



Building Aboriginal Economies

Morgan Green — OASIS

Greening First Nations Homes

by Karen Flanagan McCarthy

Morgan Green has made a business of advising First Nations on healthy and environment-friendly community development.

The Six Nations member, who has a degree in environmental studies and is trained in architectural drafting and design, started Onkwehonwene Anishinabek Sustainable Integrated Systems (OASIS) in 2000. The company works with First Nations to develop sustainable environmental management systems and build affordable, healthy housing.

“There are three problems common to many remote communities: the high cost of heating and electricity, poor indoor air quality and unplanned community development. I look for ways to provide solutions to these problems.”

He completed his first major project a year ago in Eagle Lake, Ont., an Ojibway community. “As a pilot project, we built a highly energy-efficient 3-bedroom bungalow, complete with its own



Photo Credit: Grant Morrison

Morgan Green of OASIS works with First Nations to build affordable, healthy housing.

micro-utility unit,” Morgan explains. Morgan describes the Eco-Nomad unit, created by Architectural and Community Planning Inc., as key to his healthy house design. “The unit stores and purifies rain-water or lake water for use in the house,” he

says. “Sewage treatment and management takes place inside the container and cleaned non-potable recycled water is used to flush toilets. It’s fantastic.” The size of a shipping container, the unit includes a solar panel, a small wind generator and a solar, hot-water heating panel.

OASIS has environmental management projects underway in two other Ontario First Nations: Pikangikum and Sheshegwaning.

Part of what OASIS does is provide training for people in the communities in which he

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Construction

Aboriginal entrepreneurs are building strong companies in the construction sector. As these companies grow, surrounding communities are seeing greater opportunities for job creation and training, better housing and infrastructure, and improved quality of life.

Visit our Aboriginal success stories database at www.ainc-inac.gc.ca (Click on “News Room”).

Mohawk Rock Manufacturing 'Native Stone' Stacks Up

by Richard Landis

Perseverance and innovation is paying off for Six Nations of the Grand River member **David Smith Sr.** and his Mohawk Rock Manufacturing company. It's a business David brought much experience to.

Originally the owner of a construction company, David noticed companies producing man-made stone in the U.S. and believed there was a Canadian market for a home-grown product.

David conducted his own feasibility studies and, in 1991, he and his wife **Wilma** founded Mohawk Rock Manufacturing. The *Native Stone* the company produces looks and feels like the real thing, and has become a hit with contractors, builders and installers across North America.

To manufacture *Native Stone*, David takes samples from a variety of Canada's breathtaking rock formations. A mixture of cement, slag and iron oxide pigment is then poured into moulds cast from the stone samples. The result is an exact, lightweight replica of nature's beauty.

The Smiths are optimistic about *Native Stone's* future. Mohawk Rock now has distributors and dealers throughout central and southern Ontario. Its products are available in the U.S. and Japan.

Nine First Nation members are on the company's payroll. And revenue continues to grow — sales tripled in 2001.

But success hasn't been quick or easy. "It isn't like we stumbled on a goldmine. Canadian trades are often reluctant to accept new products and techniques. Man-made rock was not an easy sell. We've had to go out and make people aware that it's a sound, durable material," he says.

There's a note of pride in David's voice as he says, "We'd like to be an example of the economic growth that's



Above is an example of a Native Stone facade.



possible with on-reserve businesses. And, like all things that matter, you have to put all your effort into making it a success."

For more information, call 519-445-4766, or visit www.mohawkrock.com *

"Morgan Green — OASIS"

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works. "My primary focus is to get First Nations people doing things on their own.

"We have the talent, capability and indigenous knowledge to become self-sufficient. Sustainable development is not a foreign concept for us. A big part of my job is explaining how we can do this, in terms everyone understands."

It's a job he does well, according to **Clarence Panamick**, of the Sheshegwaning First Nation. "He's helped us develop

our community's economy, in an environmentally-responsible and sustainable way," says Clarence.

"I love travelling to all these different communities, helping protect the environment, and helping First Nations. This isn't a job. It's a dream come true," muses Morgan.

