



Cree Communicator

News of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band

October 2006



A provincial operating license for the special needs group home on Far Reserve is welcome news for clients and staff. The six-month license is the first such granted to an on-reserve group home in Saskatchewan, and will enable the health department to access more operational and training dollars to keep the facility running effectively.

Group home funding stabilized by licensing agreement

The special needs group home on Far Reserve has become the first such facility on a Saskatchewan reserve to be licensed by the provincial government, giving it new access to federal operational dollars. The new license took effect Oct. 1.

Earlier this year, the Wawutewikumik (or “Northern Lights”) group home, which provides 24-hour care for physically and/or mentally disabled young people, was caught up in a disagreement between Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Community Living Division of Saskatchewan’s Department of Community Resources and Employment (DCRE).

In most Saskatchewan communities, DCRE licenses and supervises group homes; on-reserve across Canada, INAC provides funding to support the care of handicapped First Nations people, but will supply only a basic amount of money to group homes that are unlicensed. INAC and DCRE disagree about who should supervise and license on-reserve group homes, and as of April 1, INAC stopped funding unlicensed facilities, including Wawutewikumik.

Fortunately for the staff and clients of the group home, which can house as many as eight full-time clients and two respite clients at a time, the band was able to find program dollars

to fund the facility on a short-term, limited basis. In the meantime, health director Mary Carlson and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson stepped up their own lobbying efforts, and finally convinced DCRE to give the band a six-month license – the first such license in Saskatchewan. The licensing will be reviewed next April, and if it is approved, a full one-year license (the standard for Saskatchewan group homes) will be granted.

In order to get the initial license, the band had to agree to meet several criteria, including getting an external fire safety inspection and an external health inspection done, making sure the facility’s policy manual is up to par, hiring a certified manager, and finding an agency other than the health department to monitor the facility and investigate any complaints. This last criteria will be met by the band’s Social Development department and Indian Child and Family Services (ICFS), since DCRE’s Community Living Division – which would normally fill the role – will not come on-reserve, but outside supervision is mandatory under the terms of the license, Carlson said.

“You need to have in place supports, so that if there is an allegation of (for example) an employee striking a client, restraining a client, tying them down, denying them food, anything like that, you’re not investigating yourself,” she said.

Now that Wawutewikumik is licensed, the facility will be able to hire more staff, pay for certification training for existing workers and acquire a higher-quality handi-van, said group home supervisor Caroline Merasty. “There was nothing we could do (after the funding was cut) – just wait and wait,” Merasty said.

The license – and the resulting funding from INAC – will also offer a new level of stability for the group home, Carlson said. With this financial support, “we can actually afford to continue to deliver a service. Prior to that, we were looking at closing down, because (with) the money you would receive (as an unlicensed facility) to provide the service, you couldn’t provide the certified health care workers or your own independent building... You’d be getting enough money to feed (clients) and take them to doctors’ appointments, and that’s it.”

To the band’s credit, the facility did continue operating during tough financial times, and that’s because the service was recognized as being important for the clients and their families.

“Most of these children in here can’t live at home,” Carlson said. “Their health care needs are too great to be provided by a family member. They require 24-hour assistance... They’ll never live independently.”



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LLRIB flag raised in Pinehouse

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National chief visits Little Red River

Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Phil Fontaine paid a visit to Little Red River on Sept. 16, taking the opportunity to connect with band members from Lac La Ronge and Montreal Lake.

After attending the National Aboriginal Firefighting Competition in Prince Albert, Grand Chief Fontaine travelled with Chief Tammy Cook-Searson and La Ronge councillors Doris Morin and Hillary Cook to Little Red, where they were treated to a huge feast at the "White Hall" on LLRIB's side of the reserve.

Despite the steady rain, approximately 40 people came out to welcome the officials and share in the meal, which included dried meat soup, rabbit soup, fried and baked pickerel, fried moose meat and plenty of desserts. After the meal, Chief Cook-Searson gave the grand chief an overview of the band's six communities and its business enterprises, and the councillors – including the afternoon's hosts, John Halkett and Keith Mirasty – also made welcoming comments.

The visit to Little Red gave the grand chief his first chance to visit a LLRIB community since his re-election to the office in July. It was also

an opportunity to re-connect with Chief Cook-Searson, who played a key role in that re-election, after being asked to serve as Chief Fontaine's official nominator. The grand chief was re-elected with 75.66% of the vote.

"She did a wonderful job of presenting me before the chiefs of Canada," Chief Fontaine said. "It was such a wonderful contrast, listening to the competition with all kinds of bombast... and (then) this woman comes up on stage and starts talking in her language. It made such an incredible impact."

During the visit, the grand chief spoke about issues of concern to northern First Nations. These included the reluctance of the current federal Conservative government to implement the Kelowna Accord; a symposium (slated for next January) aimed at developing an "economic blueprint" to help First Nations create wealth; opportunities for First Nations to participate in the major industrial development projects (including hydro, pipelines, tarsands and diamond mines) that are planned within traditional First Nations territories; and concerns about negative remarks made about the Churchill River riding by former MP Jeremy Harrison, who is now an assistant to current Minister of Indian Affairs Jim Prentice.

The grand chief and Assembly of First Nations lawyer Ken Young also spent a lot of time addressing the residential school settlement deal. Chief Fontaine spoke of the deal with pride, calling it "fair and just," and thanking First Nations people for the support given to the AFN in putting together the deal with the federal government.

Young then gave an overview of the deal, touching on the common experience payments, the rationale behind the advance payments for elders, the dispute resolution mechanism, specifics for abuse claims, the truth and reconciliation commission, community commemoration activities, the future role of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the legal process required for full implementation of the deal.

After addressing other issues, the grand chief spoke again about the residential school deal, giving more detail on filing claims for physical and sexual abuse and psychological harm, and pointing out that such claims for compensation can be filed in addition to the common experience payments – it's not an "either/or."

He also pointed out that the surplus from the settlement package will go to a trust for educational programs, but the specifics on that have yet to be worked out. Whatever happens with it, though, "it will be survivors' money; it'll be for First Nations programs and services," he said.



