

After THE MILL



From confrontation to cooperation

MIKE AIKEN

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After the Mill:

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With Elders and Advisors Colin Wasacase, Joe Morrison, Nancy Morrison, Dr. Peter Hettinga, Jim Blight and Lloyd Mack

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
About the Author	ix

STRUGGLING FOR COOPERATION

November 15, 2003,	Pilot projects replace stalled FNGA initiative.....	4
November 29, 2003,	New era of cooperation	4
December 6, 2003,	Land management grads ready to work on First Nations	6
January 28, 2006,	City, Treaty 3 to cooperate on Tunnel Island.....	7
May 19, 2006,	City representatives visit Chiefs' Assembly	8
May 3, 2007,	Grand Chief pays historic visit to Council	9
May 30, 2008,	Common future focus on Day of Action	11
June 21, 2008,	Community Plan to include Treaty 3 input.....	12
December 13, 2008,	City, Treaty 3 still talking on Tunnel Island	13
December 20, 2008,	Common Ground initiative moves forward with incorporation.....	13
May 23, 2009,	Common Ground gets \$1 million boost for research	14
August 15, 2009,	Accommodation key to understanding	15
April 24, 2010,	The voice of a generation passes away	17

FORESTRY IN CRISIS

October 24, 2005,	Mill moves quietly into a new era	19
March 9, 2007,	Wood rights decision expected within weeks	20
April 4, 2007,	Dion takes a pre-election swing to Dryden	22
June 7, 2008,	Abitibi pulls out of Whiskey Jack Forest	23
June 14, 2008,	Weyerhaeuser puts Kenora iLevel staff on notice	26
February 23, 2009,	Kenora Forest Products idles saw mill indefinitely.....	27
March 28, 2009,	Whiskey Jack deal sought to prevent more job losses	30

SHARING THE FOREST

October 17, 2003,	Clearcutting protest brought to Kenora.....	32
November 17, 2004,	Bitter wrangling over logging continues.....	33
June 22, 2007,	Solidarity Day festivities include political message.....	34
January 31, 2009,	Cooperative approach key words in Kenora Forest discussions.....	36
March 18, 2010,	Two Feathers project update very positive.....	37
March 20, 2010,	Former National Chief addresses rights, responsibilities ...	38
May 27, 2010,	Minister moves to calm fears over reform.....	40

CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE

August 6, 2004	Mayor, Premier lobby McGuinty over Shoal Lake gold mine	42
December 21, 2004,	Policing key issue in Common Ground.....	44

February 3, 2005,	Wauzhushk Onigum pushes for concrete action in talks....	46
April 2, 2005,	Manitou Rapids puts past behind them with historic settlement.....	47
September 24, 2005,	Stronach announces skills development funding for area youth	49
January 28, 2006,	Police Chief pursues initiatives to restore public faith in police.....	50
May 4, 2007,	Shoal Lake 40 complete walk to Winnipeg to demand road.....	52
September 1, 2007,	Treaty 3 opens new police headquarters at Round Lake.....	52
December 13, 2007,	Survivors from Wabigoon River settlement seek compensation	53
May 3, 2008,	Treaty 3 conference tackles regional mining issues.....	55
July 4, 2008,	Hydro chairman apologizes to Dalles members.....	57
January 23, 2009,	Land claim settlement approved at Rat Portage.....	59
June 12, 2010,	More than words required downtown	60

BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

July 9, 2005,	Fobister family history reflects changing lifestyles.....	62
January 21, 2006,	Martin rallies for final sprint.....	63
October 29, 2007	Harper rolls up his sleeves	64
May 19, 2009	Prime Minister, premier announce \$100M for Trans-Canada.....	65
July 19, 2008,	Winnipeg River: A trip down Memory Lane	66
September 29, 2008,	Layton platform promises help for families.....	68
November 28, 2009,	Ignatieff hosts town-hall meeting in Kenora.....	70
May 11, 2010,	History revealed at spring feast: Common Ground	71
May 20, 2010,	Artists take river cruise history lesson.....	72
October 15, 2010,	Weyerhaeuser, First Nations sign forestry agreement	73

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

October 21, 2005,	Governor General challenges Aboriginal students	74
November 10, 2007,	Residential schools agreement commemorated in Kenora	75
March 19, 2009,	Elijah Harper encouraged by today's youth.....	77
June 16, 2010,	Special education refocused on classroom.....	78
June 17, 2010,	First of seven national gatherings important new chapter in history.....	80
June 19, 2010,	Shared perspectives on healing at Truth and Reconciliation event.....	82
June 24, 2010,	Graduation day a community affair: Wabaseamong School	84

COOPERATION IS THE KEY.....	86
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Students from local schools share the fall feast with residents of Wauzhushk Onigum (Rat Portage) First Nation.

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Mike Aiken interviewing Indian Affairs Minister Bob Nault at Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation, December 2003.

MIKE AIKEN

Since 2003, Mike Aiken has been the First Nations reporter for the *Daily Miner and News*, as well as the *Lake of the Woods Enterprise*, in Kenora, Ontario. He graduated from the Carleton School of Journalism, with minors in political science and history, and then spent three summers at Ste-Marie-among-the-Hurons in Midland, Ontario, where the staff gave him a first-hand look at living history. When he's not working, he enjoys fishing, hockey and going to pow wows.

STRUGGLING FOR COOPERATION

The lack of a deeper, more meaningful, relationship between the Crown and First Nations is resulting in missed economic opportunities in a time of crisis, as well as an aggravation of social issues on both sides. The march on Kenora in the spring of 2003 marked the climax in a scorched-earth battle between Indian Affairs Minister Bob Nault and Treaty 3 Grand Chief Leon Jourdain. While Nault pushed to reform colonial-era legislation governing Aboriginal communities, Jourdain wanted self-government for his people. Unfortunately, they both fell short of their goal, and the fight took a high personal toll on both leaders, essentially ending their political careers. The struggle for control over resource-rich Kenora District then took a back seat to the forestry crisis. The global market meltdown overshadowed all concerns, forcing all parties back to the bargaining table with further resolve.

The “Common Land, Common Ground” talks began back in the fall of 2000. They started when First Nation and municipal leaders feared tensions in the community might lead to violence, following a pair of violent deaths involving First Nations people in Kenora. The talks built on the work of previous generations, and they’ve since evolved to include a broader range of issues related to building cooperative relationships between Treaty 3 and municipal, provincial, federal, non-government and industry. However, creating a closer relationship between First Nations and the city required a revisiting of historical and cultural issues, including the legacies of residential schools and industrialization, and a rewriting of the division of powers laid out in the Constitution. Since the British North America Act of 1867 did not spell out the rules for relations between the federal government, provinces and First Nations, even a relatively simple City of Kenora-Treaty 3 joint project -- such as the development of a heritage theme park at Tunnel Island -- meant rethinking the fundamentals. The stakes became much bigger, when the mining and forest industry sectors became topics of discussion. Still, cooperation between all levels of government would improve the chances of success in rebuilding the regional economy. On the other hand, the failure to come to terms on such concepts as cooperative forest models or shared mining permits would also have dire consequences for younger generations searching for signs of hope on the horizon. Along the way, the process for establishing



Kenora Mayor Dave Canfield and Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner signing the Common Ground agreement, 2003. Photo courtesy Reg Clayton.

a framework for cooperation encountered many firsts in the Treaty 3 area. Leaders made history and paved the way for other First Nations and municipalities across Canada.

“After the Mill: From confrontation to cooperation” is a collection of current affairs occurring within Treaty 3 between 2003 and 2010. The collection is clustered into the following sub-sections: ‘struggle for cooperation’, ‘forestry in crisis’, ‘sharing the forest’, ‘change in governance’, ‘building new relationships’, and concludes with ‘investing in the future’. Each section highlights an important shift towards developing cooperative agreements between First Nations and non-Aboriginal governing bodies.

November 15, 2003

Pilot projects replace stalled FNGA initiative

While the controversial First Nations Governance Act languishes on the order paper in Parliament, First Nation leaders in Treaty 3 are pursuing an alternate approach. They are among the 200 across Canada developing their own laws for self-government. They are: The Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resources Council (AKRC), Shoal Lake #40, Northwest Angle #37 and Wauzhushk Onigum First Nations.