For more information on OASIS, call 519-752-3836. *

First Nations Projects Take Shape

by Raymond Lawrence

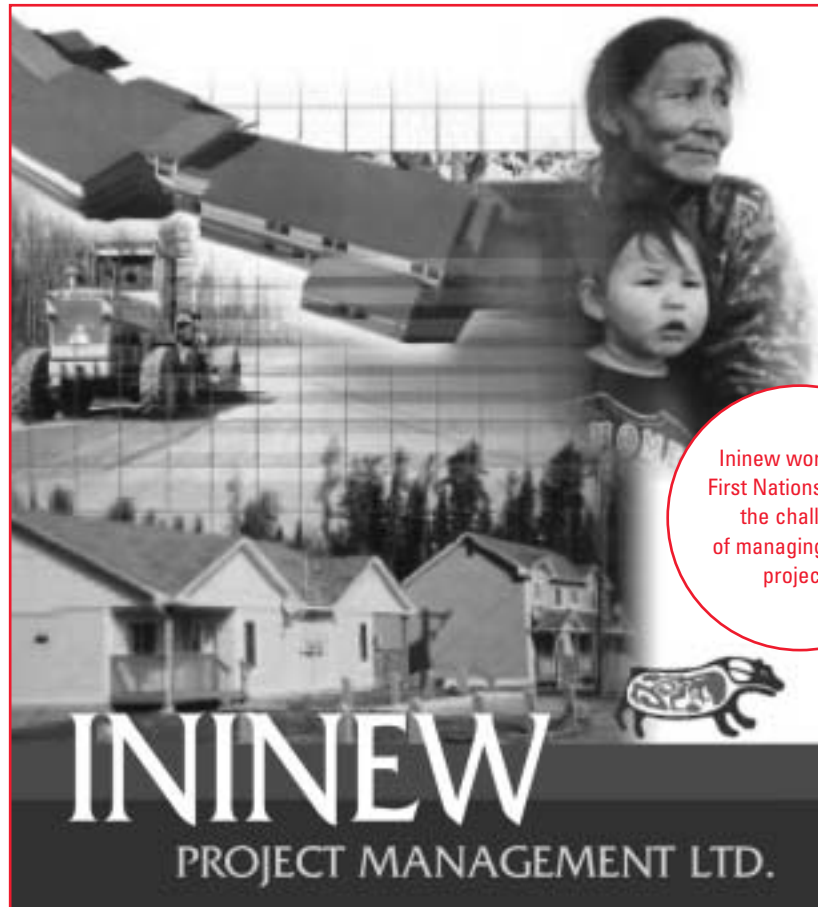
For First Nations with development plans, Ininew is fast becoming a one-stop shop to get project ideas up and running — from conception right through to the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The company handles everything from infrastructure, housing, commercial, institutional and industrial building, to economic development and environmental works.

The Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Chemawawin Cree Nation, and the Mosakahiken Cree Nation own 92.5 per cent of the Manitoba-based engineering firm. This past year alone, Ininew has four schools under development, as well as teachers' residences, 120 houses, sewer and water treatment facilities, health centres, a hotel, and a number of other design, environmental and construction projects.

"Ininew's expertise lies in the abilities of its engineers, architects, technologists and administrators," says **Jack Braun**, Ininew President. Ininew staff design, build and manage First Nations development endeavors. "Community development plans, feasibility studies, and funding sourcing and application enhance our services," says Jack.

"Because funding applications require a lot of technical information, we provide that and do the request for funding at the same time," he says. In many cases they conduct feasibility studies, such as in the development of new schools, and that information provides the groundwork for the projects.

Since its founding in 1990, Ininew has gone beyond the boundaries of a typical engineering firm, providing more than backup technical information with drawings and site plans. Ininew basically takes on entire projects, managing them through to completion. One of the keys to their



Ininew works with First Nations to meet the challenge of managing capital projects.

work is knowing the rules and regulations that surround the various sorts of work and developments. "You have to be aware of the whole process, not just the engineering aspect of the work. What we did was take it all on so that we have more control over the work we do." Other First Nations organizations, including Tribal Councils, are taking this approach.

"We're pursuing the construction management field where we act as a general contractor on behalf of the First Nations. Rather than tendering projects out, we assemble the existing expertise in the communities," he says. This allows local people to further develop skills, keeps capital from flowing out of First Nations

communities, and provides for additional employment opportunities.

Ininew serves clients in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario and, in the future, will provide services to the Nisga'a in British Columbia under a partnership agreement. The company employs about 16 people on a full-time basis and half are First Nations people. It also pools together people on a contractual basis. Last year alone, it provided employment for more than 80 people and is actively involved in training and skills development programs, including apprenticeship programs.

For more information, visit www.ininew.com *

Log Homes in Great Demand

by Edwinna von Baeyer

While Eagle's Nest Log Industries is solving a housing shortage at home, it's also drawing customers from far and wide.

The log home company is a joint venture involving the Cooks Ferry, Coldwater, Siska and Nooaitch Indian Bands. Located in the B.C. interior, the company has successfully attracted interest from clients locally and from the U.S.