AFN Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson chat over lunch at Little Red River's "White Hall" on Sept. 16. (Photo by Ron Merasty)

La Ronge youth still waiting for new centre

The planning team for La Ronge's new youth centre have a name for their new facility. They have a location for it, too. What they don't yet have is a solution to the bureaucratic "red tape".

The facility, known as Tawow Youth Centre, has been in the planning stages for approximately two years. Ownership of a metal-roofed building near the Brown St. entrance to La Ronge, across from the Shell gas station and Home Hardware, has been transferred from Kitsaki Management (which had used for retail purposes) to the band's recreation department. The interior renovation work is nearly complete.

The committee's original plan was to open the doors in the spring or summer of 2006, but that didn't happen. "Everything was on track... and then it got to town council's table," and there it stalled, said Counc. Jimmy Roberts, chair of the planning committee. "For us to be at a standstill, it's made people wonder, why are we waiting so long to open the doors?"

The exact problem is unclear, but it seems to be related to zoning issues, combined with a concern about duplication of services for youth. In early October, however, both La Ronge mayor Joe Hordyski (who is currently running for re-election) and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson expressed a willingness to re-visit the issue later this fall, and Roberts is hopeful that those discussions could result in the youth centre finally becoming a reality.

If it does, Roberts sees great potential for the youth centre to become an alternative "hang-out" to the Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Centre, which is a long trek for kids who live off-reserve or on Kitsaki reserve. He would also like the youth centre to be a place where kids can play a leadership role, from designing the logo to establishing guidelines for what age groups can use the facility at what times, what behaviours are not acceptable and the like.

While these rules would be enforced by paid staff – perhaps including the band's soon-to-be-hired community crime prevention worker –

the kids themselves would have a hand in setting the direction the facility takes.

The youth would also have a hand in the programs and services offered at the youth centre. With input from student council members at Churchill High School and Senator Myles Venne School, the committee has bounced around several ideas, including an area for jamming or recording music, a multimedia projector for showing movies, pool tables, ping-pong tables, board games and crafts.

Most importantly, an effectively-run youth centre could also help reduce the amount of youth crime resulting from boredom or frustration. For this reason, the La Ronge RCMP have been supportive of the project from the beginning, Roberts said

"If youth can find a place where they can socialize and do more productive things, rather than turning to those bad choices (like graffiti and vandalism)... hopefully it would reduce some of those (crime) numbers."

Fires force evacuation of three communities

Black days in July

Nine days of separation. Nine days of fear. Nine days of courage, persistence and dedication to a cause. Nine days of fire – and in the end, everyone and everything except four trappers' cabins, and vast numbers of trees, survived.

On June 30, the first of the flames were spotted along Hwy. 2, and on July 8, the buses and vans carrying thousands of evacuees home finally drove into Grandmother's Bay, Stanley Mission, Sucker River, and (in the case of those removed from their homes for medical reasons) La Ronge and Hall Lake.

Over the course of those nine days, members of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band were put to the test – a “trial by fire,” if you will – and came out stronger for it. In the three affected band communities along the Hwy. 102 corridor, local firefighters (some of whom received training that week) joined Saskatchewan Environment crews in fighting back the flames.

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson established a state of emergency in Stanley Mission on July 2, which resulted in the majority of the remaining residents heading south. By that point, Grandmother's Bay and Sucker River had already largely emptied out. While some individuals stayed behind in the three communities to provide reports to the band leadership, prepare meals for the fire crews and keep homes safe, others assisted in the evacuation efforts by driving vehicles down to La Ronge and Saskatoon, providing counselling and medical care, and keeping the evacuation way-station at the Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Centre (JRMCC) on Far Reserve running like clockwork.

The chief, band councillors and members of the management team each took on important roles, as did countless staff and volunteers. The leadership also worked closely with the emergency management team led by Saskatchewan Environment, attending and contributing to twice-daily briefings, and drafting news releases that kept the band membership, the media, the emergency operations centre team and residents of La Ronge and the surrounding resort areas informed.

The JRMCC, normally the band's recreation centre, arena and community hall for the La Ronge area, was converted into an evacuation centre. In addition to registering more than 2,300 evacuees – both band members and other highway corridor residents from as far north as Wollaston Lake, Southend and Missinipe – and arranging their transportation to larger centres down south, the JRMCC also served literally thousands of sandwiches, drinks and hot meals over the course of 10 days. Volunteer security workers kept a close watch on the building, and hundreds of people spent at least one night on cots or in sleeping bags.

Staff from the band-owned La Ronge Motor Hotel also put in a valiant effort, as many of the hotel rooms became temporary housing for evacuated elders. The hotel also served an nightly buffet meal for their unexpected guests.

While councillors Lester Roberts and Brian Hardlotte of Stanley Mission and Kenny Ratt of Sucker River stayed in their communities to assist with the local efforts, Thompson Charles of Grandmother's Bay headed south mid-week

to take some of the workload off the shoulders of Bernice Roberts, who was in Saskatoon on unrelated business already when the fire situation erupted in her home community of Stanley Mission. Together with community health staff from Stanley and volunteers from the Red Cross and provincial agencies, Charles and Roberts provided information, reassurance and assistance to hundreds of evacuees, who were staying in temporary accommodations at the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Soccer Centre. Other evacuees stayed with friends and family in La Ronge, Prince Albert and other locations.

By July 8, rainshowers and the valiant efforts of the firefighters had cooled the flames down enough that Chief Cook-Searson lifted the state of emergency and the evacuees were able to return home. Many lessons were learned during the week-and-a-half, and some of that new information will be incorporated into community emergency planning; a meeting to discuss the plans for the Hwy. 102 communities is scheduled for early November.

Thank you

The Lac La Ronge Indian Band would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all who helped out during the forest fires that threatened our communities along Hwy. 102, June 30 to July 8. So many people reached out to help during this ordeal that it is impossible to name every name.

Thank you first off to our band members who persevered through the community-wide evacuations of Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay and Sucker River, and the medical emergency evacuations of Hall Lake and La Ronge. I am so proud of you, and grateful to you, for your generosity, your compassion, your composure in this stressful situation and most of all your patience.