The AKRC, in Sioux Narrows, has received \$76,725 to develop conflict of interest guidelines and a process for community redress. Shoal Lake #40 has received \$49,999 to develop a portfolio system to divide the responsibilities of band councillors and coordinate these functions with administration within the First Nation. Northwest Angle #37 is a community with two distinct geographic divisions, and the \$50,000 pilot project is designed to help the First Nation develop a financial administration code that reflects the realities faced by residents on both sides of the Lake of the Woods. In Wauzhusk Onigum, the band will invest 48,325 to revise and document the leadership code for ratification by band members.

Bill C-7 has been stuck at second reading in the House of Commons since the summer, and is not expected to pass before the transition to the leadership of Paul Martin later this month. It was meant to assist with the development of laws governing leadership, as well as an improvement to accountability and transparency for First Nations government. "Good governance empowers citizens and strengthens their governments, leads to jobs, new business and economic growth. It supports social programs and health of communities," said the Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Bob Nault. (Lake of the Woods Enterprise)



Indian Affairs Minister Bob Nault. Photo courtesy of Indian Affairs.

November 29, 2003

Treaty 3 hopes for a new era of cooperation

Grand Council Treaty 3 is looking for a new spirit of cooperation, so they can move forward toward self-government. Communications Director Adolphus Cameron described a recent meeting between Grand Chief Leon Jourdain and Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Bob Nault as positive and constructive. He also hoped that both Jourdain and Nault will work together for the benefit of First Nation residents. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada maintains that



Treaty 3 Grand Chief Leon Jourdain celebrates his victory at Eagle Lake, as he's selected by delegates to another four year term in office.

copies of Band Council Resolutions (BCRs) from the 28 member First Nations are necessary, since they ensure the treaty organization has the mandate to negotiate with the federal government on behalf of member First Nations. A spokesperson for the department said that this is a standard step in negotiations with First Nations across the country, and was outlined in a letter to Treaty 3 in a letter dated August 12, 2002. However, Sheila Parry, Acting Director of the Specific Claims Negotiating Branch, says the BCRs have not yet been submitted. Treaty 3 Executive Director Reid Thompson said the opportunity for positive, constructive talks on this topic trumps everything else. "We're anxious to have some discussions with the minister," Thompson said. The executive director noted that 23 of the 28 chiefs had previously signed a resolution authorizing Treaty 3 to negotiate self-government issues on their behalf, which he felt was sufficient for the organization to move forward in negotiations. Thompson was hoping talks could be renewed, so that the issue of the BCRs could be discussed. The issue of the BCRs has apparently become a sticking point in talks between Treaty 3 and INAC. A BCR is defined as the confirmation of a decision made by the band council, said Parry, noting that they are also a requirement for negotiations under the Indian Act, which the minister needs to follow. However, there remain complex questions about them, including whose task it is to make sure they are in place before talks can begin again, Thompson noted. Following his selection to a second straight mandate, Jourdain tabled an ambitious blueprint for self-government, November 12. It included plans for improved relations with member First Nations, as well as external partners. Jourdain also mentioned more control over service delivery areas, such as childcare and resource management, as well as cultural issues such as language. In the past, Cameron said that the organization has been too anxious to move ahead with implementation, before negotiations had been completed, but was optimistic about the prospect for progress. "When people want change and they start seeing some hope, it's pretty hard to take it away," he said. The treaty organization includes 26 First Nations in northwestern Ontario, as well as two in eastern Manitoba, with a population of 17,000. Jourdain was selected to a second term during a three day leadership conference in Eagle River in October. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

December 6, 2003

Land management graduates ready to work on First Nations

Thirteen First Nations graduates received their diplomas from Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Bob Nault during a brief ceremony at Wauzhusk Onigum First Nation, Monday. Together, they learned how to conduct land surveys and environmental assessments, as part of a year-long land management course. "I thought the course was great," said Alan Harrington of Iskatewizaagegan #39, formerly Shoal Lake. Chiefs in attendance marked the occasion by speaking at length about the importance of land management, which includes planning their communities and setting aside areas of First Nations for residential, industrial or institutional uses. While notorious for its arcane detail, land management can also help band councils create jobs and partnerships with developers for the next five or 10 years. This type of structure and organization can also improve opportunities for partnerships with private and public partners.

The land management course was part of a \$1.3 million investment by Indian and Northern Affairs into lands and housing in Treaty 3, and it was offered in partnership with Human Resources Development Canada, as part of a pilot project connected with the existing Framework Agreement and First Nation Land Management Act. Graduates came from 10 First Nations across Treaty 3, and will play an important role in the development of reserves across north-western Ontario, said Chief Don Jones of Nicikousemenecaning First Nation, located just east of Fort Frances. "Investing in First Nations education is a solid investment in the economic future of self-sufficient First Nation communities in Canada," he said. The new land managers will become self-employed consultants, offering their services to their home communities, as well as other reserves in the area.

"I think it's going to open a lot of doors," said Harrington. Speaking during the ceremony, Nault assured graduates that the federal government would continue its partnership with First Nations to help grads in their work. "I very much support the creation of a professional public service with the capacity to run self-governing First Nations," he said. Chief Jones also described a long-term plan that would allow band members to own their own homes and customize them. He also talked about the possibility of allowing developers and investors to work in partnership with band councils, in order to create badly needed housing on reserves. Jones also wanted to see a mix of homes in communities which reflected the needs of Elders and the handicapped, rather than simply replicating the standard three-bedroom house. Within the last decade, both the World Health Organization and the United Nations have criticized the federal government regarding the condition of housing on First

Nations. This type of development could be worth \$100 million and would bring an estimated 500 jobs to First Nations, Jones said. Unemployment rates often run around 80 % in First Nation communities in northwestern Ontario. "Until I see doorframes and cabinets being made in First Nations, I won't be convinced that governments are serious about self-government," Jones said. Nault acknowledged the comments saying, "There's been a lot of work done, but there's a lot left to do. Quite frankly, it's time for us to do things different." (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

January 28, 2006

City, Treaty 3 to cooperate on Tunnel Island

Kenora Mayor Dave Canfield and members of city council visited Grand Chief Arnold Gardner at Treaty 3 offices Wednesday as they renewed talks about Tunnel Island. "Our governments share a responsibility to create a strong and sustainable economic development in our area," said Gardner in a press release. The historic Rat Portage, which has been described as the cross-roads of the continent, was unveiled last summer, leading to anticipation of future economic development celebrating historical and cultural ties. Canfield agreed with the concept saying, "The Rat Portage and Tunnel Island areas must be protected for all time." A workshop is being planned for early February, with interested residents encouraged to join a committee, whose job will be to create a shared vision for the properties in question.



Chief Arnold Gardner

With members of city council looking on, Canfield spoke about the need for resources to help the homeless in Kenora, following the fire at the Adam's Block. Gardner agreed saying, "I'm really proud of the things that I hear. The coming together of the fire department, and of people in general. Together, they saved lives." Another area of cooperation may be the redevelopment of the former Cecilia Jeffrey property, where Treaty 3 offices are located. While the Mayor recalled his family's deep roots in the area, Gardner spoke eloquently of the importance of land and water to Ojibway people. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

May 19, 2006

City representatives visit Chiefs' Assembly

History was in the making for Delegates to Thursday's Chief's Assembly in Lac Seul for the second day in a row. After the National Chief visited to mark the signing of the \$2.2-billion residential school agreement Wednesday, First Nation leaders witnessed the first visit by a delegation from Kenora Thursday, as part of the Common Land, Common Ground process. Councillor Rory McMillan represented the city, accompanied by historian Cuyler Cotton, who has played an integral part in unearthing the significance of local landmarks. Treaty 3's communications director, Adolphus Cameron, noted the importance of the visit, saying it was all part of the rebuilding of relationships. "It's not only us that have treaty rights," he said, noting the success of the agreement depends on the interaction between the parties involved. While reconciliation movements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities have a long history in Kenora District, the latest initiative began in the fall of 2000, when Grand Chief Leon Jourdain met with Kenora Mayor Dave Canfield. Together, they discussed issues of mutual importance, including benefit sharing from resource development. While this issue has taken on added importance since the closure of the Abitibi-Consolidated mill last December, it is one of several on the list, which also includes economic development, policing and health.



