish to mature and be caught by someone else," Elliott says. Of the 15,000 coho smolts recently released, the First Nation anticipates a return of only about three percent because of natural attrition and fishing by outside parties. Elliott notes that although the First Nation has two commercial licences, it doesn't use them.



"Our traditional fisheries tells us that our old people practised conservation before the word was even invented," he says. "If we caught every fish that had come up the river, we wouldn't have fish in four years. If they would let us get more involved in the overall conservation effort, we feel we could do a good job."

The hatchery employs six people year-round and a biologist. The First Nation's related river management program employs another four people full-time. "We'd like to see it become a tourist site. We want people to come down and see what we're doing with the resources because up until now it's been a well-kept secret. We're working to change that," says Elliott. "We're trying to upgrade the image and make people aware of what we're doing here."

For more information, telephone (250) 748-3196; fax (250) 746-3633; or visit the Web site at **http://welcome.to/cowichan-hatchery** ✷

Fish and Wildlife of Chisasibi Region Key to Eco-Plan

by Raymond Lawrence

While they already benefit from considerable tourism activity, the Cree people of Chisasibi are confident that their region's abundant natural resources will provide an even greater support of economic development.

Their plans hinge on a carefully constructed balance between hunting and fishing, and eco-tourism, with neither sector taking more than its fair share. Both sectors already contribute significantly to the Cree economy, with tourism bringing in about $1 million annually.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Polar Continental Shelf Project, Natural Resources Canada

Polar bears are one of the attractions in the Chisabini Region in Northern Quebec.

Sherman Herodier, tourism authority officer under the Chisasibi Mandow Agency, says one of the big attractions is James Bay and its abundant flora and fauna. "We have beluga whales around the islands a little further out, and there's the occasional walrus as well. And there's some islands with polar bears that stay just about year-round. They spend the summer there on some islands in the middle of the Bay but the season is short-lasting — between two to three weeks — because of the ice-floes," he says. "We have a lot of seals, and at certain times they'll come right along the coast, and a little further out you might see them in herds of hundreds."

Herodier says they have more than 50 species of nesting birds in the area. However, he adds that a big slice of their tourism business is due to the area's pike, pickerel, speckled trout and lake trout fishing potential. There are three outfitters that specialize in walleye which can be found only in the region's southern reaches. Most outfitters also provide guiding services for caribou hunting from November to February. In addition to casual guides and contract workers, the area's tourism sector employs hotel staff, outfitters and arts and crafts producers.

"From shore you can catch a lake trout that might go between 35 and 40 pounds, but we don't really go out after the big ones. It's a renewable resource so we try to avoid taking the really big ones," says Herodier. Sports fishers can haul in prized speckled trout that tip the scales at about 4.5 kilograms (10 pounds), and there are also metre-long pike lurking in the waters.

"We get a lot of people who come from other places in Canada who want to go right to the end of the road, and this is it. But we also get people from all over...people from places like Europe, Australia, China, and South America," says Herodier. On their territory, they have a 20-plus-room hotel, cottages, seven outfitters, and plenty of space for people who want to camp and be closer to the wild. During the spring break and at the end of the school year, they frequently get people by the bus-load. "We'll set up a variety of activities for them like snowshoeing, and teaching them survival skills. You can survive even in the winter without shelter and can learn to find your way around by looking at trees and the landscape," Herodier says.

"Right now, we have a village that's under construction that we're calling the Cree Village. It's the dwellings our people used to use when we were out on the territory and we still use them on traplines," says Herodier. The village, which will open either this fall or next spring, will employ local people in a variety of jobs. ✷

Co-op Helps Keep Wild Rice Harvesters in Business

In 1988, a bumper crop of wild rice for Northern Ontario First Nations harvesters initially found no market. But that setback turned out to be the catalyst for something bigger and better.

Although a bumper crop might seem cause for celebration, buyers at the time did not have the means to purchase the crop in its entirety. For a while, it looked as if the harvesters might lose out, with nowhere to sell the raw green rice. Then the solution came with the creation of Mid-Canada Wild Rice, a co-op that buys rice from the harvesters and sells it to a Shoal Lake Wild Rice Company processing facility at Keewatin.

Ben Ratuski, whose family's commercial involvement with wild rice goes back more than 60 years, was in the business as a buyer at that time. "The amount of rice that was available changed so dramatically that year that we weren't able to buy enough. So with the Shoal Lake Band, we formed a co-op, and went to the bank and arranged for a line of credit," he says.