Thank you to our firefighters for your incredible efforts in dealing with the fires, and thank you to our community watch people – our “eyes and ears”, who keep us up-to-date with first-hand information about the situation in each of our evacuated communities. We deeply appreciate your bravery.

Thank you to our volunteers and staff for your work in assisting with the evacuation and all the tasks involved – registration, meals, recreation, communication, health care, counselling and more. You did an extraordinary job in transforming the Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Centre into an evacuation centre for the entire region, and you did it for nine straight days, helping over 2,300 people in that period of time.

Thank you to the Department of Community Resources and Employment, the Red Cross and all of our own staff and volunteers who arranged accommodations, helped with shopping, entertained the children and generally helped our evacuees in Saskatoon. Your efforts to provide a calm, supportive atmosphere were greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the roadblock volunteers, who kept traffic into the fire zone to safe and manageable levels. We are grateful for your perseverance.

Thank you to the fire management centre and the inter-agency emergency management team in La Ronge. We appreciated the co-operation and communication through meetings and twice-daily briefings.

Finally, thank you to everyone who lent a hand to mop a floor, comfort a child, prepare a plate of food, fill out a form, shelter a friend or family member, or help out in any other way. We could not have accomplished any of this without you.

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson



A smoky haze darkens the skies. More photos page 12.

Leon Charles returns to council

Grandmother's Bay has replaced its band councillor with a familiar face.

After Thompson Charles' mid-summer resignation from council, the community of Grandmother's Bay held a by-election on Aug. 30.

The polls at the community hall closed at 6 p.m., after nine hours, with 138 of the 195 eligible voters having cast ballots. Former councillor Leon Charles, who had decided not to run in the 2005 general election, won back his old job with 76 per cent of the votes. Clifford McKenzie also made a bid for the position.

"I'm really amazed by the people and how they voted, in terms of how many votes I got," Charles said. "It gives me a clear message that they want me to be their leader."

Prior to the 2005 election, Charles had served for six years on council before deciding to take some time off. During that break, he spent several months working as a guide with Churchill River Canoe Outfitters in Missinipe, and also worked as an administrative assistant with the Social Development department in Grandmother's Bay.

While he had already been approached by several band members about running for council again in the next election, it was the forest fire situation in early July that convinced Charles that he truly had a desire to return to the task of leadership.

Right from the beginning of the crisis, Charles found himself naturally taking charge, starting with getting the firefighting equipment ready, then assisting with organizing the community

evacuation and providing regular updates on the fire situation.

"It gave me a direction," Charles said of the role he played during the crisis. "People wanted me to run... and (after the fires) I told them whenever it comes, I'll put my name on the ballot."

Charles was officially sworn in on Sept. 11 by local elder John P. McKenzie and Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) legal counsel Victoria Elliott-Erickson. The ceremony, which included both the swearing-in and expressions of appreciation for former councillor Thompson Charles, drew a large crowd to the Grandmother's Bay community hall.

Amongst those in attendance were a large percentage of Grandmother's Bay residents and other band members, as well as Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, several of Charles' fellow band councillors, and a group of invited dignitaries, including Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Chief Alphonse Bird and Vice-Chiefs Lawrence Joseph and Delbert Wapass, PAGC Vice-Chief Ed Henderson, and local MP Gary Merasty.

Thompson Charles, who withdrew from council to focus on his family's needs after a series of tragedies, was thanked heartily for his time of service, and a family member accepted several gifts on his behalf.

Although he may be "recycled," as Vice-Chief Joseph jokingly put it, Charles is confident that he can bring a fresh burst of energy and vision to the position. Since starting back on Aug. 31, he has been working on updating the community members on Grandmother's Bay's financial position, and he is eager to continue



Leon Charles has been re-elected as Grandmother's Bay band councillor, following a by-election.

building new homes on the reserve. He would also like to see where the community can go in terms of economic development and job creation, with an eco-tourism camp – perhaps in partnership with his former employer, Ric Driediger of Churchill River Canoe Outfitters – as the top idea on his list.

"Creating jobs is the key for community members," he said. "Right now, if they're on social assistance, they can't get anywhere, and if they were to have good jobs, it would help them make positive changes in their lives."

As for his own new job, Charles couldn't be happier. "I got up really early Tuesday morning (after the election)," he said. "I couldn't wait to go back to work."

Hall Lake, Grandmother's Bay urge Justice minister to expand policing services

More cops, please

The "boys in blue" aren't seen all that often in Hall Lake and Grandmother's Bay, but not because there is no crime in either community.

The relatively small populations of both reserves mean that less policing services are available for the two communities than for their larger neighbours. In fact, one RCMP officer – hired through the Community Tripartite Agreement signed by the band, the RCMP and the province – serves both Sucker River and Hall Lake, but works out of the CTA detachment office near La Ronge, at least an hour's drive from Hall Lake. Grandmother's Bay, for its part, receives policing services from the Stanley Mission detachment, an hour south. The major issue: response times.

"They do provide good service to us, it's just that for us it's not adequate," said Hall Lake councillor Leonard Halkett. "Any incident can turn really serious in a matter of seconds, and when that happens, myself and the security guard – we're the ones that have to try and defuse things. We're certainly not paid to do that. I don't get paid to put my life on the line."

On Oct. 6, some progress was finally made on this longstanding issue, during a meeting in Regina between Halkett, Grandmother's Bay councillor Leon Charles and the provincial Justice minister, Maynard Sonntag. Chief Tammy Cook-Searson and executive director Russ Mirasty also attended the meeting.

"He called us a squeaky wheel," laughed Counc. Halkett, who has met with Justice officials numerous times over the last three years to discuss policing concerns. "That's the thing – once you get on their backs, you've got to stay on; otherwise, they'll brush you off."

Fortunately, this time, Minister Sonntag decided to give the wheel some grease, asking the LLRIB delegation to provide him with a proposal outlining their desired solutions to the policing problem. "To us, that's a good indicator that they're actually going to look at (a solution)," Halkett said.

"It sounded really good when we were done, that something was going to happen," agreed Counc. Charles.

Before a proposal is put to the minister, both Charles and Halkett want to explore their options. One possibility is to offer special constable training to band members, so they can take the course and then provide some basic police protection to

their home communities without having to leave the reserve.