Councillor Rory McMillan

Cotton's rediscovery of the Rat Portage described by Dr. Bigsby, between Cameron Bay and the Winnipeg River, has served to emphasize the geographic significance of Lake of the Woods as the crossroads of the continent. Researchers are continuing to show the rich heritage associated for both pre-settlement Aboriginal populations and European immigrants. Earlier this year, the Mayor and Grand Chief met at the Treaty 3 offices where they openly talked about broadening the scope of their work. Last week, the two sides met again at the Abitibi staff house. The event was significant because the logging company continues to own large tracts of land surrounding Rat Portage. Another important piece of real estate is Tunnel Island, which has been the focal point of development talks for many years as support continues for a heritage site that reflects both natural and cultural history. However, Cameron was quick to calm any fears, as he said they would be moving slowly and carefully in order to avoid the maze of pitfalls in front of them. He also pointed out the shape of future partnership discussions has yet to be defined. (*Daily Miner and News*)



Kenora's Abitibi pulp mill in 2004.

May 3, 2007

Grand Chief pays historic visit to council

For the first time in more than 100 years, the Mayor of Kenora formally received the Grand Chief of Treaty 3. As the Common Land, Common Ground process continues to take shape, Mayor Len Compton welcomed Grand Chief Arnold Gardner to a special meeting Wednesday morning. "I'm pretty dog gone sure we want the same things you want," said Gardner. Both agreed they were tired of having people unfamiliar with the region making decisions on behalf of area residents. "I think we can all relate to that comment," said Compton.

The meeting comes as both leaders are looking for ways to create jobs and provide services in tough economic times. Both men met at the Dalles First Nation last month, as Abitibi agreed to hand over 370 acres of land for the Tunnel Island heritage project. Kenora council also lobbied for the inclusion of First Nation partners in the Common Voice proposal, which was passed by the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association last weekend. Gardner wanted to see more discussion about the partnerships being worked out between Eagle Lake, Red Lake, Wabigoon, Dryden and Pikangikum. Together, they are all finding ways to attract foreign investors, train workers and build value-added products for export. "What's happening here has gotta grow," said Gardner, referring to the co-operative ventures. "Let's quit talkin'," he added, emphasizing the need for action on important issues affecting both



Wood ready for processing at Abitibi before the mill closed.

communities. Both leaders addressed the National Day of Action set for the end of June, when Aboriginal people across Canada are expected to call for changes in government policies.

Emergency meetings were held in Winnipeg, following the last federal budget, when Ottawa spent relatively small amounts on First Nations. Aboriginal leaders were already upset by the cancellation of the Kelowna Accord, a change in funding for special education, as well as ongoing delays in the settlement of land claims. In Ontario, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte blocked a rail line April 20, while the standoff at a housing development in Caledonia continues into its second year. Locally, negotiations are continuing on the wood rights for the \$30 million expansion plans at Kenora Forest Products, which could provide as many as 250 jobs. However, the province has been in talks with Treaty 3 and Grassy Narrows representatives in order to provide certainty of supply for the project. Protestors temporarily closed both the Trans-Canada and the English River Road last summer, as Grassy Narrows band members and environmentalists try to protect their traditional lands.

Wednesday's meeting of council with Gardner was in stark contrast to the demonstration Wednesday by Caledonia residents in Toronto, as they pushed for a quicker solution to their stalemate with Six Nations members. The Grand Chief's political advisor, Adolphus Cameron, agreed to visit council so he could explain the Resource Law adopted by their National Assembly. In return, council invited the Grand Chief to return, so grand council members could work more closely with the city as equals. Job creation, education, the

environment, policing and homelessness have been high priority items. The new Urban Aboriginal Committee is scheduled to meet again May 18, in an effort to deal with some of these issues more effectively. (*Daily Miner and News*)

May 30, 2008

Common future focus of Day of Action

Again this year, the Grand Chief of Treaty 3 and the Mayor of Kenora marched side-by-side along Lakeview Drive on the National Day of Action. Of course, there's a new grand chief this time around -- newly selected Diane Kelly -- however her message was very similar to her predecessors. "I'm very proud to re-affirm that we want to continue that relationship," she told the crowd gathered at the Harbourfront. Kelly added that she wanted to make sure her government expected to be treated with respect, and that they want to join their municipal neighbours in sharing the benefits of resource revenues. Thursday's gathering was the second in Kenora, which joined communities across Canada in raising the profile of Aboriginal issues. While the urgent nature of the requests hasn't changed, there was definitely less tension this time around. This is probably because the Mayor and Council have joined with Treaty 3 in advocating for substantial changes to resource development in



Treaty 3 Grand Chief Diane Kelly (middle) is accompanied by Kenora Mayor Len Compton, at the march during Day of Action, Kenora, 2008.

the province. Since mining and forestry remain the best hopes for economic development in the area, providing some political stability for investors is key.

In his speech Thursday, Mayor Len Compton repeated his support for the Great Earth Law, also referred to as the Resource Law. "It is a model for the country," he said, as he called upon federal and provincial governments to get on board. "We can move forward together, only if the treaty is respected," he said, saying politicians in Toronto and Ottawa shouldn't be allowed to ruin the future for those who live here and share the land. "We are the ones who share this place, for as long as the rivers run ... It is up to each and every one of us to make our treaty partnership work," he concluded. In 2007, blocked rail lines and highways in southern Ontario, and leaders at all levels did their best to keep protests peaceful. Locally, the crowds were smaller this year, but the recent outcry surrounding the KI6 leaders from Treaty 9 have shown the issues remain unresolved. (*Daily Miner and News*)

June 21, 2008

Community plan to include Treaty 3 input

Treaty 3 First Nation neighbours will be consulted, as the city prepares its next long-range plan. This will mean Aboriginal communities will be involved in discussions on budget allocations and land use planning. As part of the 2015 community plan, Councillor Rory McMillan suggested council should go beyond the city's limits. During Monday's regular meeting, McMillan was setting the table for some long-term planning, but he put a different twist on it by nominating Cuyler Cotton from the Common Ground project for the lead role. McMillan added they hoped representatives from Treaty 3 would become involved in the process, as council looks into the crystal ball to determine the city's future direction.

The results of the community consultation process will have an impact on the budget, as well as land-use planning, he noted, following the council meeting. Since 2000, mayors and grand chiefs have been meeting together, in an effort to gain a better understanding and help resolve common issues. While the impetus was race relations stemming from a pair of violent deaths involving First Nations people visiting Kenora, the movement has expanded to include the joint Tunnel Island heritage project. It has also included the historic first visit by a grand chief to city hall, as well as visible support from the Mayor over the last two years during the National Day of Action. In the background are important economic issues, such as the devastation of the forest industry and the opportunities created by new mining claims. Both are reliant on access to resources often located on traditional lands. There is also considerable interest in helping to improve the city's response to homelessness, as well as

links between First Nations residents seeking jobs and job vacancies faced by small business owners. McMillan hoped the consultations with community members would begin in the fall. A number of town hall style forums have been held in Kenora in recent years, as residents look for ways to create a better understanding and form meaningful partnerships. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

December 13, 2008

City, Treaty 3 still talking on Tunnel Island

Common Ground discussions continued this week, in hopes there would be a formal announcement by the end of the week. The parties were given a Dec. 1 deadline by Abitibi, who said local leadership needed to find a way to transfer land within two years, or it would revert back to the paper company. The heritage development could become a centre piece for the area, as it works to diversify the economy through tourist attractions and special events. Some have referred to it as Kenora's version of Vancouver's Stanley Park, which offers visitors a mix of natural beauty and visitor services such as restaurants, recreation and cultural sites. Over the last two years, lawyers have been working with community leaders, in an effort to create a partnership that reflects both Canadian legal obligations and First Nations traditions. In their last deputation before council, the working group was optimistic that an arrangement could be met, and they were working on the application for incorporation, so they could receive the land title. There are various views on how the land should be used, and this will be the focus of upcoming talks. While some feel it should be kept in its natural state, others talk about the potential for creating badly-needed jobs. An agreement on this project might also pave the way for further cooperative efforts between the municipality and its First Nation neighbours. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

December 20, 2008

Common Ground initiative moves forward with incorporation

City council named four directors to the new corporation, which was created to help manage the Tunnel Island heritage development. The partnership between Kenora and Treaty 3 had to be formed before Dec. 1, or the land would have reverted back to AbitibiBowater. Those named were Mayor Len Compton, Councillors Rory McMillan, Adolphus Cameron and Cuyler Cotton. The resolution didn't name their counterparts from the First Nation communities. The parties involved have not yet said how the land will be used, and a consultation process for determining the future of the project is

expected in the New Year. As expected, council approved a formal application to senior levels of government for funding to help pay the cost of Phase II for downtown revitalization. Both Ottawa and Toronto will be asked for \$2 million each. However, the head of the planning committee council didn't release their plans for the city's share of the project, saying it would depend on negotiations with the other partners.

