



Cree Communicator

News of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band

December 2007



Left: "Christmas orange, Santa?"

Above: Three-year-old Desmond Charles gives the big – er, little? – guy a close inspection.

Right: Executive secretary Ruth Thompson offers rice pudding with northern flair: blueberries.

'Tis the season for joy and feasting... and Santa Claus, of course!

Farewell and Godspeed, Senator

On Nov. 28, after a long illness, Senator James Miles Venne breathed his last breath, leaving behind a legacy of love, deep faith and dedicated service to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

Senator's death at the age of 89 leaves a hole in the hearts of many, starting with his wife of 63 years, Mary Venne, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, his sisters and brothers, his nieces and nephews and other extended family. Throughout his long life, Senator's charm, wit, intelligence and compassion also earned him many friends.

Those same character traits – combined with a fierce commitment to the welfare and advancement of his people and a deep trust in God – also earned him the respect of many. Senator was committed to ensuring that the Lac La Ronge Indian Band could serve its people in all areas, independent of government funding or the whims of other outside agencies.

He was first elected as chief in 1971 and served in that capacity until 1983, and then again from 1985 to 1987. In that time, the band started on the path toward economic self-sufficiency, with the establishment of its business arm, Kitsaki Development Corporation (now Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership) and its first company, Northern Resource Trucking. It also took control of many services previously run by federal departments, including education. Senator made numerous trips to Ottawa to lobby for the band to be allowed to run its own education system, and to ensure that every LLRIB community had its own school – one of which, on La Ronge's Far Reserve, was named after him. Senator was also closely involved in the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1980, and travelled at one point to London, England, to meet with British officials.

After leaving the office of chief, Senator continued to serve in an advisory capacity, both for the band council and for all the First Nations in Saskatchewan. In 1989, he was appointed as a senator for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and to the band's council of elders. He has been an ongoing source of strength, insight and good humor for both the elected leadership of the band, and the many people who have come to know and love him.

Senator also leaves behind a legacy of love for the land – he was for many years a fishing guide and a trapper on his own trapline – and for God and His people. He came to faith as a young man, and served for many years as a lay reader in the All Saints Anglican Church – the same church in which he was confirmed in 1937, and married in 1944. He was encouraged to pursue ordination, and was eventually ordained as a deacon in 1988, and as a priest in 1989, serving as priest assistant to Bishop Charlie Arthurson. He was named Archdeacon Paul Canon of St. Alban's Cathedral in 1994. He also served a term on the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples in Toronto.

Finally, any remembrance of Senator Venne would not be complete without a mention of his two most constant loves: his wife Mary, and the National Hockey League's Montreal Canadiens. He was often seen sporting a Canadiens hat, and, just a week before his death, he was delighted to meet former Canadiens goalie and now Liberal Member of Parliament Ken Dryden, when Dryden and fellow MP Tina Keeper visited La Ronge.

Senator Venne was laid to rest on Dec. 1 at All Saints Anglican cemetery, following a private family service. A public funeral at the Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Centre on Far Reserve earlier in the day drew hundreds of mourners and well-wishers, including business



Senator Miles Venne, 1918-2007

leaders and federal, provincial and First Nations politicians from across the country.

God speed you to your rest, Senator. You will be forever missed.





**Elder Catherine Charles,
for the council of elders**

(This message was translated from Cree by Grace Cook, Gift of Language and Culture Project.)

I would like to thank the chief and council for everything, and say Merry Christmas to all the people from the Lac La Ronge Indian Band communities – La Ronge, Sucker River, Hall Lake, Grandmother's Bay, Little Red and Stanley Mission. I'm also thinking about all the elders, and Merry Christmas to all of them. I hope they have a good Christmas. Let's all have a peaceful and safe Christmas, so that nobody will get hurt. I'm also thinking about all of the people we have lost, like the senator. And when we are eating together, we feel sadness sitting around the table when there is someone missing. But I thank God for everything.



Councillor John Halkett – Little Red River

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

The rebirth of the gravel business. We had one here a few years back, but it went bankrupt. And then our new administrator Ray McKenzie started it up again. We purchased a gravel screener, and we've been doing work in the surrounding area – the RM of Paddockwood and other places. We've also been putting gravel on our main roads and our bad driveways. We had a Class 1A truck driver training course, and one of those students was hired to work with the gravel business. We continue to prioritize our housing. We also started a water bottling business – for now that's just local, we haven't done a lot of advertising. We're working on community development.

What are your hopes and wishes for this coming year?

Hopefully more housing! More housing, more training.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

I'd like to wish everyone a very happy new year.