Even if that happens, however, Cst. Halkett would still like to see a CTA detachment established in Hall Lake. Despite the community's status as a dry reserve, a lot of alcohol still comes in, and drug trafficking is also a serious concern. A greater police presence is needed to control both problems.



The community of Hall Lake expressed its gratitude to RCMP Cst. Jason Sauve, who was recently transferred out of the North, for his excellent service, during graduation ceremonies June 15. Left to right: Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, La Ronge RCMP S/Sgt. Kirk Munro, Cst. Sauve, Counc. Leonard Halkett. "He was really into his job," said Counc. Halkett. "He responded as much as he could, and also he was very involved with the (RCMP) cadets. He was a people's person. I'm really sad to see him go." (Photo by Jim Searson)

Sucker River marks treaty day at last



After cancelling the event in May to focus on a community-wide search for a missing boy, Sucker River finally celebrated its 2006 treaty day, with a feast, canoe races, children's games and the traditional \$5 per person cash payments.

On July 20, Counc. Kenny Ratt was joined in the Sucker River community hall by Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, executive director Russ Mirasty, and Indian Affairs representative Marlene Panes. Each of the officials shook hands with each of the treaty payment recipients and passed a \$5 bill down the line until it was officially given to the recipient by RCMP Cst. Wayne Wagner.

During the treaty payments, community health nurses checked blood pressure (complete with a squeezable model heart to show the risks of clogged arteries) and glucose levels, and provided information on healthy portion sizes, while other staff handed out information about the risks of tobacco, solvent sniffing and gambling.

After the treaty payments were done, community members and the visiting officials shared a feast of burgers, soup, pickerel, fried potatoes, mashed potatoes and bannock.

A community canoe race had hearts racing and blood pumping hard as five teams of canoeists paddled vigorously down the river, starting just before the old bridge and around under the new bridge and back. The race was won by Basil Ratt and Sally McKenzie, with Chief Cook-Searson and Russ Mirasty coming in second.

There was also a relay race, made up of paddling, biking, swimming and running events. The competition – attempted by just two teams – was won by Frank McKenzie, James Roberts, Ruby McKenzie, Sally McKenzie and Basil Ratt.



Band members of all ages – from babies to elders – took part in the treaty day events in Sucker River, which were held July 20 after being re-scheduled due to a tragic drowning in the spring. After lining up to receive the traditional payments (and, in some cases, getting their blood pressure and glucose levels checked), community members enjoyed an outdoor lunch, and several athletic competitions, including a canoe race and a relay race.



Nothin' but blue skies for new Jeannie Bird Clinic

Even the weather seemed to agree that the grand opening of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band's newest clinic was a celebration worthy of its best.

"My mother must be proud up there," Tina Ratt told the crowd gathered July 21 under a clear blue sky outside the band's new Jeannie Bird Health Clinic on Fairchild Reserve, which is named for Ratt's late mother. "Now (with the naming) her grandchildren and great-grandchildren will remember her."

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson praised Bird's dedication to the health and well-being of band members over her 17 years as a community health representative, and the continuation of that level of commitment by the current staff, led by health director Mary Carlson. With the grand opening of the new facility coming less than two weeks after the forest fire evacuations, the chief praised the health clinic staff for the key role they played in providing first aid and organizational support at the evacuation centre.

"When a crisis hits our community, everybody pulls together," the chief said. "That's the only way we can get through the tough times."

"Pulling together" was also a theme in the establishment of the clinic. It took a year-and-a-half of hard work to transform a swamp just off Hwy. 2 into a solid piece of land with a fine new building, housing the band's health administration, community health, home care, mental health, prevention and recovery, health education and community development programs, water quality monitoring services and a brand-new dental therapy program.

"We solved a lot of problems, and the last year and a half has been very enjoyable," said Johnathan Cox of Genesis Architecture and Engineering, who worked closely with Health Canada and the project team to get the facility up and running for the health staff's official move-in on March 29. Cox praised Carlson for "testing and challenging us," and expressed his hope that the facility would be a catalyst for improved health services.

For her part, Carlson expressed gratitude to her planning team, project manager Ravi Prakash and RNF Construction. She also singled out director of facilities Lewis Layton for his expertise and guidance with the design decisions, and for his and his staff's help in preparing the ground and being available to help in times of crisis during the construction; Cox for his patience and understanding (and doughnuts for the meetings); PA Photocopiers

for their help in selecting data systems and furniture; Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (who sent two reps to the grand opening), for being flexible in allowing the band to build a facility that meets the band's needs rather than simply following a set FNIHB model; and the health department staff and management for their patience and support.

Carlson also stressed that the new building would not have become a reality without the persistence of former executive director Doug McLeod. "Due to Mr. McLeod's persistence and future-oriented thinking, we have this facility today," Carlson said.

In lieu of artwork or other gifts, some of the guests at the grand opening complied with Carlson's requests that - now that this facility is done - they consider a cash contribution to the health department's next project: an elders' care facility for La Ronge. One of the cash contributors was the Prince Albert Grand Council, who sent Ernest Sauve from their Health and Social Development department to say a few words.

"We know that the health of our communities is not on par (with non-First Nations communities)... and we know that there are a lot of demands on our health services, so to see a facility like this gives us a big boost," Sauve said.

Ida Ratt-Natomagan, a band member from Pinehouse who sits on the Mamawetan Churchill River Health Region board, also had glowing words for the band on the opening of the new facility. "I just feel pride," she said, "that I'm a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band."

The grand opening celebration also included tours of the new facility, an official ribbon cutting and a barbecue, with a large cake cut by members of Jeannie Bird's family.

A closer look at the Jeannie Bird Clinic

Official opening date: July 21, 2006

Director: Mary Carlson, R.N.