Construction would involve the area north of the pavilion and the new Lake of the Woods Plaza between Main and Bernier, where First Street used to run. A total cost could reach \$6 million. Councillors also encouraged event organizers to proceed with their plans for the 2009 tourist season at the Harbourfront, saying the project would be done in sections and crews could work around event schedules. Phase I totals within budget Operations chairman Dave McCann said work was within estimates for last summer's projects. He noted the tendered cost was just under \$7.5 million, and there was a contingency fund of \$500,000 in case of overruns. McCann said they were 95 % complete and have \$312,000 left in the contingency, even after the city decided to return \$166,000 for landscaping into the budget, after it had been removed last spring. Otherwise, he said they were within \$23,000 of the tender. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

May 23, 2009

Common Ground gets \$1 million boost for research

The city's unique efforts to create a heritage development on Tunnel Island got a shot in the arm last week. Scholars from three universities and a college have agreed to help research the complex issues surrounding cross-cultural partnerships between Aboriginal communities and municipalities. The official announcement came Tuesday morning, as Minister of State Gary Goodyear announced a six-year commitment to social science research examining how northern Ontario and First Nation communities are working together in a unique partnership to jointly manage the use of the former Abitibi-Consolidated Inc. lands and promote economic development in the region. Through a Community-University Research Alliances grant administered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, this \$1-million investment will support numerous university researchers and students in partnership with community-based organizations. The project is designed to support the growing partnership between the City of Kenora, Grand Council Treaty 3 and neighbouring First Nation communities.

The project will also include scholars from the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Queen's University and Confederation College. "Social sciences and humanities research plays a valuable role in advancing

innovation and competitiveness, fostering job creation and building a diversified, resilient economy over the long term,” said the minister in a prepared statement. During his remarks Tuesday, Goodyear elaborated saying “what we learn together will help us grow our country.” Members of the forest industry were also on hand in hopes of learning some good news for their collective future. While the dramatic drop in demand has been a driving factor in layoffs at both Kenora Forest Products and iLevel, the success of ongoing negotiations surrounding wood rights in the Whiskey Jack Forest will also be a key factor in any sustainable recovery. There have been talks for many years surrounding the White Feather and Two Feather projects, which hope to link Wabigoon, Pikangikum and Eagle Lake First Nations with the municipalities of Red Lake and Dryden, as well as Scandinavian investors and Asian consumers. However, this type of alliance has so far eluded the Kenora area. As the Canadian economy restructures, the partnership between industry, governments and First Nations is an increasingly important relationship. There’s common ground as companies and their investors seeking secure access to resources, communities looking for jobs and First Nations are looking for a share in the benefits of profits derived from their traditional lands. However, there are also generations of history to overcome, along with a deeper understanding of cross-cultural issues, such as the concepts of land management and ownership.

With reference to Tuesday’s announcement, Prof. John Sinclair of the University of Manitoba said, “It allows universities to work with communities.” Mayor Len Compton also greeted the news with optimism, noting the importance of Tunnel Island and relationship building to the city’s economic future. He noted Elder Clifford Skead’s comments from their 2006 workshop, where Skead refused to close the meeting, because it was important for their relationship to remain open and grow strong. Since 2005, the community has lost more than 700 jobs in local mills and surrounding woodlands. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

August 15, 2009

Accommodation key to understanding

Last month, University of Ottawa professor Claude Denis made a guest appearance on CBC Radio’s The House. While the broadcast dealt mainly with the issue of the border crossing near Cornwall, there were implications for Northwestern Ontario. Along the St. Lawrence Seaway, Mohawk residents have forced the federal government to move its customs office, as part of the First Nation’s assertion of their sovereign rights to their territory. In an area where there’s lots of heated debate over trade issues - particularly around tobacco and cigarettes - this was no small detail.



Roberta Keesick of Grassy Narrows First Nation shows how a clearcut has impacted her trapline and traditional way of life.

In his explanation of the situation, Denis talked about the ongoing accommodation between First Nations and Canadian governments. The reporter's piece described how the various groups worked to accommodate each other's daily interests, while an agreement on a resolution to larger issues remained outstanding. This has also been the case in Caledonia for some time now. This type of imagery illustrated the type of oil and water mix between the First Nation system of government, as it seeks self-government, and the existing Canadian system, which is adapting to new political realities.

Locally, we may be somewhat familiar with the division of responsibilities between city hall, the district services board, Queen's Park and Parliament Hill in Ottawa. However, we're still adjusting to the jurisdictions and resources being claimed - or reclaimed - by First Nation chiefs, their two tribal councils, Grand Council Treaty 3, as well as regional and national chiefs. This may seem to be a bit of an esoteric issue, except that it wasn't too long ago, when Treaty 3 chiefs were pushing the government in Ottawa, and even delegates at the United Nations, for more sovereignty over their territory. This included the right to pass and enforce laws within treaty land within Northwestern Ontario and eastern Manitoba, with an important impact on the rules surrounding forestry, mining, education and child welfare. This oil-and-water mix continues to emerge in issues such as the management of the Whiskey Jack Forest. A meaningful resolution in a timely manner remains critical to the survival of local mills, much less any revival. It's also important when considering health care and social issues, necessary for lowering budgets for our local hospital

and dealing effectively with our transient street population. At this point, it seems as tough economic times and the departure of large multi-nationals have done more to exacerbate the situation by creating a vacuum. The pulling together in response to a crisis has led to such initiatives as the Tunnel Island heritage project and Two Feathers forestry, but these are only the beginning, surely.

Unfortunately, there remains little evidence that either political system is meeting or consulting regularly with the other, in order to create a long-term plan for the future. As politicians on both sides sit down to make long-term decisions affecting residents, there remains no mechanism for ensuring the left and right hands are communicating, much less accountable to one another. In his campaign literature, the new national Chief for the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, is critical of what he describes as “unfounded assertions of lack of accountability and integrity against Aboriginal leaders.” Further along, Atleo in his literature also refers to “mechanisms to reconcile crown and Aboriginal title through shared decision making and revenue and benefit sharing and contemplate new dispute resolution processes.” It will be interesting to see what form these will take. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

April 24, 2010

The voice of a generation passes away

The story of Louie Cameron quickly divides an audience. For First Nations people, his name is internationally recognized. However, on Main Street, he had slowly become one of the many anonymous faces in the crowd. In the history books, Cameron will be remembered as the leader of the Ojibway Warrior Society. He was the face of a generation, who was seen in newspapers across the continent. He helped stage the armed stand-off at Anicinabe Park in 1974, and they were his immortal words that threatened to burn down the town, if police tried to break up the protest by force. For Lakeside residents of the time, he was a terrorist and a criminal. Period. They had heard the shots fired and they feared for the lives of their families, as the armed stand-off lingered on.

The two different viewpoints couldn't be more different. Among his people, Cameron was willing to stand before the world and demand change. He was willing to stand up for those facing the bitter end of the traditional lifestyle through industrial pollution. As a survivor, he spoke out against the lasting effects of sexual and physical abuse through the residential schools, and he defended the families who had lost loved ones under mysterious circumstances in Kenora. In many ways, the Kenora community is still dealing with the fallout from those tense days in August. Municipal and First Nation leaders remember what it was like, and they don't want to see a repeat.

