









Arts and Culture

Whether in the form of theatre, cinema, music, dance, painting, sculpture, fashion or crafts, Aboriginal people are asserting their culture, history and traditions. It is not surprising to see many artists in Aboriginal communities. Themes based on their roots and spirituality are often used.



Photo credit: Annabelle Dionne

Florent Vollant

Keeps Dreams Alive



Carving out a niche in the world of music demands a great deal of courage and relentless determination. Florent Vollant, an Innu singer-songwriter-composer from Maliotenam on Quebec's North Shore, knows all about it. He first achieved fame as a member of the duo Kashtin, and is now pursuing a solo career. He won a 2001 Juno Award in the Best Aboriginal Music of the Year category for his album *Nipaiamianan*. To say that Vollant loves music would be an understatement. For him, singing in Innu, his mother tongue, is not just a job, it is a way to live life and preserve his culture.

"When I succeed in making people dance, sing, dream or even cry, I feel that I've achieved something and that I serve a purpose" he said. At age five, Vollant was already fascinated by music, and as he grew up, it became an essential part of his life. "I didn't choose music, it chose me," he explained.

To make a living in the music business, as Florent Vollant has done for several years now, you not only have to like music, but also love it passionately. "I look at it as a vocation, because it's by no means an easy life and takes a lot of time and energy. But if you love music, it doesn't seem like work," he said.

In addition to relentless determination, aspiring musicians need a goodly amount of self-confidence. "It isn't always easy when self-doubt sets in. You need to be surrounded by good people who believe in what you are doing, sometimes more than you do yourself," he explained. Vollant believes his most valuable asset is the support of his family. "Without that, I don't know if one can overcome the obstacles of the music business—it's very difficult." As with everything, success depends not only on a combination of talent and technique, but also to a large extent on the effort put into it.

Florent Vollant divides his time between Maliotenam, where he has set up a recording studio to help young Aboriginal people follow in his footsteps, and Montreal, where he records his songs. When asked if having to leave his loved ones behind could have prevented him from practising his profession and fulfilling his passion for music, he said no without hesitation. "Once you've decided to do something, you have to do everything it takes to succeed." In his view, creating a beautiful song is worth any sacrifice.

What Florent Vollant loves most is creating a melody and conveying an emotion through his songs and music. "When you sing in a language people don't understand, your challenge is to reach them in another way besides through the words. The Innu language is well suited to song and melody. When I give people the impression, through my music, that they understand my songs, it's an extraordinary feeling."



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

Tammy Beauvais Designs

Young Mohawk designer is inspired by her grandmother

Tammy Beauvais, a young Mohawk designer, knew that starting a business would not be a ticket to the easy life. "You have to work hard to make a name for yourself," she explained.

Beauvais's name is attracting more attention these days as a result of the cashmere shawls she created for the wives of 34 heads of state attending the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. She made the shawls at the request of Aline Chrétien, wife of the Prime Minister of Canada. Beauvais has received many orders for her clothing since providing her services for this high-profile event. However, she knows that she is just starting out and that a great deal of work lies ahead.

When Beauvais launched her fashion design business Tammy Beauvais Designs in Kahnawake in January 1999, it was a childhood dream come true. Since age ten, she had wanted to follow in her grandmother's footsteps. Highly respected in the community, her grandmother made traditional clothing for children and adults. "My grandmother had a big influence on my work," said the young designer, who has created her own particular style by incorporating traditional Mohawk symbols into her designs.

In a short time, Beauvais has succeeded in creating her own niche in the fashion world. With the valuable help of her friend Marvin Delormier, her designs are now sold in more than 40 boutiques in Canada and the United States. "Marvin was a big help in finding stores interested in carrying my collection," Beauvais explained. "I find the rest of my business on the road, at pow-wows, conferences and trade shows."

For more information, visit the
Tammy Beauvais Designs Website at
www.tammybeauvais.com



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

Ash Pounding

A unique technique in Odanak



According to an Aboriginal legend, the Abenaki were born in an ash basket, an unusual way of saying that they have been making baskets for many generations. Ash pounding became a tradition in the Aboriginal community of Odanak near Trois-Rivières, where 10 people or so make ash baskets.