Number of staff: 42 (including administrative and janitorial support)

Programs and services:

- Dental therapy for La Ronge, Hall Lake and Grandmother's Bay (includes the full range of dental care services)
- A full range of community health services, including pre-natal and post-natal care, a child screening and immunization program, a tuberculosis (TB) program, a communicable disease program, a chronic disease program, an adult immunization program, and a youth sexual wellness program
- Prevention and recovery services, which include addictions counselling and mental health counselling as well as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) education and prevention, and holistic services
- Home and community care services, which include home management, home care nursing, palliative care, home health aide services, and diabetes education
- Community support services, which include elders' support services (including cultural and recreational activities) and youth support
- Health education
- Water quality testing
- Medical transportation

(The Jeannie Bird clinic does not have doctors on staff, and does not provide emergency medical care. These services are provided by the La Ronge Medical Clinic and the La Ronge Health Centre, and by clinics in Prince Albert.)

Clockwise from bottom: Members of Jeannie Bird's family, including her siblings Arthur Bird (left) and Flora Olsen and her daughter Tina Ratt, cut the ribbon to officially open the new clinic. Elder Catherine Charles and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson gave a helping hand.

Chief Tammy Cook-Searson and health director Mary Carlson share a laugh.

The grand opening festivities included face painting, bubble-blowing and sand play for the kids.





A proud salute

The presence of Lac La Ronge Indian Band members in the northern village of Pinehouse was officially recognized Aug. 10, with a flag-raising in front of the village office. The councillors from La Ronge, Sucker River and Hall Lake joined band members Daniel Misponas (far left) and Ida Ratt-Natomagan (centre left), and Pinehouse deputy mayor Laura Boyd (centre) for the official ceremony. (Photo courtesy Doris Morin)

Band pride flies high in Pinehouse

There's a new flag flying proudly in front of the village office in Pinehouse: the white and green banner of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

The presence of the flag is the result of lobbying efforts by band members living in the northern village, notably Ida Ratt-Natomagan, who wanted a way to have the contributions of the band to her home community formally recognized. As Ratt-Natomagan pointed out, the Canadian and Metis flags have flown in Pinehouse for years, but the presence of First Nations people – 131 from the LLRIB, 63 from Canoe Lake and 26 from English River – has been underplayed.

Several years ago, when Ratt-Natomagan started work as Pinehouse's Community Reference Panel (CRP) co-ordinator, one of her goals was to bring the Metis and First Nations populations closer together and have each group recognize the contributions of the other. In recognition of that effort, the village and the

band signed a letter of understanding making Ratt-Natomagan the band's official delegate from Pinehouse. The flag was a logical next step.

"We're proud of our heritage, we're proud of who we are (as LLRIB members), and because we're very grateful to the Lac La Ronge Indian Band for all the support and services they've provided for us, we wanted something (to show that)," Ratt-Natomagan said.

So, on Aug. 10, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, and band councillors Leonard Halkett, Kenny Ratt, Doris Morin, Jimmy Roberts, Pam Mirasty and Hillary Cook travelled to Pinehouse for a special ceremony: the hoisting of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band flag. Despite chilly weather, approximately 150 people gathered for a big barbecue, with steaks, hot dogs, salads and bannock on the menu.

After the meal, deputy mayor Laura Boyd and several village councillors joined the LLRIB

delegation and local band members for the flag-raising ceremony. The visitors were then taken on a tour of the community, with the local schools and the new remote housing as special highlights.

Although the band membership in Pinehouse is fairly small, the LLRIB leadership have always shown support, not only for their members but the entire village. For example, Ratt-Natomagan said, the band has provided a substantial cash donation for Pinehouse's new arena, and elderly band members receive assistance for their living costs. As well, the chief always comes for special events, such as school openings and graduations. "It didn't matter if there was no band member graduating, she'd be there," Ratt-Natomagan said.

"It's just – being there (for us). They didn't say, no, you have to be on-reserve to do this.... Although we're off-reserve band members, they took care of us, as if we were living in La Ronge (or another reserve community)."

Five-year "blueprint" receives go-ahead

The band leadership has approved a strategic plan that will underpin the work done by all of the LLRIB's programs and businesses over the next five years.

The final document, prepared by consultant Karen Wianeki and entitled "Gathering Ground and Moving Forward 2006: Our Collective Vision for the Future", was approved by chief and council at their regular meetings in late June.

The process of creating the strategic plan, which is the first of its kind for the LLRIB, involved all areas of the band, including services such as education, health, and social welfare, as well as its businesses. Together, the leaders developed a vision statement and a list of core values the band holds dear, and looked closely at both internal and external political, social and business factors that have an effect on the band, before developing the practical steps that will be taken to meet the band's goals.

"The purpose of this document is to express, in a formal way, our objectives," said executive director Russ Mirasty. "It will allow band staff and elected officials to set priorities and to work toward a shared set of strategic objectives."

"It is a cornerstone for us as band members because it identifies for us, and for our partners, exactly how we want to position ourselves," Mirasty added. "Through our strategic plan, we are building on the foundation of our past, and making critical decisions today that will enable us to better position ourselves for the tomorrows that lie ahead."

The 19-page document outlines the collective vision statement, and describes each of the band's values: wisdom, compassion, respect, bravery, sharing, patience, commitment, integrity and, finally, truth (the sum of the above). It then summarizes the five-year plan, with a detailed explanation of each of the plan's objectives and strategic priorities, and how each goal will be tackled over the short-term (one to two years), medium-term (three to five years) and longer-term (six to 10 years).

These priorities include capacity building (that is, building the competence and capabilities of the band membership, leadership and staff), healthy and safe communities, self-sufficiency and economic development, a focus on youth, culture and identity, health and healing, and a commitment to quality education.

Amongst the projects planned are a band entrepreneurial policy; economic and business advisory services; a comprehensive housing strategy that will promote pride of ownership, reduce overcrowding, and promote energy efficiencies and cost savings; the development of emergency response plans (including pandemic planning) for each band community; community safety bylaws; the creation of an umbrella youth council and more involvement by youth in band governance; a Woodland Cree cultural interpretive centre; a northern treatment centre; and an on-reserve training centre.

As Chief Tammy Cook-Searson put it, "this document represents a blueprint for our future. Our evolution as people will be guided by the framework that this document provides. By describing the benefits and the desired outcomes we are seeking, 'Gathering Ground and Moving Forward 2006' establishes a long-term vision and a framework for decision-making to which we can all commit."