The Common Ground initiative began in the fall of 2000, after the violent deaths of two First Nations people. Sensing the renewed tensions rooted in long-standing inequalities, the leaders of Treaty 3 and the City of Kenora quickly gathered and agreed to work cooperatively towards peace. They'd seen the alternative. The potential for conflict between the municipalities and First Nations still exists today. The disparities continue, even though our search for a political solution is ongoing. By now, though, Cameron had become much more of an observer than a participant. For most downtown visitors, he could be found at the Kenwood, the Husky, or the post office. In recent days, most passersby would never guess that he had once made headlines around the world, and there were researchers who still made pilgrimages to the city in an effort to track him down. In their eyes, he was a connection with history. Over the years, Cameron's voice had definitely mellowed, but he clearly hadn't let go of the ideal of self-government, nor was he able to shed the images that haunted him until his dying day from the residential schools. At a celebration of the Treaty a couple of years ago, in the same Anicinabe Park, Cameron was asked to be part of an honour guard. When he spoke, Chiefs and Elders listened.

Along with brothers Albert and Tommy Keesick, the small colour party found their place alongside the former grand chiefs. Even at a glance, it was clear there were those among the gathering who had paid a heavy price for challenging the system. Their life stories included failed marriages, alienated children and a range of addictions. The job of rebuilding the nation can be hard on the soul. Yet Cameron continued to care deeply for his people. In his own way, he would pull people aside and tell them the concerns of the dispossessed. It was a voice that will be missed. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)



On a wintry night, members of the NeChee Street Patrol search under an old tug in McLeod Park for the homeless.

FORESTRY IN CRISIS

October 24, 2005

Mill moves quietly into a new era

"I haven't got anything good to say about this company," said a visibly upset mill worker as he walked away from his overnight shift at Abitibi-Consolidated's Kenora paper mill early Sunday morning. In the pre-dawn, all was quiet as a handful of remaining employees peacefully drove away, while a few stayed to talk sports over coffee across the street. In the end, there were no protests or cries of anger, as they had all seen it coming for a long time. Unless a last-minute deal can be reached between management and its five unions, Abitibi's 81-year history of paper making in Kenora stopped with Saturday's overnight shift.

If a deal is reached, as Mayor Dave Canfield predicts, then one paper machine and a total of 185 employees will work towards continuing their operations in a transition that could take up to two years. The company would add a co-generation plant, in an effort to reduce rising electricity costs which have crippled the mill's bottom line, along with mounting wood supply costs and a rising Canadian dollar. But the two sides only have a few days to find a solution, as decisions regarding suppliers will have to be made by the end of October, Canfield added Saturday. However, if the unions choose not to agree to accept deep concessions to their collective agreements, then about 100 workers will prepare the plant for an indefinite shutdown, which is expected at the end of November. Already, the end of the line has come for just over 200 employees, who have been terminated. "A lot of people are glad that it's over," said one employee, who requested anonymity. "They can move on with their lives now."

In its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the Kenora mill employed as many as 1,500 unionized employees, making it a symbol for the city. While forestry remains a vital part of the local economy -- through companies such as Trus Joist and Kenora Forest Products -- retail, health, social services and tourism have been taking over as economic engines. (*Daily Miner and News*)



After 81 years of production, Kenora's Abitibi pulp mill closed in 2005, forcing the city and the surrounding First Nations to reconsider their relationship. In a way, the closure became a catalyst for a renewal of Common Ground talks.

March 9, 2007

Wood rights decision expected 'within weeks'

Natural Resources Minister David Ramsay said Thursday he hoped to have a decision on wood rights affecting Kenora Forest Products "within weeks." During a brief stop in Kenora, the minister, who is also responsible for Aboriginal affairs, said he wanted to make the right decision on the request for proposals. "We want to make sure of certainty of supply," he said, noting the many complicated issues relating to the decision. While Kenora Forest Products is hoping to add as many as 250 jobs through an expansion plan at its local mill, First Nation communities want to protect their traditional lands. As the local economy struggles to recover from the loss of more than 440 jobs as part of the ongoing forestry crisis, Aboriginal protesters have been working with environmental groups, in an effort to protect the boreal forest. "We are in constant communications with First Nations," the minister said, as he prepared for meetings Friday with Treaty 3. Kenora Chamber of Commerce representatives also met with Ramsay Thursday afternoon, where they discussed the implications of the city's downtown revitalization project with the minister. After listening to the street-level presentation about how the forestry downturn has affected the city, Ramsay also promised there would be good news for social services in the spring budget. "We should not be allowing anybody to fall behind," Ramsay said.



*Natural Resources
Minister David Ramsay.
Photo courtesy of Daily
Miner and News.*

The minister said there could be room for travel to the North, when a controversial new species-at-risk bill goes to committee after second reading. He said he had been talking with stakeholders during the drafting of the bill, and suggested the time for additional consultations would come following second reading. Council members across Northwestern Ontario are worried about the potential impact on logging, since there may be further restrictions on the areas eligible for commercial harvesting. Response to climate change Ramsay noted the day's earlier announcement, supporting a bio-mass fuel generation project in Fort Frances, opened the door for a cleaner, more environmentally-friendly source of energy for the forestry sector. Abitibi-Consolidated officially announced its biggest investment in four years Thursday morning -- an \$84.3-million biomass boiler for the pulp and paper mill in Fort Frances, and is getting a boost from the Ontario government in the form of a \$22.5-million grant under the Forest Sector Prosperity Fund. The fund is part of the province's \$1-billion-plus plan to help forest companies invest in their own future -and the future of the communities that depend on them. Ramsay said in Kenora the Fort Frances project would also help provide a source of energy that wasn't dependent on fossil fuel prices. He hoped this move would help use more of the trees being logged, providing a more efficient cutting practice.



As part of the growing forestry crisis, after years of weathering the softwood lumber tariff wars, Kenora Forest Products idled indefinitely. Owners hope to restart production; however wood rights remain an issue.

The biomass boiler will burn mill-generated wood waste and primary sludge, as well as harvest slash from woodlands operations and wood waste from area sawmills. Abitibi's regional mill manager Doug Murray indicated during a formal press conference Thursday morning natural gas is a major component of the company's costs in Fort Frances and by using wood waste to make steam there'd be less worry about what was happening with the price of natural gas. He added the new boiler --work is to start this summer with completion by the fall of 2008 -- will significantly reduce the amount of electricity the mill buys from the grid and the associated costs. While welcoming Abitibi's announcement in Fort Frances, NDP Leader Howard Hampton questioned why the McGuinty government is forcing Northern mills to invest in generation when there is a surplus of cheap electricity across the North. "Northwestern Ontario is drowning in a surplus of some of the lowest generation cost electricity in the world," Hampton said in a press release. "What is preventing paper mills from using this electricity at a reasonable price is the McGuinty government's hydro policies." (*Daily Miner and News*)

April 4, 2007

Dion takes pre-election swing to Dryden

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion Tuesday promised a national forestry forum if he was elected prime minister. During a campaign-style visit to Dryden, Dion referred to job losses in the industry across the country. "The development of a sustainable forestry strategy is instrumental to enhancing the Canadian forestry industry and protecting valuable regional jobs," he said. Dryden has lost more than 330 jobs during the recent downturn, which has claimed mills across Northwestern Ontario. Mill manager, Norm Bush, who is now with Domtar, Dryden's major employer, was looking forward to the summit, which would join industry with government, union and academic experts. "It's kind of us against the world," he said, echoing Dion's call for a more united



Liberal leader Stephane Dion in Dryden.

Team Canada approach to forestry. Dion also fought past the politics of division, as he criticized Stephen Harper for his negative ads and strategic decisions during the last budget. "We'll fight back, but not with negative images," he told party faithful Tuesday night. He said Harper should be ashamed for giving back \$1 billion to Americans to buy peace on softwood lumber, when the U.S. may be heading back to court after just six months. He slammed the Conservatives for choosing tanks for an expensive war in Afghanistan, rather than housing and clean water on First Nations.



Chief Simon Fobister.

Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner praised the Liberal leader for visiting, saying he was following in the footsteps of Paul Martin, who was the author of the Kelowna Accord. Chief Simon Fobister of Grassy Narrows First Nation also had kind words for Dion. “We hope, when he becomes prime minister, he’ll be sympathetic to communities like ours,” he said. The community has been in a long-standing battle against logging practices. Kenora District has been a Liberal seat for most of the last 80 years, including a 15-year stint by former Indian Affairs minister Bob Nault, but incumbent Roger Valley is facing a strong challenge from both the Tories and NDP. In the next few days, heavyweight federal cabinet ministers Jim Prentice and Vic Toews are expected to visit the riding, in an effort to take a riding the Tories lost by just 1,500 votes in 2006.