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

We've worked on several projects with our neighbours in La Ronge and Air Ronge, including the new fire hall, plans for a new tourist information centre, and the regional water system. We've lobbied for years for some areas on our reserves to get running water, and one past councillor was told "never in your lifetime", but it's finally been achieved. Also, natural gas is finally going ahead. Our wellness gathering in spring was a success, and we are planning another event, because people are asking for one. People want more healing. Politically, we have been working on the Little Red timber claim and we are making progress. The federal government has finally agreed to deal with the issue, and we are having ongoing meetings with their representatives. The residential school cheques are out, and so far everyone seems to be making wise choices about what to do with the money. Hopefully they'll get good gifts and have a good Christmas.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

We wish you all a joyous Christmas, and a prosperous new year. We are looking forward to 2008, with many events already planned: a New Year's Eve dance, the 'Wreak Creation' hockey tournament (Feb. 8-10), our winter festival (Feb. 15-21), an education conference (Feb. 19-21), a winter fun weekend (Feb. 22-24), a youth conference and a healing event. May you all enjoy this festive season with your family and friends. God bless you all.



Councillors Pam Mirasty, Doris Morin, Jimmy Roberts and Hillary Cook – La Ronge

**Message
from the
Chief**



Tansi to all Lac La Ronge Band members and friends. As another year comes to a close, I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide this brief report. We are sad to announce the passing of Senator Miles Venne, who passed away on Nov. 28, 2007. We celebrated his remarkable life with his family and friends on Dec. 1. We will all miss him dearly.

On Dec. 6, the community of Stanley Mission honored Elder Peter Roberts, who decided to retire after four decades of service, first as a band councillor, and then a member of the council of elders. Thank you, Elder Peter.

As your chief and council, we are pleased that survivors from our community have been finally receiving their settlement payments from the residential schools settlement. On Dec. 12, together with other members of the Prince Albert Grand Council, we presented Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Grand Chief Phil Fontaine with a starblanket to thank him for the years that he has put in to reach this historical settlement. National Chief Fontaine accepted the gift with words of thanks to the people from British Columbia who first brought the issue forward over 17 years ago. He also

thanked all the people who have contributed to this historic event – the biggest settlement in Canadian history – but most importantly he expressed his appreciation to all the survivors.

There are a significant number of LLRIB members, along with many other survivors from the North, who attended the Timber Bay School. Unfortunately, the federal government has not validated this school as an Indian Residential School, and therefore students that attended are not eligible to receive the Common Experience Payment (CEP). Section 12 of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, entitled 'Additional Residential Schools', outlines the process for a 'Request to Add Institution'. The process provides for a 60-day period of research before the Timber Bay School can be considered for classification as a residential school.

I initiated this process in October of this year. We received a response from the federal government in a letter dated Nov. 19, 2007. At that time, Canada acknowledged receipt of the LLRIB's formal request and informed us that its research unit has initiated the investigation, but that it would require an additional 60 days to complete their report. On Dec. 13, I met in Ottawa with Gina Wilson, Assistant Deputy Minister to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, to further advocate for recognition of Timber Bay School as a residential school. We also proposed to assist with the research process, in order to ensure that all the information is there when a decision is made. We will continue to provide updates to the LLRIB as we receive more information.

Congratulations to the new Government of Saskatchewan, Premier Brad Wall and the Saskatchewan Party. Recently, I spoke to the new premier, to congratulate him and his party, and to initiate discussions and dialogue with the new provincial government on the issues and concerns of the LLRIB. The premier has assured me that his party is committed to meet with us in the near future to discuss the issues that are facing our band. We also want to congratulate Cumberland MLA Joan Beatty on her successful re-election.

On October 10, I met with the Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Strahl, in Saskatoon. We discussed areas of importance to the LLRIB. The new Minister is committed to working with us to ensure progress is made on these issues. He has also committed to meet in La Ronge with our council and the people of our community.

As the Christmas and New Year's holidays approach, let us reflect on the blessings that we have received in the past year. I encourage each and every one of you to spend time with your families this season. Celebrate this holiday season not only with presents, but also with laughter and togetherness.

On behalf of our membership, elders, council and staff of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, I would like to wish each of you a very joyous Christmas and a hope-filled new year. Remember what a gift our families are to us, and never forget that Christmas is a celebration of God's gift to us – His own Son.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year everyone.