To get a copy of the full strategic plan, contact the central office in La Ronge at 425-2183 or toll-free 1-800-567-7736. Implementation of the plan will be a work in progress over the next few years, and further input from the membership is always welcome.

Young golfer a “tiger” in the woods



Jerry Christiansen Jr. is eager to follow in the footsteps of his golf idol, Tiger Woods.

Smack in the middle of Jerry Christiansen Jr.'s golf bag is a club sporting a fuzzy, orange-and-black-striped tiger's head. It's an appropriate emblem for Christiansen, who is not only a big fan of legendary golf protégé Tiger Woods, but also the closest thing that the Lac La Ronge Indian Band has to an “heir apparent” to the frequent Masters' winner.

“It's so fun watching him (Tiger Woods) dominate, seeing him win,” the 14-year-old noted during a visit to the Eagle Point Resort, his eyes frequently flicking over to the waiting first tee on the neighbouring golf course. “That's what I want to do.”

While golf doesn't dominate Christiansen's every thought – his bedroom is plastered with hockey memorabilia, with only a small framed picture of his idol hinting at his passion – it does absorb much of his time.

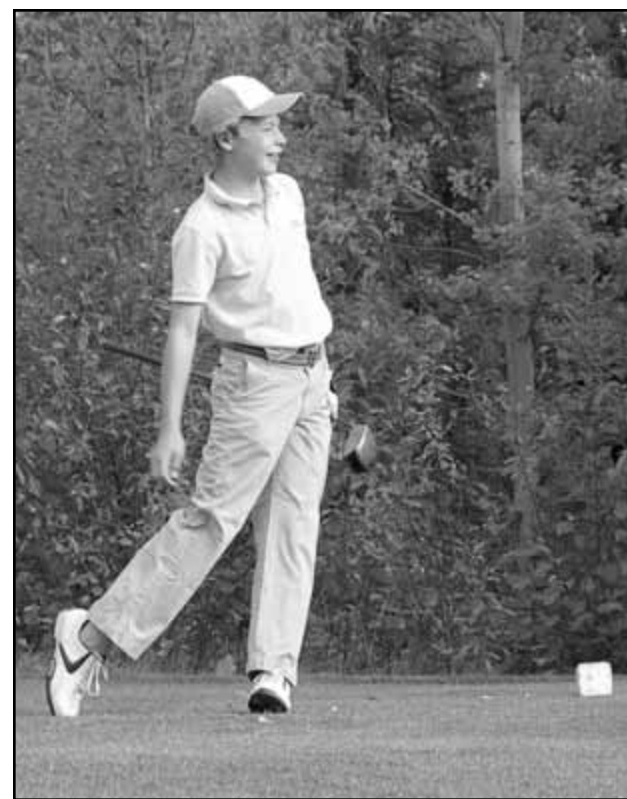
Since he began golfing competitively two years ago, Christiansen has become a frequent medallist at Canadian junior golf tournaments, and most recently scored a gold medal at the Indigenous Games in Colorado. His big goal is to compete in the U.S. Amateur competition in 2009.

When Eagle Point is open, Christiansen is on the golf course nearly every day, averaging four hours on weekdays and eight hours on weekends. He practices with friends whenever possible – “I get all my friends into the game,” he says.

Off the course, he practices chipping in his parents' back yard and putting on the carpets, and watches games on TV, which is how he picks up a lot of his skills. In the winter, family vacations to Las Vegas serve as practice opportunities for Christiansen and his dad Gerry, from whom he learned the game. The Christiansens' garage also echoes with the sound of Jerry hitting balls into a golf net throughout the colder months.

In early fall, “I don't get much sleep,” he admits. “I come to the golf course right after school, and stay up late doing the rest.”

Unlike many competitive sports, golf is focused exclusively on individual performance, and for Christiansen, that is one of its main attractions. “In other sports, when you lose, it could be the team's fault, but (in golf) when you lose, you know it's your fault – and vice versa when you win.”



Getting in a little practice time on the course at Eagle Point.

That said, Christiansen counts amongst his heroes not just the pros like Tiger Woods, but “just about anyone who plays golf – people who play golf just for the love of the game, and not because they're good at it but because they love it and you can always get better.”

The best part of playing competitive golf? “Winning,” he says. And the worst? “Waiting. Waiting when there's someone in front of me on a hole, or the night before a tournament. I can not get to sleep the night before. The excitement keeps me awake.”

Fortunately, so does adrenaline the next day. As a serious golfer, Christiansen is very aware both of his shortcomings – his putting posture has resulted in fewer recent wins than he'd like – and his strengths. As he points out, success in golf is largely about attitude.

“You can't do good in golf unless you're confident, and I think that's my strength – I'm pretty good at the mental side of the game, except that I'm really hard on myself,” he says. “I've been told many times that I need to work on that.”

Given his record, there's no doubt he will.

Send us your sports stories!

The sports section planned for this issue has been postponed due to a lack of response to our call for story ideas. We would like to feature both team reports and individual achievements by our band members in 2006.

If you have a story idea (such as the above feature on Jerry Christiansen's success in golf) or a team report to include, please leave a message for *The Communicator* at the band office in La Ronge with your name and phone number, or send an e-mail to cpaulsorthner@lrib.ca.

The new **deadline** for submissions is **Nov. 30, 2006**. Previously submitted reports and story ideas, as well as any submissions received by this date, will be included in the next issue.

We look forward to celebrating our band's athletic achievements with you!



The ice is in (here, newly poured by the crew at the Jonas Roberts Memorial Community Centre on Oct. 17), but the stories are not! Let's hear about the successes of our athletes – show us how they exemplify the values of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band.

Senators study LLRIB business success



Chief and council welcomed members of the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples to La Ronge on Sept. 25. The senators toured band-owned businesses and learned about the band's history, culture, traditions and success stories. (Photo by Valerie G. Connell)

Looking at the successes of some Aboriginal communities and others that are not doing as well, and examining the common threads to success and ways in which those can be shared, is the purpose of a fact finding cross-country study by members of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. The committee visited with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band leadership on Sept. 25.