Prentice is expected to visit Pikangikum First Nation within days, so he can see for himself the poor living conditions that prompted national headlines last fall. Kenora riding was created by the Martin government, and it has an unusually high percentage of Aboriginal voters with 8,400 of 43,000 voters in the isolated reserves. The cancellation of the Kelowna Accord and the lack of spending on Aboriginal issues hurt Tories. However, voters in municipalities have responded well to Stephen Harper’s no-nonsense style, and Conservative candidate Greg Rickford’s links to both First Nation leaders and top ministers could help win converts. NDP nominee Tania Cameron also has a strong foundation to build on, with support from provincial leader Howard Hampton and a strong history of community activism on behalf of the disadvantaged and First Nations youth. The riding is also known for its vast geography, as it spans an area larger than Great Britain. (*Daily Miner and News*)

June 7, 2008

Abitibi pulls out of Whiskey Jack

The wait is over. Last week, Abitibi-Bowater pulled the plug on their operations in the Whiskey Jack Forest. The announcement provided a sense of relief for trapline owners, who have been fighting clearcutting practices. However, it added a sense of uncertainty for the future of the wood supply. The director of public affairs and government relations for the paper giant, Jean-Phillippe Cote said Tuesday afternoon they would cease logging immediately. While he respected the process put in place by the province, Cote added the company had to make a decision on their sustainable forestry license. “As a company, we simply can’t afford to wait four more years for a decision,” he said, during a brief interview Tuesday. As a result, the company would be turning over their

license to the province, in hopes they would move forward with First Nations on talks for issuing a new one to another company.

The official announcement is expected to come Thursday, at the first annual shareholders meeting for the newly-merged company, Abitibi-Bowater. Natural Resources Minister Donna Cansfield repeated her commitment to setting quick deadlines for talks between Grassy Narrows and the province. "Absolutely, if we don't put some goals in place and some time frames, it can go on too long," she said Wednesday morning. At the signing ceremony last month in Grassy, Cansfield hoped to find some answers to the deadlock in three to six months. Other parties at the table weren't as definite. From his point of view, retired Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci spoke of setting terms of reference for future negotiations. There are also some points being worked out on how consultations with First Nation leaders will work in conjunction with Treaty 3 Grand Council, in terms of implementing the Resource Law. Kenora-Rainy River MPP Howard Hampton said he wasn't surprised by the news, but he wasn't convinced it would ease the situation. "At the end of the day, this will complicate things more," he said.

Hampton also noted the government had a window of opportunity to resolve the situation when they first came to power, but the NDP leader said there wasn't the political will in the government to push for a settlement. On the other hand, Kenora MP Roger Valley described it as a step forward. "This is good news. It allows flexibility for Kenora Forest Products," he said, referring to expansion plans for the saw mill. Ownership of Kenora Forest Products repeated their interest in wood rights for the Whiskey Jack Forest Wednesday. "We are looking forward to participating in developing with the local community, a cooperative sustainable forestry license, which will include business interests as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Kenora Forest Products CEO Ailbe Prendiville described it as "a new fresh approach on sustainable management of the forests".

The owners of the local sawmill noted they remained committed to their plans for a \$32 million expansion of the facility, once market conditions improve. "We have a current secured wood supply, and we are confident our future requirements will be met," Prendiville said in a prepared statement. "We are planning our expansion, once we are through these extremely poor lumber markets." Weyerhaeuser spokesman Lawrence Pillon commented on behalf of management at the company's Kenora iLevel plant. "We intend to raise the issue with the province and with Mr. Justice Iacobucci's team to ensure they understand the importance of having harvesting arrangements in place to provide wood to the only operating forest manufacturing facility in Kenora," he said through a prepared statement. "Our state of the art, value-added TimberStrand facility is the single largest investment in the Ontario forest industry \$300 million over the past 10 years," he added. Pillon noted 25 % of its workforce is from the Aboriginal community.



Weyerhaeuser's new \$250 million iLevel plant was forced to lay off staff and reduce production, as the American housing market went into the tank.

The operation directly and indirectly employs over 1,000 people in the region with an overall economic impact exceeding \$60 million per year, he stated. Pillon emphasized they intended to continue operating, as they reviewed the situation. Jim Ambs of Ambs Forest Products wasn't in a good mood Wednesday. He'd just told his crew of about 20 they'd been laid off. As of Tuesday, their services were no longer needed. "It's a sad situation," he said, during a brief interview. Ambs said he was one of three main contractors operating in the Whiskey Jack Forest. Between them, they employed 80 to 100 people. Without the permission from Abitibi and the province, they couldn't cut wood, he said. "It's a serious blow," he said, emphasizing there was no transition period for him or his staff. He also wondered aloud about the options for iLevel, who used hardwood from the forest supplied by Abitibi, as well as Kenora Forest Products, who planned to re-open and expand when markets improved. Meanwhile, Rainforest Action Network spokesman David Sone sent a prepared message following the announcement. "Grassy Narrows has scored a major step forward for Indigenous rights. We're calling on all companies to follow suit and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to give or withhold consent to industrial projects on their traditional territories," he said.

A representative from Greenpeace, Richard Brooks, described the news as a victory for the community. "I think we're seeing the first fruits of their labour," he said Tuesday, noting the community's five-year blockade against logging. Still, Brooks said they would continue to lobby for meaningful consultations with First Nations, which would include prior and informed consent by Aboriginal communities, before decisions on development are made.

American office supply company OfficeMax had been under pressure from environmentalists, because they're using products made from materials from the Whiskey Jack Forest. Weyerhaeuser building projects and homes have also been the focus of protests, including members of the First Nation. However, this may also be an opportunity for Grand Council Treaty 3, who is looking for an opportunity to rebuild its economy by introducing its Resource Law. City council has also been supportive of the grand council, because the Great Earth Law, as it's also called, could be a mechanism for resolving disputes over resource development. This could mean both local jobs and benefits relating to resource development in both forestry and mining. Aside from the \$32 million Kenora Forest Products project, which could create 50 staff positions at the sawmill and another 200 in the woodlands, there's also the Kenbridge mining proposal near Sioux Narrows, which could create 150 jobs within two years. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

June 14, 2008

Weyerhaeuser puts Kenora iLevel staff on notice

With 40 % of their wood supply coming from the Whiskey Jack Forest but nobody left to cut it, Kenora's iLevel plant needs some answers quick. The director for government and public affairs, Lawrence Pillon, said Thursday there was a sense of urgency to the matter. "Time is of the essence. The mill's future depends on sustaining adequate wood supply without additional cost or compromising the quality of our product," he said, during a brief interview. The plant is down to half-production, since half the staff was laid off in January 2007. There are still 157 staff working, but they could be done within "a few months" unless some resolution was found to the supply issue. Management are continuing to talk with MNR, and they are hopeful some solutions can be found through the negotiations under former Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci.

The latest developments follow a trip by a delegation from Grassy Narrows First Nation to Toronto June 12 and 13, in order to discuss the future of wood rights in the Whiskey Jack Forest with MNR officials. "That's the first thing we're going to deal with," said Chief Simon Fobister June 6, during a brief interview. "We'll have to figure out what opportunities there are," he said, acknowledging the interest from Kenora Forest Products in the issue. Last month, the community had signed a memorandum of understanding with the province. In essence, they had agreed to keep talking, with the assistance of retired Supreme Court justice Frank Iacobucci. Late last week, lawyers for Grassy issued a short statement, which said the community was relieved to finally have a moratorium on clearcutting on their traditional lands. The press release also talked about a four-year process for resolving long-standing

grievances. As they'd described in May, the two sides were expected to hammer out a terms of reference for their talks, before delving into more specific discussions on topics such as forestry, economic development and Aboriginal values.