The First Nations decided to form the company because, according to Nooaitch Band Administrator and Eagle's Nest board member **James Fountain**, there was "a lot of interest from members who wanted log homes." With many First Nations members on a waiting list for new housing, the company's efforts have resulted in the housing shortage declining and job opportunities increasing.

Although Eagle's Nest offers stock plans, James notes that, "clients usually provide the design and the floor plan. So, we mainly do custom work."

Eagle's Nest is particular about the building materials it uses. High quality Douglas fir, spruce, lodgepole pine, green fir, and cedar are its main building materials. Although the Nooaitch Indian Band has access to trees from a harvesting agreement with the government and from its woodlot, it trades and buys logs from local sawmills to obtain just the right materials.

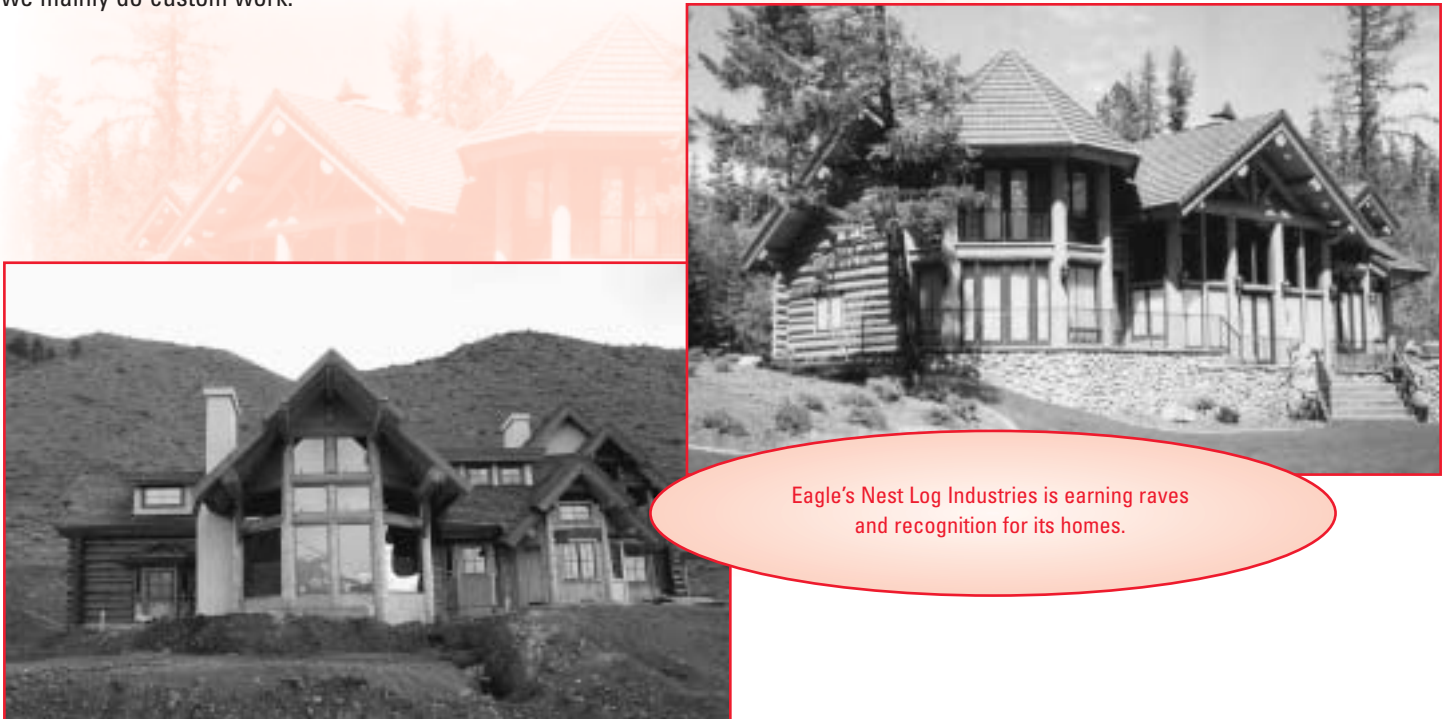
After Eagle's Nest Industries builds a log home, it ships the disassembled house materials as a package to the client. Often, the company helps local contractors reassemble the house.

The company usually builds two big projects and up to six smaller ones per year, and employs between five and nine people. In the First Nations communities, the company lays the house foundations, builds the log home shells, and contracts out the plumbing, electrical,

and other work. Nooaitch Indian Band hopes to establish their own construction company so that, in the future, it can do all the work involved. As well, the Band is hoping to develop the Eagle's Nest Log Industries site into an industrial park to attract business to the area.