"We're trying to figure out why we have some tremendously successful stories in our Aboriginal communities and others struggling at basically third-world level," said Conservative Senator Gerry St. Germain of British Columbia, chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. "We're here because there's a success story in Lac La Ronge."

While in La Ronge, members of the committee met with Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, councillors and other representatives of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band and their business arm, Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership, along with representatives from Saskatchewan Northern Affairs and Northlands College.

With a particular focus on the workings of Kitsaki, including an overview of several of the band's businesses, Chief Cook-Searson and Russell Roberts, CEO of Kitsaki, outlined the elements of the band's success, including its organization, management, values, culture, history, and the contribution of elders.

Having a strategic plan and sticking to it, building partnerships, and keeping a watchful eye for opportunities, were also highlighted as part of the success story. Kitsaki has 10 business ventures of its own, and, as a member of the Prince Albert Grand Council, has business partnerships with the PAGC's Prince Albert Development Corporation.

Government programs that assist Aboriginal business, including providing funding support, are important, particularly for smaller potential business owners, Roberts said.

"If programs are working, don't take it away."

The impetus for the study came from Liberal senator Nick Sibbeston, a former premier of the Northwest Territories, who noted the importance of looking at both the successes and obstacles for First Nations economic development.

"We are aware there are pockets in our country where Aboriginal people have been very successful," Sibbeston said. "Business is a very

tough endeavour, tougher than just simply getting jobs. It takes a lot of initiative and there are just so many things that go into a business, so when it's happened successfully, it's very nice to see."

"So we wanted to look at... what elements lead to success. Is it just money? Is it just leadership?" Sibbeston said, adding that governments, both federal and provincial, often have monies available to assist with business ventures. Ventures must show potential for success before financial support is offered.

"Basically we hope our report will say, 'Look, government, unless these things are present, don't even think of throwing money at certain projects, because they are going to fail,'" he said.

Highlighting the successes, examining and analyzing what the elements are that lead to success, and finding the common areas, are essential parts of the study, as is looking at the challenges that keep some communities from getting into business, Sibbeston said.

"Why is there so much apathy, social problems? You know there are areas of our country where Native people are not getting anywhere, not even getting jobs, not getting anything, let alone starting a business," he said.

Leadership, Aboriginal governance, and ownership of land are common threads throughout the country in the cases of Aboriginal people attaining economical success, Sibbeston said, adding that because of land claims, many projects must include consultation with aboriginal people by governments and companies before initiatives can proceed.

"Companies can no longer go to these areas and do as they wish. ... This is a tremendous leverage that the aboriginal people have," Sibbeston said, referring to the accomplishments of various Aboriginal communities across the country, particularly in the Northwest Territories.

Education, training, resource management, unemployment and funding issues are recurring themes the senators are hearing as they cross the country, St. Germain said.

"There's a huge concern brought forward by the Aboriginal community that funding is often put forward... on a short-term basis, and often the project isn't given a chance," he said.

St. Germain also noted the importance of dealing with social problems faced by Aboriginal people across the country, such as poverty and unemployment.

"What is unusual here (in La Ronge) is the obvious succession of successful leadership that exists within the La Ronge band area, within the organization. I think that's contributed a lot to their success. Leadership and governance are certainly at the forefront of what we're being told when we come across success stories in economic development. ... I'm seeing it here in technicolour."

The senators' final report is expected to be delivered to the government in the spring of 2007.

Article written by Valerie G. Connell, The La Ronge Northerner. (Reprinted with permission)

The Cree Communicator is the official newspaper of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Its goal is to provide effective and positive communication between the band's chief and council, staff and general membership. This publication serves the 8,100 band members living off-reserve or in the six communities of La Ronge, Stanley Mission, Grandmother's Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake and Little Red River. It is published once every three months.

LLRIB departments, staff and community members are encouraged to submit story ideas, photos and news about past and upcoming community events and band members' accomplishments.



The Cree Communicator

Box 480

La Ronge, Sask.

S0J 1L0

(Toll-free) 1-800-567-7736

(Ph) 306-425-1334

(Fax) 306-425-5963

(E-mail):

cpaulsorthner@llrib.ca

Information about the Lac La Ronge Indian Band can also be found on-line at www.llrib.ca.

Articles by Carmen Pauls Orthner, communications officer, unless stated otherwise

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Bible, beadwork and bells among repairs planned for Holy Trinity

Officials from Saskatchewan Environment have temporarily removed several articles, including a Bible, from Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Stanley Mission for cleaning and restoration purposes.

The church is the oldest building still in use in the province; plans are to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the completion of the church in 2010.

The support structure for the church's bell was also examined during the visit.

The Bible, three brass and one marble memorial plaques, a beaded pulpit hanging, and an altar cloth were removed from the church.

The Bible, although not dated, was presented to the church by H.J. Moberly, J.E. Sinclair and H. Mitchell. "They were probably Hudson Bay Company people," said Joe Roberts, a Stanley Mission resident, who was on hand to assist with the removal of the items on Oct. 3.

Each item was carefully wrapped in a plastic type board to provide stability for travel.

"Then we will wrap the whole thing in bubble pack, being careful how we get it across on the water," said Janette Hamilton, a cultural resource specialist with Saskatchewan Environment.

The brass plaques are tarnished and mostly in need of cleaning. "They won't come back as shiny new, we're just surface cleaning and sealing them so they will come back sealed and won't have the same potential for problems such as people touching and handling them," Hamilton said.

A beadwork hanging, again not dated, but created by Mrs. Elizabeth J. Cook, the wife of Solomon Cook, was another item wrapped for travel.

"It's been there as long as I can remember; that lady passed away years ago," Roberts said.

"We'll give it a cleaning and some of the beadwork needs to be reattached," Hamilton added, noting that a solid piece will be added to the top of the hanging, where the material is uneven, to keep the material from being pulled out of shape by the weight of the beads.

The altar cloth was also taken so that some of the stitching can be re-attached and an



Janette Hamilton and Joe Roberts carefully wrap a Bible from Stanley Mission's Holy Trinity Anglican Church for transportation to Regina on Oct. 3. Several historic items from the church are being cleaned and repaired in advance of the church's 150th anniversary celebrations in 2010. (Photo by Valerie G. Connell)

assessment done on the possibility of cleaning it. The cloth is made of different fabrics, with the centre a woolen blanket type material and a lighter material at either end. The centre is purple, which, Hamilton said, is a difficult colour to work with.