A pilot project was meant to work on a study for the area, which would both identify and define the future of projects in the Whiskey Jack Forest. However, last week's announcement by Abitibi - that they were pulling out of the Whiskey Jack Forest - may alter proceedings. "We have to address these issues," Fobister acknowledged Friday. "That's the thing we're going to work on right away." Still, in the same conversation, he emphasized the importance of the ongoing negotiations on substantive issues that have dogged the community for many years. Grassy has been hit hard by the impacts of industrialization in the area. Their traplines have been hit hard by logging, while their fishing grounds have been devastated by mercury contamination from a pulp mill upstream in Dryden. Their blockade at Slant Lake has lasted more than five years, outlasting the pulp mill in Kenora. Since the closure of three plants in the city, and layoffs at the remaining iLevel operation, there's considerable interest in trying and keep what's left of the forestry sector in the area. There's also some interest within Grassy, where they've invested in sawmill technology, in order to help them build and sell log homes. Still, there remain the issues of finding ways to include First Nations in meaningful consultations on any projects that may take place within their traditional lands, as well as getting consent. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

February 23, 2009

Kenora Forest Products idles saw mill indefinitely

About 75 staff at Kenora Forest Products are being laid off indefinitely. Due to slow American markets, the sawmill will be idled at the end of the month. Some staff will continue to operate the planer into March, as well as prepare the plant to be mothballed, but they will also eventually be idled, as well. The news comes as the slowdown in the American housing market continues to have an impact on the ongoing forestry crisis in Northwestern Ontario. "We've been weathering the storm for a year and a half, and it continues to be stormy," said mill manager Rod McKay. He emphasized the company continues to wait for government to make its decision on wood rights for their expansion plans, but they've been waiting since Christmas of 2006 and it's now the spring of 2008. "There's not much I can do about it. It's just waiting for the wheels of government," McKay said.

A report on the dispute between Queen's Park and First Nations from a provincial facilitator, Frank Iacobucci, is due at the end of March. Until then,

Abitibi still owns the rights, even though their pulp mill closed in 2005. Devlin Timber also closed its operation the same year. NDP leader Howard Hampton, whose riding includes Kenora, was upset by news of the layoffs. Hampton pointed out the other operations run by Prendiville Industries in Manitoba continue to operate without layoffs or shutdowns. This is due to the Doer government's efforts to meet with companies, workers, communities and First Nations to weather the storm. "It's a very different approach," Hampton said, as he contrasted Ontario's strategies for the forest industry with Manitoba's.

Cheaper electricity rates, lower stumpage fees, tax changes to improve cash flow and a pro-active approach have all helped, Hampton said. Ontario MNR spokesman David Bauer of was unable to provide comment on the situation by press time. Mill owner Ailbe Prendiville said the plant closure was due to a lack of demand for stud lumber, and he didn't expect Queen's Park to play a bigger role. Prendiville stressed the operation in Kenora was producing a primary product, which wasn't in demand in the American export market, due to the oversupply of housing. The family's other operations in Manitoba, he pointed out, were making secondary items, such as lattice, fencing and treated lumber. Prendiville said they'd waited for more than a year for the markets in the U.S. to improve, but they show no signs of turning around any time soon. "We just can't do it anymore," he said, referring to the losses they were suffering. If the owners wanted to protect their plans for a \$30 million expansion, when market conditions returned, then they had to shut down for a while, he added.



NDP leader Howard Hampton of Kenora-Rainy River. Photo courtesy Daily Miner and News.

Kenora MP Roger Valley listed off the number of mills in the riding that've been downsized or closed, in the recent downturn. "There's not much left in the riding," he said, referring to losses at Abitibi, Trus Joist and now Kenora Forest Products. While the government could help by offering incentives for companies, so they could retool for the next upturn in the cyclical industry, Valley wasn't very optimistic about Ottawa's intentions. "I certainly hope so, but I doubt it," he said, noting the debate begins next week. Kenora NDP candidate Tania Cameron said Saturday the federal government needed to push through its aid package immediately. "Workers at Kenora Forest Products have lost their jobs in part due to the Harper government's refusal to protect jobs in the forestry sector," she said. "The NDP is demanding the overhaul of the EI (employment insurance) system, which denies two-thirds of workers any benefits if they lose their jobs and no longer provides the training workers need," Cameron added.

A total of about 75 workers will be off the job by the end of March. In his statement to council, Mayor Len Compton suggested the indefinite plant



Kenora MP Roger Valley campaigns at an open line show in Eabametoong (Ft. Hope) in 2004.

shutdown at Kenora Forest Products could be 14 months, as owners continue to weather the storm of bad economic times. Compton, as he expressed his sympathies to all workers and their families involved, acknowledged the patience of management, who continued to operate the mill despite suffering losses. "It's devastating news for the community," he said Tuesday. Prendiville ownership are still hoping to re-open an expanded mill, when market conditions recover. They remained optimistic the province will still allow them rights to enough wood supply, in order to fund their \$30 million project that could add 50 jobs in the plant and 200 in the woodlands.

Councillors had also spent a good half-hour listening to a presentation from iLevel general manager Bill Candline, as well as his woodlands manager, Mike Dietsch. Together they painted a bleak picture of prospects for 2008. During his presentation, Candline described a decline in demand of more than 30 % for his product since 2005, as American housing starts dropped from 2.4 million to less than 1.5 million, according to company records. Meanwhile, the list contributing to higher production costs grew longer. It included the high Canadian dollar, extra fuel costs, extra taxes and even the extra holiday. "All these things add up and make it very difficult to continue," concluded woodlands manager Mike Dietsch. In 2006, there was sufficient wood to operate the mill at full capacity, but since then the economic conditions have changed,

Dietch said. Compton asked the delegation to forward a copy of their presentation to city hall, so it could form part of their presentation in Ottawa. The Mayor said he may have an opportunity to address the standing committee on natural resources in March, following an invitation from MP Roger Valley. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

March 28, 2009

Whiskey Jack deal sought to prevent more job losses

Natural Resources staff is working with forest companies, First Nations, environmentalists and city leaders, in an effort to prevent further job losses. Officially, the management plan for the Whiskey Jack is meant to close at the end of March. Since this could mean even more closures and shutdowns, all parties are working on a contingency plan, which would allow work to continue while a deal's hammered out. Ideally, the plan will allow operations to continue at iLevel, the Kenora's remaining mill, until 2012. It would also allow for a supply to operations in Fort Frances, Dryden and Ear Falls, which also depend on the fibre supply. "Without a contingency plan, this would result in a curtailment of forest operations during the period April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2012," it says, in the proposal, which is currently on review at Robertson Street. At the last city council meeting, Mayor Len Compton suggested there might be a slight delay until April 11, but he was optimistic a deal could be reached. Wood from the forest is used at Kenora's iLevel plan, as well as mills in Dryden, Ear Falls and Fort Frances.

Even after the jobs lost in the current downturn, there are still close to 2,500 jobs in these communities that depend directly on mills that process fibre from the forest, according to the ministry's proposal. These workers include about 370 contractors, associates and woodlot staff related to the Jones Road operation. The \$250 million plant has been operating below capacity, while the meltdown in the American housing market continues. Estimates of stumpage fees and other charges owed to the Crown totaled about \$3 million in 2004-2005, the last year figures are listed in the forest management plan. There is also an estimated 1,600 mining claims worth approximately \$158 million. They include deposits of gold, silver and uranium. Roughly 123 lodges and 54 outposts are also listed, as part of the tourism sector.

More than two years ago, Grassy Narrows First Nation re-issued its call for a moratorium on resource development within its traditional land-use area. Since the land they have defined as the territory they've historically depended on for subsistence has been within the Whiskey Jack, band members issued an eviction notice to logging companies in late 2007. Their stand has been supported by a number of environmental and human rights groups, includ-

ing Amnesty International and Greenpeace. Still, the contingency plan calls for 27 clearcuts in 2010, including, 17 that will be more than 260 hectares in size. The community's legal counsel, Kate Kempton of Olthuis Kleer and Townshend in Toronto, emphasized negotiations between the First Nation and the province are ongoing. She said her client has never stopped arguing for an end to "bad logging," which she defined as economically and socially unsustainable. Kempton also noted that approvals have not yet been issued for cutting. However, the proposal put forward by MNR in its contingency plan may offer some hints at what may be ahead. "It certainly sets the table and indicates what might be permitted," she said Tuesday night, during a brief interview.

From a historical context, the community has seen its share of grief from the impacts of industrialization. This has included the devastating mercury contamination related to pulp mill operations in Dryden, which polluted the English River system and virtually wiped out their fishing and guiding. Logging has also hit their hunting and trapping hard, resulting in the collapse of their traditional economy. This meant band members have been forced to make the difficult adjustment from the self-reliance they enjoyed while living off the land to the western economy. This has included the introduction of welfare, in an effort to help residents make the transition to other jobs and careers. The community finally put up a blockade six years ago, in an effort to stop the clearcutting on what they considered to be their territory.