The Abenaki work in pairs and use axes to pound ash logs, which have been previously rounded at the ends to prevent the wood from splitting. They pound the logs at a meticulously co-ordinated rhythm. Then they delicately peel off layers of wood and separate them into thinner strips, which Abenaki craftspeople use to make baskets. But first the ash-pounders have to remove the rough outer layer of wood and allow the long ash strips they have peeled off to dry. Once dry, they are rolled up and sold to craftspeople, who use them for their creations.



"Ash is getting harder and harder to find," said Clément N'Sadoquos of the Odanak Band Council. This year, he had to look for ash in the Algonquin community of Kitigan Zibi near Maniwaki, north of Hull. Although the resource is becoming scarce, demand for it is not, which is why an ash tree-planting project is under way in Odanak. "However, we will have to wait about 15 years before we can use our own trees." In about 20 years, we can expect the Abenaki to be completely self-sufficient in the manufacture of these magnificent baskets.



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne



Tourism

Everywhere in the world these days, tourism is rapidly expanding. Tourism is a solid base for a country's economic, social and cultural development.

Aboriginal tourism, which has been developing over the past ten years, gives Aboriginal people a unique opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of their values.



Photo credit: Annabelle Dionne

Stepping Back Into the Past

Centre d'interprétation de Gespeg



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

The Centre d'interprétation de Gespeg is an ethno-tourism centre built as a replica of the Micmac way of life in 1675. The Centre opened in the summer of 1995 after training had been given to about 15 artisan guides. In just a few years, the number of visitors increased from 3,000 to 8,000 per year. The mainly European clientele is quickly captivated by the Aboriginal lifestyle, beliefs and customs of that period. Visitors are back to an era when Aboriginal people survived only on what they could find in the wild.

For food, the Micmac hunted moose, beaver and other large animals and fished for eel, smelt, salmon, sturgeon, alewife and Atlantic tomcod. They rounded out their diet with fruit, roots, leaves, shellfish and even bird's eggs.

The Micmac could make something practical out of almost anything. They used cedar bark to make rope and cattail leaves, birch and ash bark to make handcrafted baskets. Spruce roots were used to sew the bark together and pine gum to waterproof the baskets. Dishes and plates were made out of poplar, a soft, light wood that was easy to carry and very suited to a nomadic way of life. They also used bear fat to prevent germs from penetrating into wood. To entertain children, they made softballs out of deerskin using bone needles and deer sinew, then filled the balls with moose hair.

Since the Micmac were nomads at the time, they had to prepare a different site according to the time of year. Therefore, the interpretation site is divided into six different islands. Activities on the fall island focus on the first large-scale hunts and final preparations for winter. Here the Aboriginal people work hides and make hunting weapons, snowshoes and even toboggans. On the winter island, they prepare the necessary equipment for winter hunting and fishing. Activities on the spring island are devoted to maple syrup-making. On the summer island, they fish, produce handicrafts, gather fruit and grow tobacco. On the hunting island, visitors can see various types of traps and temporary camps used in that period. Lastly, as the name suggests, the general island features a variety of activities.

The Centre d'interprétation de Gespeg is open to visitors from June 15 to the end of September. For more information, call (418) 368-7449.

Aventure Mikuan II

Discover a Gentler Side of Nature

The word "mikuan" means "feather" in Innu. "Feathers are gentle and glide smoothly, like the adventure tours¹ offer people," explained Aventure Mikuan II President Gordon Moar. His tourism business, a member of the Quebec Aboriginal Tourism Corporation (STAQ), located in the Ashpamushuan Wildlife Reserve in Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, offers a different perspective on flora and fauna.

Tourists can go into the forest to look for medicinal plants, learn how to find their way in the forest with the help of the sun, trees, wind and lichen, recognize traplines, learn more about animals' living habits and observe beaver habitats. Also available are package tours in which participants learn techniques for tanning hides, sample the many flavours of traditional cuisine or see how traditional handicrafts are made.

Anyone wishing to stay more than a day in this enchanting world can sleep in a Montagnais tent, teepee or shaputuan. In earlier times, Aboriginal families would gather in the shaputuan to teach children tolerance, respect, friendship, love and understanding. Before tucking in for the night, you can sit comfortably around the fire and listen to Mr Moar tell Aboriginal stories and legends. The experience can only be described as fascinating and enchanting.