"We need to test the wool on it because its purple and that's a hard one. I don't guarantee we can do anything with it," Hamilton said.

One of the marble plaques was removed for assessment to see if marks on the surface can be removed. If so, the remaining plaques will be cleaned as well.

The items will be returned to the church next spring, and then that fall, other items will be removed from the church for cleaning, including the brass altar cross, two vases, a pair of wooden candlesticks – which Roberts noted were sent to Stanley from a bombed-out church in London, England, in 1945 – and two other Bibles.

Upon inspection of the church's belfry, a cast iron bearing, which provides stability for the church's bell structure, was found to have moved out of place about 10 millimetres. The bearing is still holding by 40 millimetres, said John Hendriks, project manager for Saskatchewan Environment's Facilities Management Unit in Regina, who carried out the inspection.

"That's an issue. I don't think we would leave it. If this shaft came out of this bearing, down she'll come," Hendriks said, referring to the church's bell. "It's a far cry from coming down, but I don't think we should leave it. The support that holds the shaft and bell has twisted."

Hendriks also noted that the bearing looked dry and should be oiled, and also recommended a bracket be placed at the top of the structure to secure it further. "It's not an expensive fix."

Article written by Valerie G. Connell, The La Ronge Northerner. (Reprinted with permission)

Band members, business venture win FSIN awards

Two Lac La Ronge Indian Band members and a joint venture co-owned by the band have been honoured as recipients of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations' 2006 "Circle of Honour" Awards.

The annual awards are a way for First Nations in the province to recognize the outstanding achievement of individuals living both on- and off-reserve, in 35 different categories. The two winners from our band are Danielle Dupre and Russell (R.J.) McKenzie.

Dupre, a recent graduate of St. Mary's High School in Prince Albert, was honoured both for her academic achievements and for being a role model for youth. As a Grade 12 student, Dupre maintained an 82% average and was on the school's honour roll. Three days each week, she volunteered at West Gate, a community after school program that provides supervision and guidance to over 80 children who would normally be unsupervised.

In addition, she plays soccer, hockey, and baseball and competes in modern dance. In February, she was crowned the Prince Albert Winter Festival Princess. She is a hardworking, responsible teenager, dedicated to completing her education and working to make her community a better place.

Eight-year-old Russell (R.J.) McKenzie received the Saskatchewan First Nation Veterans Association Humanity Award for the quick thinking that saved his step-brother Gary Sanderson's life.

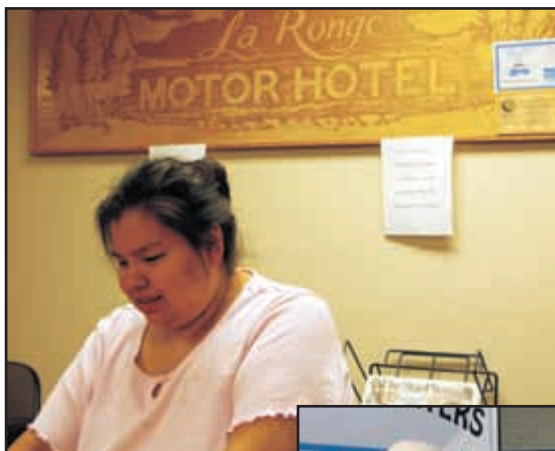
The two boys, who are both from Stanley Mission, were playing near the dock on the Churchill River during a women's fish derby on April 7. R.J. and seven-year-old Gary were walking on the ice when suddenly Gary fell through the ice into the water. Without hesitation, R.J. grabbed Gary by the arm and pulled him to safety.

R.J. does not have rescue water training, but as he told others afterward, he "just knew what to do." R.J.'s quick thinking didn't end with the rescue of his brother; he also put up a sign on the dock warning others with the words, "Do Not Come Here".

A Circle of Honour award for economic and community development was also presented to Dakota Dunes Golf Links, a golf course co-owned by the band's economic arm, Kitsaki Management. Dakota Dunes was also recently named by Golf Digest magazine as the "Best New Canadian Course of 2005".

Information about the Circle of Honour awards – including details on how to nominate someone for the 8th annual awards, to be presented in conjunction with the FSIN Spring Chiefs Assembly in 2007 – is posted on the FSIN's website at: www.fsin.com/circleofhonour.

Facing fire head on!



Top, left to right:
Firefighters head back out to the fire line.

Staff at the La Ronge Motor Hotel (including Nicole Eninew, a Sucker River resident who normally would have been home that week) helped out evacuees by providing rooms for elders, activities and evening buffets.

Evacuees found the JRMCC a good place to rest and put down their baggage.

Center, clockwise:
Counc. Leonard Halkett takes a break from fire-fighting duties while young evacuees occupy themselves with games and toys at the JRMCC.

Evacuees line up before travelling by bus to Saskatoon.

Saskatchewan Environment's fire cache kept close tabs on the locations of all the fires burning in the Hwy. 102 corridor.

The Emergency Operations Centre at the Town of La Ronge office was a constant buzz of activity throughout the crisis.

Communications were a top priority, with daily (and sometimes twice-daily) reports being issued by the band and the province, using information provided by "eyes and ears" in all the affected communities.

Volunteers prepared thousands of meals for evacuees at the JRMCC.

A emergency radio transmitter broadcast information updates on a repeating loop, on FM 91.1.

Bottom, left to right:
New evacuees register at the JRMCC.

Cody Roberts, who was born July 5, was just one of several new band members to arrive while their parents were evacuated. Cody – here with mother Carmalina McKenzie of Grandmother's Bay – received several welcoming gifts from health director Mary Carlson and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson.

Other "evacuation babies" included Lawrence Roberts, born July 2 to Martha McKenzie, and Shaneika Roberts, born July 10 to Candice Roberts.

Hwy. 102 was closed to all but emergency traffic for most of the week, with volunteers manning the roadblock day and night.