Currently, there are about 240 rice harvesters with memberships in the co-op and more people are joining each year. While the co-op is owned by a non-Aboriginal person, 95 percent of the harvesters are First Nations people. The co-op buys green rice, paying one installment to the harvesting members; then sells the rice to the processing plant at the Shoal Lake Wild Rice Company. In spring, when all the rice is sold, harvesters are paid the second installment — one reflecting current market prices. Profits are paid back to members and shareholders. "The co-op gives the members a place to sell their rice," says Ratuski.

The co-op remains strong, despite last year's crop failure — a stark contrast to 1995 when it purchased about 285,760 kilograms of green rice. At Shoal Lake, green rice is processed and prepared for market. About half of the total volume of green unprocessed rice can be refined for sale as a finished product. "They process the rice and then they sell it all over the world," Ratuski says.

"This system works quite well because when there are only two or three buyers, they bid on the crop. The co-op pays in advance and then sells the rice," he explains. In the past, with only a few buyers, the harvesters often felt underpaid. Now they enjoy a seasonal boost in their finances by harvesting rice. The people selling mechanical harvesters, capable of harvesting between 450 and 680 kilograms of green rice a day, also make money, Ratuski adds. These machines have replaced the two-person-canoe system of harvesting.

First Nations wild rice harvesters are able to sell directly through the Shoal Lake Keewatin depot, or through one of several other regionally located depots in Northern Ontario and Manitoba. These accessible depots mean that co-op members do not have to ship their product as far, thus reducing the costs of getting their goods to market.

For more information, telephone (807) 547-2851, or fax (807) 547-2741. ✸

Strategically Located Batchewana Company Secures Merger with Multinational

by Raymond Lawrence

When the two businesses through which it marketed most of its products broke up, the Batchewana First Nation's Advanced Thermodynamics Corporation (ATC) felt the crunch. The company, which had operated on the industrial park at Batchewana near Sault Ste. Marie for about eight years, was 51-percent-owned by Batchewana Band Industries. The remaining 49 percent was owned by non-Aboriginal private sector investors.

"The company did well at first, but we had problems doing banking, and with an operating line, to the point where we didn't have the financial resources required for an operation of this size," says **Harry Jones**, Vice-President and former President of Batchewana Band Industries.

ATC was left with a quality facility, quality products, but almost no means to meet the demand or market its various heating and cooling systems for the trucking and railroad industries, and the military. It was still winning contracts but struggling to make the payroll, finding it harder and harder to manufacture their products and get them out on the market.

But the First Nation was not defeated. It knew the market was as strong as ever. Accessing that market would simply require new ideas and approaches, and new partners. One of the community's big pluses was its strategic location — in the centre of the North American continent.

Hoping to strike a deal, the First Nation contacted the Vancouver-based office of Teleflex, a multinational that operates in 80 countries and employs more than 14,000 people worldwide. The big company was interested in ATC's products, but the cash-strapped First Nation operation could not meet the demand. So Teleflex proposed buying ATC. That proposal left the First Nation with five-percent shares in the company, and an on-reserve operation that currently employs more than 30 people.

Harry Jones is Vice-President of Batchewana Band Industries.

"Part of the purchase agreement was that they would remain on-reserve, hire our people and form an employee advisory group and we would retain a five-percent interest in the company," says Jones.

"The Teleflex deal was the best arrangement for us because we still have the employment and we have assurances from Teleflex that as long as the product is saleable and production quality and quantity remain high, that will continue. They liked not only the product but also the manufacturing facility and the personnel. They have no intention of moving anything. What more could a community ask for?"

Although ATC operations may not have turned out as initially planned, the end result has the Ojibway First Nation looking farther away from home for opportunity — in fact, into the U.S. and Europe.

The First Nation says that in dealing with potential international partners, it can market ATC based on the highly competitive lease rates it offers on industrial park property. Another marketing plus is an available workforce whose members will stay after they receive their training.

In terms of promoting its industrial park, having a large international company on site adds weight to the First Nation's marketing. Opportunities for spin-off benefits also stand to increase over time, especially as ATC operations expand and more big companies move into the First Nation's industrial park. The First Nation is confident that its strategic location will be of interest to enterprises targeting both Canadian and U.S. markets. ✷

Circles of Light is published by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Production: Anishinabe Printing
Managing Editor: Wendy MacIntyre
French Editors this issue:
Jacinthe Bercier and Line Nadeau

Please address all letters, comments and requests to: *Circles of Light,* DIAND, Communications Branch, Room 1901
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Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H4

Telephone: (819) 953-9349

Published under the authority of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Ottawa, 2000

QS-6145-004-BB-A1

www.inac.gc.ca

Printed on recycled paper

Uchucklesaht Forest Enterprises Creates Employment for Community

by Canadian Forest Service, Pacific Forestry Centre

There are few two-year-old companies that can claim to be one of their community's major employers. But since it was launched in 1997, Uchucklesaht Forest Enterprises has created jobs for almost every family on the reserve of 30 people. The company has had a significant impact on community economic development.