Aventure Mikuan II has been operating for ten years. Setting up this company enabled Gordon Moar to return to his roots and learn more about his culture and traditions. "People's needs are no longer the same and there are certain activities we used to do that we no longer practise today," he said. Gordon Moar also shows how his ancestors respected nature. "The land must be managed with respect and close attention paid to it. We hear about inexhaustible resources, but it's not true. The land is fragile and we have to take care of it."

Most of Moar's clients are Europeans. They are people looking for something different than the regular tours to Quebec. Moar's company employs as many as four guides and can thus accommodate larger groups.

In spring 2001, Mikuan II Adventure Tours received a citation of excellence for its overall product from the STAQ. Moar was given this award for the authenticity, quality, safety and cultural content of his product and for proficiency in his culture. In May 2002, Moar also received a special citation at the national Grands Prix du tourisme québécois awards gala for his role in preserving the environment and expanding knowledge of ecotourism.

If you yearn for adventure, be sure to bring your mosquito repellent.

1. A video about this company is available at the Quebec Regional Office of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

Aventure Mikuan II
Tel: (418) 275-2949
or (418) 679-6087
(At the sound of the beep,
press 33)
Fax: (418) 275-6691

Centre ethno-culturel Kanatha-Aki

A Place of Discovery and Repose



Does the idea of sleeping in a teepee appeal to you? Or discovering Aboriginal spirituality, building a dream-catcher or simply learning how to live in the woods? If they do, then the Centre ethno-culturel Kanatha-Aki, in the woods near Saint-Donat, 130 kilometres north of Montreal, is the ideal place for you. It is a reconstructed Aboriginal village, where you can take the time to live in harmony with nature.

During a visit to the site, former Algonquin Grand Chief Dominique Rankin took us to a healing circle, a site deemed sacred by Aboriginal people. Visitors are invited to meditate in a prayer to the cardinal points. The prayer to the East asks for light and the dawning of a new day with the rising sun, reminding us that we need to take time to live from day to day. The prayer to the South thanks Nature for creating and nurturing all living things. The prayer to the South also asks for respect between human beings and harmony between peoples. The prayer to the West, the direction of acceptance and repose, expresses thanks to Mother Earth. The prayer to the North asks for liberation and purity.

The Centre ethno-culturel Kanatha-Aki has won various awards, including a tourism innovation award in 1999 and a tourist attraction award in 2000. Since it opened, the Centre has already received over 2,000 visitors: 60% from Quebec and the rest from Europe. Rankin notes that "they are often people seeking to find themselves or to learn more about our culture and spirituality."

Dominique Rankin also provides canoe excursions on the lake. There is no more pleasant a way to observe nature in all its bounty. He stresses that "it is important to live in rhythm with nature and to feel part of the same environment as animals. It is also important to learn about where we came from, who we are and what is around us.

For more information,
visit the Centre ethno-culturel
Kanatha-Aki Website at
www.dominiquerankin.com
or call (819) 424-4411.

Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

Science and Technology

Aboriginal people are involved in many areas of science and technology. Scientific research, medicine, advanced technology and engineering quickly come to mind. Regardless of their areas of interest, Aboriginal people continue to incorporate their values into their activities and to enhance people's lives through their many achievements.



Photo credit: Scierie Opitciwan



Photo credit: Sylvain Vézina

La piste amérindienne

A Direct Link to the Aboriginal World

In just four years, La piste amérindienne has established itself as the foremost French-language Aboriginal Website. Groupe Cleary, an Aboriginal communications company founded 11 years ago in Wendake initially wanted to create a Website to introduce the new Internet technology to Aboriginal communities in Quebec.

All of Groupe Cleary's consultants have an in-depth knowledge of Aboriginal issues. In addition to providing a range of communications and multimedia services, the firm specializes primarily in employee training and development and program assessment. La piste amérindienne Website is a core part of its services. "We want La piste amérindienne to become a national reference tool on the Internet," said Dominic Cleary, Marketing and Development Manager and son of company founder Bernard Cleary.