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson



Councillor Brian Hardlotte – Stanley Mission

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

First of all, education – I think everything went smoothly in the schools in terms of educating our children, getting them ready for the outside world – so thank you to our teachers and overall the education system. Same with the health. A good thing that happened is getting more nurses in place, and that’s thanks to the head nurse that’s there right now. And also the care that’s been provided by the community support services – I think the elders are getting good care. Another very good thing is the elders’ shelter. The people there are very comfortable. There’s people there from La Ronge and other communities, not just Stanley Mission. The other thing is student employment - we’ve been able to hire a lot of students. And I’m especially proud of the Junior Ranger program that we had this past summer. It was a great success.

In terms of other projects, with our highways protest we did on the National Day of Action in June, that resulted in work with Saskatchewan Highways. We had a contract to work with Highways on brushcutting and clearing the roads, and we had another contract with SaskPower to clear the power lines on the highway. And the government committed to upgrade the road in the summer of 2008; they’ll add more gravel, and put calcium on all of the road, not just the turns, as a way of controlling the dust.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

I’d just like to wish the communities a very merry Christmas, not just Stanley Mission but La Ronge band as a whole. Have a safe and happy New Year, and stay cool.



Councillor Kenny Ratt – Sucker River

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us in Sucker River.

Councillor Leon Charles – Grandmother’s Bay

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

The year 2007 for Grandmother’s Bay has been pretty busy. The poker rally we had in 2007, we had over 600 hands sold. The youth canoe trip we had in July for six days – we flew out and we paddled home on the Paul River. The new arena – January 18, 2008 is the official opening, so that’s exciting. What’s unique about it is the whole building is fabric-made. It’s done – the indoor rink was just built in early December, so it’s flooded now. The work started in the first week of November and it’s completed. Lots of positive things for the youth to do, and we just need help again from the parents. There’s also been a lot of employment. Increased numbers of jobs – I go out and look for economic opportunities for the people that want to work, such as the Golden Band Resources underground mineral exploration project north of Grandmother’s Bay – they need heavy equipment operators clearing trees off sites, and carpenters, setting up the camp. And also I got a contract with Highways to brushcut the highway into Grandmother’s Bay, and SaskPower recently sent us a purchase order for some work to do.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

I always say to my staff, Christmas time is for family, and for spending with your kids – play with them, enjoy them. Make your kids happy, make your family members happy. And then come New Year’s Eve, that’s when adults go out and do what they want to do. On New Year’s Eve it’s your turn, but be safe, enjoy yourself. In 2008, I’d like to see the band continuing to work with outside businesses and building partnerships with them, and creating more opportunities for our people.



Councillor Leonard Halkett – Hall Lake

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

The Sally Ross School grad basically was probably the best thing that’s ever happened, for me anyways, in this community. Parents actually got to see their children graduate. Not only in my heart but in my mind, I see education as so very important for our community. They don’t have to leave home now to get an education. If they leave the community, they experience culture shock. A lot of them come back home without finishing school. Also, my father was a councillor for the band for 16 years. Basically he started this community and he never asked for anything in recognition of that fact, so it seemed very appropriate that the high school wing was named after him.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

My hopes and dreams for the band membership are that they have a prosperous new year, and have a safe holiday. Also, a safety tip: before you go to bed, unplug your Christmas trees. The majority of fatal house fires during the holidays occur in the wee hours.



Councillor Keith Mirasty – Little Red River

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from Little Red River.



Councillor Lester Roberts – Stanley Mission

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

There’s not one particular thing, there’s a lot of things. Over all, I’m happy with what happened in 2007. Our water and sewer expansion, our increased housing, and Dad’s retirement party were some of the best things about the year.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

I’d like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Councillor Bernice Roberts – Stanley Mission

What was the best thing about 2007 for your community?

We’ve had so many ‘best things.’ The lieutenant-governor came to our community twice (once for the re-dedication of sacred objects from Holy Trinity Anglican Church that had been removed for repair by Saskatchewan Environment, and once as part of the Lieutenant Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum). Also elder Peter Roberts’ retirement party – I’d like to thank everyone who came out for that. It’s been another successful year for the community of Stanley Mission. Our administration is strong, housing is improving, the sewage lagoon is complete, the gas bar is open – we did all that this year. It was a really busy year.

What would you like to say to the band membership this holiday season?