Located near Barkley Sound in British Columbia, the First Nation historically had little involvement in the forest industry. In 1997, a survey of forestry activities in the region reported that close to $1.7 billion worth of forest products had left the territory since 1925. The Uchucklesaht First Nation, however, received virtually no direct financial benefit from any commercial forestry activity.

Chief Councillor **Charlie Cootes** took the lead in seeking ways for the community to address this problem. So Uchucklesaht Forest Enterprises was launched to create jobs close to the reserve. At the same time, it created an opportunity for the First Nation to become stakeholders in the local forest industry.

The community approached the two major timber licence holders in the area, MacMillian Bloedel Ltd. and International Forest Products Ltd. (Interfor), to discuss potential opportunities for the Uchucklesaht to provide silviculture services. Both companies agreed to award some silviculture contracts to assist in the training and development of the First Nation crew. Natural Resources Canada's First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) also contributed to the Uchucklesaht training program, and provided funding for an experienced individual to meet with industry members to bid on and secure forest stewardship contracts.

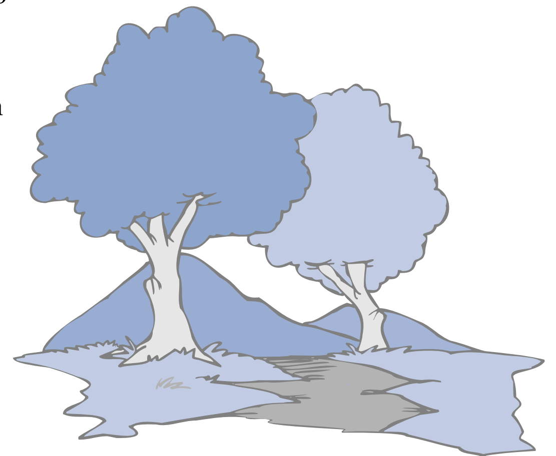
With FNFP support, the First Nation began a job training program for six crew members in 1997. The crew's first silviculture project involved two weeks of brushing for Interfor. MacMillan Bloedel followed with a contract for spacing and pruning. Both companies accessed Forest Renewal B.C. funds to carry out the silviculture activities in their area of operations.

"The goal of the training program funded by the FNFP was to provide six band members with silviculture training, so that the company always had at least a four-member crew to carry out contracts," says **Pat Deakin**, the First Nation's Special Projects Co-ordinator. Deakin's task was to develop a model for the community to build capacity in the forest sector. "During the first year of operations, the company exceeded this goal by creating training and employment opportunities for 10 people."

In the summer of 1997, the crew worked on a Ministry of Forests spacing contract, completing it on time and on budget, and making the company a profit. Deakin credits the crew's success in part to the decision to hire three non-Aboriginal professional tree spacers from Campbell River, regarded as among the best on the Coast. "They really provided mentorship, expertise and friendly competition for the Uchucklesaht crew," Deakin says.

"One of the band's long-term goals is to form a joint venture with another Nuu-chah-nulth community to secure an allocation of wood," says Deakin. "The company will also continue offering pre/post-harvest services to companies in the region."

Deakin's advice to other First Nations in British Columbia considering entering the silviculture field is to meet first with regional forestry companies, and the Ministry of Forests, to identify their needs. He also advises that they talk to as many other First Nations involved in the business as they can. ✷



Portrait

The Reluctant Millionaire

Steve King
Algonquin
President, King Konstruction and Forestry

by Fred Favel

I had a lot of battles through my life because of a lack of education. I only went to Grade 12...it was hard all alone doing paperwork. For sure, I'd stay in school longer. That's what I suggest to the younger generation today. If they want to go into any kind of business today, education is a must.

Steve King runs his business empire out of his white Chevy Silverado F1500 half-ton truck. With a two-way radio system and a cellular, he talks to home base at his garage or to his employees who are on 18-wheeler rigs, in the field running heavy-duty machinery, or on a construction site. This is no easy task considering the diversity of his operation, which includes logging trucks, but it's obvious that King relishes every minute of it. "Work" is one word that makes his face light up, and as far as he is concerned, no job is too big for him or his company. He is now the sole owner and president of King Konstruction and Forestry, based on the Timiskaming First Nation in Quebec, and worth an estimated $3 million. Not bad for a man who could not raise a $5,000 loan from the local bank for his first piece of equipment.