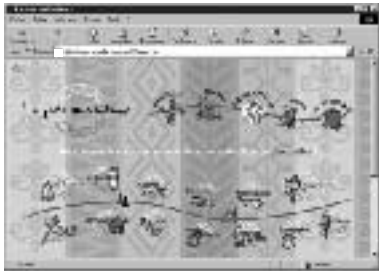
Every month, nearly 40,000 Web surfers visit this site providing information on the Aboriginal economy, tourism and culture. It is an effective way to keep up to date with news and events in the Aboriginal world. Currently La piste amérindienne has hyperlinks to 400 other Aboriginal sites in Quebec, including 20 created by Groupe Cleary itself. "Over the years, we have developed expertise in the new media sector. We can now design Internet sites for businesses and communities and produce CD-ROMs and other new technology products," Cleary explained.

La piste amérindienne also provides e-commerce opportunities. Visitors can purchase handicrafts made in various Aboriginal communities in Quebec. "Orders come from as far away as Europe," Cleary said. Aboriginal craftspeople can use the site to advertise their products, ranging from pottery to moccasins.

The site also enables Groupe Cleary to promote itself internationally. The company plans to sell CD-ROMs, books, Aboriginal recipes and even fur products on the site. The Internet has helped Groupe Cleary carry out its mission to stimulate and make First Nations economies prosper.

The firm also plans to set up other similar sites for Aboriginal communities in each province and territory. Dominic Cleary said, "We want to become the foremost Aboriginal reference source for all of Canada and perhaps even the world."

Not wishing to set a cap on the number of visitors to its site, Groupe Cleary set up The Native Trail, an English-language site. This English version of La piste amérindienne includes hyperlinks to over 800 other Aboriginal sites in Canada. Creating this site helped Groupe Cleary develop a solid reputation. According to Dominic Cleary "Today large companies come to us for our quality services."



Visit La piste amérindienne
Website at
www.autochtones.com
or The Native Trail
Website at
www.nativetrail.com

Stanley Vollant

Quebec Medical Association's First Aboriginal President

On April 21, 2001, Dr Stanley Vollant, originally from the Innu community of Betsiamites, was appointed President of the Quebec Medical Association. His mandate is to uphold the professional values of Quebec's physicians. The Association, representing 6,000 of the province's 14,000 physicians, including specialists, general practitioners, resident physicians and medical students, strives to maintain excellence in medical practice and takes a stand on important health-related issues. Dr Vollant is the first Aboriginal in North America to hold such a position.

Since 1994, Stanley Vollant has practised medicine at the Baie-Comeau regional hospital, where he heads the general surgery unit. One of his major concerns is the health of First Nations people. "Aboriginal people have specific problems and are entitled to specific solutions," he said, adding that he wants to raise government and public awareness of First Nations' health requirements.

When Dr Vollant talks about his profession, his eyes light up and show what he feels most passionate about. "Medicine is a great profession because it involves dedicating oneself to others. People are looking for physicians who will listen to them and show human compassion," he explained.

Dr Vollant believes that, first and foremost, good physicians must care about their patients, take their role in society seriously and demonstrate determination and professionalism. Determination, especially, means controlling certain fears. Vollant learned he had to acquire this ability if he wanted to become a doctor. He remembers what he had to do to overcome his fear of blood and dead bodies. He even admits to having fainted the first time he touched a cadaver. "I wanted to become a doctor, so I took steps to overcome this problem."

Dr Vollant sees life as an unending path strewn with obstacles that one must learn to overcome. "Obstacles help you grow," he explains. He maintains that this philosophy, in particular, helped him become a surgeon.

One of the things that inspires Dr Vollant is the life of his grandparents. "They would travel by canoe with their children and belongings on the Betsiamites River for over a month and a half to reach their hunting and fishing grounds. They had to deal with obstacles, such as portaging, crossing waterfalls and struggling for survival. If they had not gone through these hardships, I would not be here today."

Dr Vollant's unparalleled success in the medical field and his appointment as President of the Quebec Medical Association are the result of hard work and his ability to seize the opportunities life offers. He has clearly learned how to use obstacles as a springboard to success.



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne

MAKA Innovation Technologique inc.

A Fast Developing Start-up Company



Photo credits: Collaboration of Karic Roberge

Montreal-based MAKA Innovation Technologique inc. was founded in May 1999 with the objective of improving the aerodynamic performance of road vehicles. The new company's first invention was an aerodynamic air deflector, christened the BoatTail, which is installed on the backs of semi-trailers. The invention hit the market just at the right time.