What else is in Eagle's Nest Log Industries future? In autumn 2002, the company will travel with Canada Mortgage and Housing Company (CMHC) officials to participate in a "matching" session in Austria. There the company will be paired with potential clients. In January 2003, Eagle's Nest will participate in BAU 2003 — an international construction industry trade fair in Germany that draws 1,824 exhibitors from 42 countries, and almost 200,000 visitors.

For more information, contact 250-378-6148 or visit www.eaglesnestloghomes.com *



Eagle's Nest Log Industries is earning raves and recognition for its homes.

Company Branching Out, Growing

by Tara Lee Wittchen

Mikisew Energy Services Group (MESG) is making its mark.

"We've got one of the busiest communities for industrial-type construction and one of the strongest economies," says **Charles Iggulden**, MESG president and CEO. MESG is 100 percent owned by the Mikisew Cree First Nation, a remote community north of Fort McMurray, Alta.

MESG includes three companies — 2000 Plus Limited Partnership, MM Limited Partnership and MSD Limited Partnership. They were formed to provide economic opportunities for the First Nation and to give members employment and skill development opportunities. Almost 50 percent of the employees are Aboriginal, and most of them are from the Mikisew Cree First Nation.

"Originally, when we started, we were just supplying labour," Charles says. "Then we started building houses." As they grew, they started doing heavy-machinery work, civil road construction, carpentry, facility construction and plant maintenance.

MESG now does about \$10- to \$15 million worth of business a year.

In addition to its financial achievements, MESG has other strengths.



MESG's construction arm has developed a strong business.

"We were the first Aboriginal company to receive the 'One Million Hours No Lost Time' award from Syncrude Canada Ltd.," Charles says. MESG also had the best safety record and lowest number of employees missing in action of all the contractors at Syncrude, an energy company.

MESG has operated out of Fort McMurray for several years and acquired its own yard and shop in 2002.

"We're in the process of hiring a full-time human resources manager, and part of their duty will be to identify band members who don't qualify for jobs and to work with them to get pre-employment and life-skills training. It's a little bit of a different role from a typical HR manager — half of the work will be outreach."

The outreach strategy presents career options to First Nations students and encourages them to stay in school.



MESG strives to offer viable employment options to First Nation members and a realistic means of realizing education and career-related goals.

"Since we're owned by the band, it's one of our mandates to return back to the band, and it's not always cash that you return back," says Charles. "It's sometimes skills or the abilities to make changes."

To find out more, call Mikisew Energy Services Group at 780-791-1660. ★

Tara Lee Wittchen is a writer and editor of Ojibway and European heritage.

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Housing Firm Expands Reach

by Raymond Lawrence

By specializing its services and expanding its client base, Yukon's Han Construction is thriving.

In the early 1990s, the economic development arm of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation created Han Housing, a business they later developed into a successful contracting company for residential and commercial carpentry work. "We started out only building houses for the First Nation. But now, as a limited company, we bid on contracts like any other construction firm," says Han Construction General Manager **John Mitchell**.

"We have standing offer services agreements with the federal and Yukon governments, and we bid on homes and commercial developments," says John. The standing offers included single family dwellings, used by government employees, and commercial properties that house government offices. They also had their service agreement expanded to include

the local air-tanker and air-attack facilities for fire-fighting. "We won the contract to build the air tanker base and then we had our contract extended to take over the repairs and maintenance on it. It was a natural progression as the federal government has been quite happy with our work — so they kept us on."

Before it could enter the mainstream market, the company had two major First Nation projects to complete. One was the \$1.6-million Tr'ondek Hwech'in Cultural Centre and the second was the First Nation's administration office, a project worth more than \$2.5 million. Last year, about 70 percent of their work included a combination of private, commercial and government jobs.

While about 12 people are involved with the business year-round, it employs between 25 to 30 people in the summer. On average, 50 to 75 percent of the employees are First Nations people. "We try to keep

permanent people on all the time and we have an active apprenticeship program. During the winter lull, we arrange it so our apprentices go out and do the in-class part of their apprenticeship," says John. "We supply them with a guaranteed job and guaranteed wage level. In our case, our apprentices are usually ahead of the rest of the territory in getting their required hours."

While it was difficult to break free of the perception of being a First Nation-only company, through hard work and attention to detail it has established itself in its field and has gained considerable recognition. The company does renovation work, carpentry, and has its own, successful cabinet-making shop that produces hutches, desks, and office furniture.