Photo credit: Fred Favel

Wearing his King Konstruction baseball hat, King drives through the reserve for which he has done so much. The homes and buildings that his company has constructed are a testimony to King's dedication and determination. They symbolize not just his success as an entrepreneur, but also his pride in the accomplishments of band members, who trained and apprenticed to build a thriving community. King is also proud of the fact that 90 percent of his employees are Aboriginal.

He was born in 1958 into a family whose dairy farm had the usual complement of cattle, pigs and chickens. His mother tended a large vegetable garden and the family sold their produce to residents of the reserve and the neighbouring Francophone community. "I guess this is where I picked up the incentive to work, the self-motivation to become what I am today. I do believe it had a big impact on me," King says.

He attended schools in Notre Dame du Nord: "Not one word of English", he says. "I loved math, numbers and stuff like that, and French — I did pretty good for an English-speaking person. I was one of the top in French." He also excelled at sports like hockey and baseball. King developed many friendships with his classmates, and became fluent in French, a skill that was to serve him well in later years.

After high school graduation in 1976, King joined a construction company as a labourer in road building, and moved on to become a machine operator, running a payloader which filled trucks with asphalt. After a few years in this position, he took a legal course at McGill University in Montreal and began working as a courtworker for the local Algonquin communities. "I dealt with criminal courts as a translator, finding lawyers, probation officers and explaining the judicial system to them, because a lot of Native people were going into the courts, pleading guilty and just going to jail. We wanted to stop that, and that's why I became a courtworker." During this period, King also spent several years as a band councillor. But after six years, he felt the need for "the fresh air," and went back to heavy-duty machinery as an occupation.

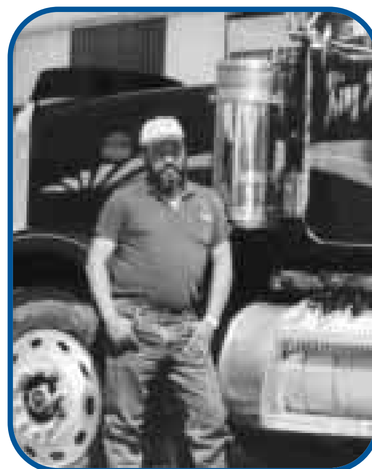


Photo credit: Fred Favel

While still a courtworker, King had wanted to purchase a backhoe using his salary as collateral. The backhoe was $15,000, and he needed a $5,000 loan. When he approached the local bank, his application was refused. "They said that they could not seize anything on-reserve and they could not get any guarantee." So, with some money from his father and what he had saved, King convinced the owner of the backhoe to trust him for the balance. He had the machine paid for in the first year. He contracted with the band for snow removal in the winter and digging basements and water lines, in addition to landscaping for the rest of the year. He used the backhoe as collateral for his next purchase — a truck to help in the landscaping, and so on. His purchases were always backed by full collateral based on the value of his assets. A few years later, the companies he dealt with began extending him credit, based on the growth of his enterprise and his reputation. From the 10-wheeler dump truck, and on to more trucks, snowplows, graders, bulldozers, loaders — the rest is history.

In the beginning, virtually all his work was in his own community. With the full support of the band, his company built the Timiskaming First Nation Band and Council Office, Seniors' Nursing Home and Kewetin School, plus 70 homes in the community. King Konstruction then added a forestry component and expanded into other First Nations communities. "I thought the trucks could do more, so we converted the existing gravel trucks into logging trucks. I bought trailers for the trucks and put fifth wheels on them to do logging for major companies in the area." The company also hauled heavy-duty equipment from site to site. Next, King Konstruction began building roads into the logging sites. To service his substantial inventory of trucks, bulldozers, and road-building equipment, King Konstruction now operates its own garage and gas station.

King's sister, Joanne, is the administrative backbone of the operation. She also trains people in the skills they need to run a small business. In the beginning, only about 40 percent of King's staff was Aboriginal. But as a result of band training programs, he was soon hiring and training more and more Aboriginal employees. "Now we're 90 percent Native...thanks to those programs and the training we provided ourselves."

One of King's current projects is a $1.2-million administration and health centre for a neighbouring First Nation. King Konstruction is also developing 21 lots for another First Nation community. He has been awarded many honours for his achievements, and is proudest of "Quebec Entrepeneur of the Year," which he received in 1998 from the Native Commercial Credit Corporation of Quebec.

At age 41, Steve King has both feet firmly on the ground. Asked how it feels to be a millionaire, he replies, "Being a millionaire doesn't really bother me. I mean, I don't feel like a millionaire and I don't think I will ever change. We're still working seven days a week mostly."

Fred Favel is an Aboriginal writer and communications consultant.