MAKA's air deflector consists of four panels, which are installed on the back of the truck to form a 16-degree angle. The panels reduce turbulence at the rear of the vehicle and thus minimize the truck's aerodynamic resistance. In poor weather conditions, the air deflector improves visibility for drivers by reducing the amount of splashing. It also generates substantial fuel savings.

"Truck drivers travelling long distances can save about \$1 per hour, which amounts to a saving of over \$2,000 per year," explained Huron-Wendat entrepreneur Karic Roberge. Because it costs \$1,300 to install an air deflector on a semi-trailer, the savings are noticeable starting in the first year.

Starting a business definitely requires daring, resourcefulness, passion, a realistic outlook and unlimited perseverance. In addition to all that, young entrepreneurs Karic Roberge and Mathieu Boivin are not afraid of a challenge. "In the first year, we carried out research, developed the product and gathered the necessary funds to launch the business," recalled Roberge. "After obtaining our Canadian and American patents, we promoted our product to trailer manufacturers. Starting your own business is not an easy thing to do, but it was worth the trouble and we found the process very rewarding and motivating," Roberge said.

To build people's trust in their product, they conducted wind-tunnel and road tests at the National Research Council of Canada under the supervision of Kevin Cooper, one of North America's best-known aerodynamics researchers. Although it cost Roberge and Boivin \$60,000 to have these tests carried out at Canada's largest research centre, they forged ahead and made every effort to develop their product.

"These tests were invaluable," Roberge said. "They enabled us to measure the air deflector's aerodynamic performance and gather other technical data. The wind-tunnel tests helped us determine panel size and configuration and the angle at which they should be set to obtain optimum results." The road tests confirmed the two partners' assumptions and increased their optimism. "It's reassuring to know that the theory is reliable," Roberge said.

Because of the significant interest of grand enterprises, up to now, for its mass production, the invention has every chance of being a commercial success.

For more information about
MAKA Innovation
Technologique inc.,
visit the Website
www.makainnovation.com
or call (514) 384-3883.

Natural Resources

Many Aboriginal communities in Quebec are interested in developing natural resources. In the past ten years, Aboriginal people have become more involved in promoting these resources and want to share their know-how and knowledge in the areas of fishing, hunting, forestry and gathering.



Photo credit: Annabelle Dionne

Eagle Forest

An Exemple of Sound Land Management

Eagle Forest, a forest unlike any other in Quebec, consists mainly of white pine, red pine and deciduous trees. It is very close to the Algonquin community of Kitigan Zibi and provides Aboriginal people with profitable business opportunities in the forest industry.



Photos credits: Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg

Since 1996, Eagle Forest has been part of an inhabited-forest pilot project. Seven organizations comprising the Eagle Forest Management Corporation are jointly managing these lands. In addition to being committed to the Region's socio-economic development, the Corporation's members have adopted a mandate to practise integrated land management and develop forest resources. The lands are developed and managed by all Corporation members on a consensus basis. Eagle Forest provides the Kitigan Zibi Algonquin community with a unique opportunity to manage these lands according to its aspirations.

With their considerable forest industry expertise, the Algonquin have participated in various resource management activities in Eagle Forest. In addition to logging, they have built roads, bridges and an inn, and laid out over 100 km of forest trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, horseback-riding and even dog-sledding. Their participation and vision encourage other Corporation members to look for better methods of harvesting the forest on an ongoing basis.

Forest activities have created close to 20 jobs in the community and generated nearly \$2.5 million in annual spinoffs. All of the profit is reinvested to improve the forest. The Kitigan Zibi Aboriginal community is also expressing interest in ecotourism. Within the next two years, various types of infrastructure are expected to be built to highlight the Aboriginal heritage of Eagle Forest. This experiment shows that it is possible to work in partnership and that small actions can help achieve great things.

Boat Captain's Life

is in Tune With the Tides

Before becoming a boat captain, Gérard Ross, an Innu from Essipit, had already seen a lot in life. From a very young age, he knew what the word responsibility meant. At age 15, Ross worked as a lumberjack for a forest products company to help support his family. At age 18, he was driving bulldozers and fulfilling a childhood dream. Although he seemed headed for the forest industry, he decided to drop everything and go into rock crab fishing.