For more information, contact Han Construction at 867-993-5220. ★

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



This home and duplex were built by Han Construction.



Sawmill Project Spurs Construction

by Diane Koven

Fort William First Nation is really building on the success of a new industrial park and sawmill.

Plans were announced in November 2001 for the construction of a \$14-million industrial park on Fort William First Nation lands, close to Thunder Bay, Ont. A major part of the project is the construction of the Bowater sawmill, to be built and leased by the First Nation to Bowater Pulp and Paper Canada Inc.

Work began at the end of 2001 as the site was cleared and readied for construction. "All site development was negotiated by Fort William First Nation," said **Marvin Pelletier**, Project Manager. "This has created jobs for First Nation people and gives us experience. The actual construction started at the beginning of March."

A second partnership, between general contractor Tom Jones Construction and Fort William First Nation, has allowed many First Nation members to learn trades and

find employment. "We have been involved with the site preparation and ground work," said **Michael Pelletier**, Band Manager. "We have heavy machinery such as backhoes and bulldozers and we have the rock and stone needed for the project. Because this is a big job, it has enabled us to purchase more machinery which we will have for future jobs."

Other contractors working on the site have hired First Nation members as well. "Approximately 30 members are working for other trades, such as electrical and other site work. A couple of our people are working and earning their hours towards their apprenticeships," said Michael. "This has also presented an opportunity to our entrepreneurial members. About a dozen trucks owned by individual members are working on this project as well."

The creation of jobs is one of the tangible benefits of this project. In addition to the construction work, there will be jobs in the sawmill and related areas such as transportation, on-reserve fuel sales

and restaurants when it is completed. "We have about 90 people training now for the sawmill," said Michael, "so that when it is ready, they will be able to get jobs there. We are using our own funds to provide training through Confederation College so that our own people will have a better chance to get the jobs."

This project is expected to attract other businesses to the new industrial park and to further enhance the economic climate in the region.

"Construction has given us a shot in the arm," said Michael. "We used to have only eight to ten people in construction; now we have nearly 30. We now have more assets, more folks working, more opportunities for entrepreneurs who are working on their own. This will lead to more construction jobs in the future."

For more information, contact the Fort William First Nation at 807-623-9543. *

Photo Credit: Paul Proulx



Gary Thompson is a worker on the Bowater construction project.

Growing Company for Growing Community

by Hélène Katz

A growing community and list of projects are keeping Tawich Construction Inc. busy.

Created in 1990, it's owned by the Cree Nation of Wemindji, Que. "Sometimes we've got so much work in the community that we don't have time to bid on outside projects," says **Earl Danyluk**, acting Director General. Tawich does residential and commercial construction and renovations. Projects have included building community halls, a mini-mall and a police station. "We're putting in drainage, paving sidewalks and next year we will do landscaping and tree planting," Earl says.

"We're continually developing new subdivisions and roads," he adds. "We usually build between seven and eight new houses a year." They also have a lot of renovation jobs. Most of the community's houses are more than 20 years old, so repairs are ongoing. Extensions are being built onto existing homes to accommodate bigger families.

Construction season runs from April to November. During the summer, the company employs about 60 people as machine operators, truck drivers,

labourers, carpenters, electricians and plumbers. Ninety percent of its staff are First Nations people.

Tawich Construction works outside of Wemindji as well. The company will be involved in constructing 70 km of highway in the James Bay area, including tree-clearing bush work. They also have a 10-man bush crew ready to head to Eastmain to work at the EM-1 and EM-1A Hydro-Quebec construction project.

Over the last few years, Tawich Construction developed its own training programs for truck drivers and heavy equipment operators. Carpenters are trained on the job with expert teachers. "All of our 60 employees are trained by us," Earl says. That's a change from when local First Nations people had to go to trade schools in southern Quebec.

The growth of Tawich Construction is good in other ways as well. Projects create employment for other sectors

such as catering, housekeeping, kitchen help, janitors and security in construction camps.

Building roads, dams and dikes is a new field for Tawich that will create new opportunities. "People are going to get experience from that and maybe go on their own, starting their own company," Earl says. "Some people are already buying trucks to haul gravel, to offer security and personnel. Those kinds of spin-off opportunities are out there."

They're opportunities Earl wants to offer to the community's next generation. He goes into the local secondary school on career day to encourage students to finish high school and go on to become engineers.

He wants students to reach their full potential and to realize what opportunities are out there for them.

For more information, contact 819-978-0264. ✨



Tawich does residential and commercial construction.