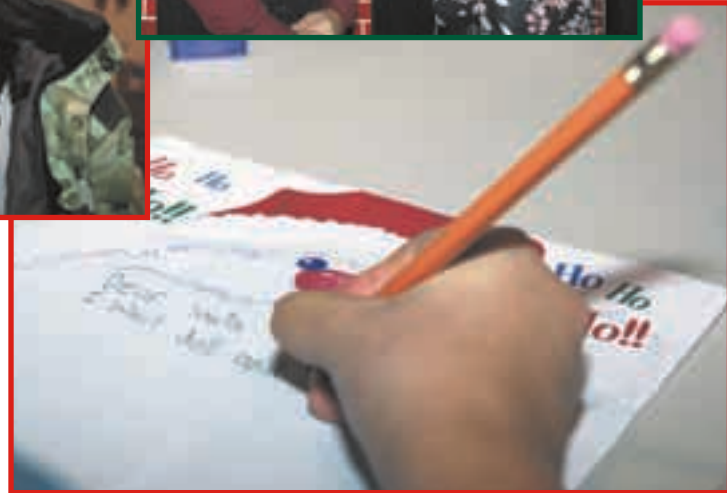
I would like to extend a sincere thank you to the membership and the staff of Stanley Mission. And also I’d like to wish families a happy holiday season, and a healthy and prosperous new year.



Christmas moments at the JRMCC



Clockwise from top left: Counc. Hillary Cook (right) awaits another plate needing a scoop of cranberry sauce at the community feast; Snow wouldn't melt in her hands – or would it?; Chief Tammy Cook-Searson invites Elder Henry Roberts to bless the meal; "I swear, I've been a good girl all year!"; A sparring demo by the local tae kwon do martial arts group.



Elder Peter Roberts says goodbye to politics

After more than 40 years in band politics, 31 of them as an honoured member of the LLRIB's council of elders, Peter Roberts has capped off his career in style.

On Dec. 6, the community of Stanley Mission hosted what Roberts' son (and current band councillor) Lester hopes will become a tradition for those who have provided a great service to the band: a retirement party.

"There's a lot of people who don't get the recognition they deserve," Lester Roberts said. "By the time anyone tries to do anything on behalf of these people that have been there for many, many years, providing service not only to their own communities but also to their other communities, they're gone. So it was good that it was done. A lot of people deserve it, and a lot of people don't get to see it."

The event, held at the community hall, came complete with a feast, speeches by fellow

politicians, family members and friends, jokes about Elder Peter's musical tastes, and enough gifts to re-furnish his entire living room.

Trappers from Brabant Lake snared all the game needed for huge pots of rabbit soup, and community members from Stanley prepared the turkey, ham, potatoes, bannock and all the other trimmings, and served them to a large crowd of guests from the area and neighbouring communities.

Gordon Hardlotte served as the master of ceremonies, and personal reflections and acknowledgements of elder Peter's many years of service were shared by fellow elder Catherine Charles, former chiefs Tom McKenzie and Harry Cook, the band councillors for Grandmother's Bay, La Ronge and Stanley Mission, and other friends. Hardlotte also read a letter sent in recognition of elder Peter's retirement by Harry Aschennbrenner, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's former funding officer for the northern district.

Elder Peter also received many gifts, including a lounging chair, a plasma TV, a dining room set, several shirts, and two beautiful handmade quilts, one of which was embroidered with his name. Former chief Cook and his wife Rose presented elder Peter with several gifts from their recent trip to Jerusalem.

The celebrations wrapped up with two square dancing demonstrations – one by a group from the elementary school and the other made up of high schoolers – performed in elder Peter's honour.

"It's really hard for me (to see him retire) because I started travelling with him in 1989, when I first got in as a councillor," Lester Roberts said afterwards. "Trips then were very short, because the minute he gets into a vehicle he'll start talking, eh? ... Their (elders') stories

never end. They've got so many stories to tell... You can never hear enough of what they tell you."

"That's the only hard part for me (about his retirement) – I'll no longer have him on my side, in the vehicle," he said.

Looking back over their shared years, in politics and as father and son, Lester recalled numerous lessons he's learned from Peter – first and foremost, to take care of people, and to work hand-in-hand with everyone.

"Don't get angry. They're going to be there regardless – work with everybody, no matter who they are, what colour they are," Lester said. "And it's always nice to work with somebody from the outside. You work with everyone – that's the key to everything. Communication – you've got to be able to communicate, with your staff, with whomever you have to work with. If you give nothing, nothing will ever return."

Below: Elder Roberts, wrapped in a gift blanket, accepts a congratulatory kiss from Counc. Doris Morin.



Above: Peter Roberts listens to a speech by his son Lester.



Left: Kids gleefully await their first bite of the retirement party cake.



Learn a Cree Word



English word:
Christmas

makosīkīsikāw

ᓄᓐᓕᓕᓐᓂᓐ

Translation and illustration supplied by the Gift of Language and Culture Project.