"In 1980, I bought a lobster boat in New Brunswick and converted it for crab fishing. It was an old boat that leaked constantly," recalled the man who risked everything for fishing. "I didn't know a thing about fishing, but I learned."

Ross and his wife put countless hours and effort into the boat. They would get up at two o'clock in the morning to prepare the boat for fishing, check the weather, get the bait ready and make sure they had all the fishermen they needed. Captain Ross thought of only one thing: supporting his family. A father of two children, he felt a great responsibility on his shoulders. He refused to be discouraged by the cold, ice floes, storms and wind, and began to see the results of his perseverance after three years. "Thanks to electronic radar equipment, which makes fishing a great deal easier, we now know exactly where to go to get fish and where the best spots are," Ross explained.

When crab fishing begins in early April or as soon as temperatures climb above 15°C (so that the crab do not freeze), Ross and his fishing crew are out on the St. Lawrence river fishing. Captain Ross has always made respect for the sea a guiding principle. When the northeast wind reaches 75 or 80 km/h and the waves are too high, he does not go out to sea because it is too risky. Sometimes careless fishermen fail to follow this principle and put their lives at risk. "It's better to play safe," Ross said.

Gérard Ross, together with five other crab fishermen and Les Pêcheries Manicouagan, owns a plant, Les Crabiers du Nord, in Sainte-Anne-de-Portneuf, which sells all of the harvested fish. Although the United States accounts for the biggest share of the snow crab market, the market also includes Japan. However, crab bought by the Japanese must be perfect without any brown spots. Ross has even travelled to Japan in search of new markets proof that a captain's life no longer has limitations.



Photo credits: Annabelle Dionne
with collaboration of M. Gérard Ross

Northern Delights

Inuit Teas Preserve Tradition

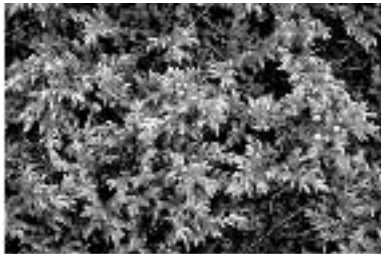


Photo credits: Avataq Cultural Institute

Inuit teas marketed under the Northern Delights brand are a remarkable achievement for the Avataq Cultural Institute. The Inuit elders of Nunavik, concerned about preserving their language, culture and heritage, were the inspiration behind the Institute when it was founded in 1980. Today, the Institute is considered an international reference centre for Inuit culture.

In 1998, Institute President Robert Watt came up with the idea of launching a company to market Inuit products. The new company would have to find sources of financing for the Institute and promote Inuit culture internationally. Familiar with the tea-drinking habits of the Inuit, the Institute carried out research on medicinal plants and set up a project to market herbal teas incorporating the benefits of five plants found on the tundra.

The project is a first in Canada. "This is the first time the Inuit have used their native flora to launch a commercial product," noted Project Manager Bruno Pilozzi. "Because only a few elderly Inuit know the traditional methods for using plants and still make use of them today, this knowledge must be preserved before it disappears with them."

"Tea bags are easier to brew than plants in their natural state," Pilozzi explained. With Northern Delights herbal teas, Inuit can at last fully appreciate their heritage. So far, the teas have been very well received. Many Inuit said the teas brought back fond memories of their childhood.

Between July and September, across the vast wilderness of Nunavik, Inuit are busy hand-picking the plants used to make the herbal teas. "We don't want to retard the growth of the plants in any way, so we are careful to leave their roots securely in the ground so that we are guaranteed an unlimited renewable resource," Watt explained. After the plants have been harvested and dried, they are shipped to Montreal, where they undergo routine processing before being packaged in individual tea bags.

"Northern Delights Inuit herbal teas could generate significant economic spinoffs for the Avataq Cultural Institute and the region," said Suzanne Beaubien, the Institute's Director of Finance. Until now, all of the plants used to make the teas have been picked in the Kuujjuaq area. Four other Inuit communities have offered to participate in the business. "We plan to invest the profits from the business in other activities in order to meet the Institute's objectives and provide cultural services for the Nunavik population," Beaubien explained.

For additional information,
visit the Avataq Cultural
Institute Website at:
www.avataq.qc.ca