The contingency plan for the Whiskey Jack Forest also makes reference to a possible merger with the neighbouring Kenora Forest, which could happen within three years. Since the management plan for the Kenora Forest is set to expire in 2011, and there are talks underway for the development of a cooperative management model in the Kenora Forest, there's speculation about how Grassy Narrows might be affected, Kempton acknowledged. In theory, a cooperative model could include input from municipal and First Nation interests, in an effort at retaining benefits for local residents. However, Kempton noted some models are based on the size of the investment put forward by the different partners. While First Nations might be at the table, when decisions are made, they might also be pushed aside by more powerful corporations, Kempton added. Until the issue with the contingency plan for the Whiskey Jack Forest is resolved, the discussions surrounding the development of a cooperative model for the Kenora Forest are on hold. Even after the jobs lost in the current downturn, there are still close to 2,500 jobs in these communities that depend directly on mills that process fibre from the forest, according to the ministry's proposal. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

SHARING THE FOREST

October 17, 2003

Clearcutting protest brought to Kenora

Treaty 3 Grand Chief Leon Jourdain joined the Friends of Grassy Narrows in a March through Kenora Thursday. The protest against clearcutting and federal Aboriginal policies focused on Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Bob Nault, as well as Abitibi-Consolidated. Jourdain said the minister was deflecting his responsibility and accountability, in relation to the treaty rights of Aboriginal peoples. "The history of our people, in relation to our country, is a history of denial and broken promises," he said. "There is a window of opportunity here, through the leadership of Paul Martin," he added. Approximately 65 people attended the rally. Sponsored by the Friends of Grassy Narrows, it included members of the First Nation, which is located about an hour's drive north of Kenora, as well as residents of Winnipeg who made the trip to attend the rally. Rally spokesman Peter Kulchyski said they had planned to sell off the contents of the minister's office. However, when they arrived they found the door locked, so they simply left a price tag on the doorknob, along with a note explaining their actions. "Although it's Robert Nault's responsibility as Minister of Indian Affairs to ensure the protection of First Nations' treaty rights, the minister doesn't seem to mind that Grassy Narrows' rights are violated by the logging deal that has been made between the Ontario government and Abitibi-Consolidated," Kulchyski said in a press release.

The First Nation set up a blockade last December, in an attempt to stop clearcutting north of the community, saying they did not feel a part of the consultation process relating to forest management. The Grassy Narrows First Nation is claiming jurisdiction of 6,500 sq. km. of the Whiskey Jack Forest, saying it is a part of their traditional land use area. A spokesman for the provincial Ministry of Natural Resources has said the band has been invited to participate in discussions, but has not been a part of the planning process for their upcoming five-year plan. An alternative process may still be possible through the federal government's Model Forest Program. A spokeswoman for the program has suggested a complementary public process focusing on the issues at Grassy Narrows. This process could also benefit from learnings gained from consultations with First Nations throughout Canada.



*Ontario Premier
Dalton McGuinty.*

In an interview, Nault's press secretary, Julian Morelli, said that the minister has always been open to negotiations with all First Nations, including Grassy Narrows. "The minister is willing to mediate, but clearly this is a matter of provincial jurisdiction," Morelli added. Morelli noted that the new Ontario government has not yet named their minister responsible for natural resources. However, he was optimistic that the new provincial government would be more receptive to negotiated settlements of resource issues. Dalton McGuinty became the new provincial premier October 2. (*Daily Miner and News*)

November 17, 2004

Bitter wrangling over logging continues

Chief Ed Martin of Washagamis Bay First Nation asked an Elder to conduct a traditional ceremony Tuesday, in hopes of preventing further divisions within the community. It seems apparent that recent elections for the Washagamis Bay Investment Corporation ordered by a Superior Court judge haven't been sufficient to heal deeply rooted rifts within the board. While referring to three people elected to the board of the corporation, Martin challenged their right to represent anyone. "They're not acting for the board. They're not acting for the people either," he stated categorically. Band members Rick Petawanikweb, Tony Mandamin and Evans Chartrand were among 10 board members elected in August. Petawanikweb was also appointed to the position of treasurer. He said he spoke on behalf of the corporation at a public meeting Monday night, where representatives of Abitibi, local trucking companies, McKenzie Portage Road ratepayers and Ministry of Transport officials discussed logging opportunities on the reserve. Petawanikweb told those assembled the contract wouldn't go ahead, unless the corporation was included in the talks. However, a corporation resolution dated Oct. 29 and passed by four board members, says Petawanikweb was removed from the board, along with Mandamin and Chartrand, said board member Yvonne Paypom.

A Superior Court ruling dated April 14, 2003 ordered the band to hold new elections, as well as an annual general meeting, in an attempt to restore order following bitter bankruptcy proceedings. No date has yet been announced for the meeting with band members, which was also part of the Superior Court order issued in April 2003. No accounts have been produced either, leading to speculation about the handling of the corporation's affairs. "If we were a corporation in town, somebody would be in jail right now, but we're on a First Nation," said Paypom Tuesday, describing her frustration.

While Kenora city council must disclose its decisions and financial position in a public forum, the same rules aren't always in place on First Nations. Each side in the dispute over the Washagamis Bay Investment Corporation accuses the other of running off with money from the investment corporation. Both sides also accuse the other of violence, criminal behaviour and intimidation tactics, as the dispute continues. There are about 49 homes on the Reserve, with band council estimating 16 have been condemned. Band council says a logging contract it signed with Abitibi will produce at least \$500,000, which is needed to pay for at least six and as many as 12 new homes. Petawanikweb and his supporters say they live in condemned homes, while members of council are providing themselves with nice homes to live in. They say council wouldn't need the money from logging if they had handled existing revenues properly. Chartrand, meanwhile, showed where the Chief is building a new road and a new home by the waterfront.

Chartrand and his supporters say the process for awarding new homes to band members is skewed in favour of the Chief's supporters. Martin denies this saying a new process has been developed, so that homes can be fairly distributed in the spring. The Chief said both the road and his new home are being paid for from his own funds, and that there will be other homes built along the road. Martin adds a draft version of the audit prepared by the band's third party administrator for the First Nation is being finalized, but not yet ready for release. He added that the First Nation is putting a remedial management plan to repay more than \$1 million in debts. The Chief said the deficit means outside management help is required to help them restore the band to a better financial position. The shortfall also means added revenues from logging are required to help pay for housing, he added. On Monday night, truckers said they were hoping to start hauling wood within two weeks, but the tangled web relating to the contract with Abitibi could take a little longer to sort out. (*Daily Miner and News*)

June 22, 2007

Solidarity Day festivities include political message

Federal NDP candidate Tania Cameron took advantage of Thursday's celebrations to announce a peaceful demonstration against poverty on First Nations. Cameron, who helped organize activities, is also the band manager and a councillor for Dalles First Nation, where the march is set to begin. Youth from the community hope to begin their trek to Kenora around 8 a.m., and then make their way to downtown. "Having eight, five or six people to a house -- It's not right," said Cameron, in her speech. "Receiving \$5-600 a month in a hydro bill -- that's \$5-600 a month. It's not right," she added.



Students at Sakatcheway Anishinabe School in Grassy Narrows gather around during a lesson in Ojibway immersion.

Cities across Canada recognized Aboriginal cultures Thursday, just over a week before the deadline set for the National Day of Action, June 29. Although Aboriginal leaders have called for peaceful protests focusing on education and awareness, some younger leaders have openly opposed this strategy. Locally, Treaty 3 and Chiefs of Ontario leaders appealed for calm last week, during meetings in Sioux Lookout, and there were no signs of violence at the youth powwow at Grassy Narrows last weekend. NDP leader Howard Hampton, member for Kenora-Rainy River, said he didn't expect confrontations next week, but did anticipate longer, more complicated negotiations on key issues, such as wood rights and land claims. "If goodwill and respect were shown early on, many of the issues at Grassy Narrows could've been settled," he said.

As it stands, talks between the First Nation, Treaty 3, the province and Kenora Forest Products continue on plans for a \$30 million expansion at the sawmill, which could provide up to 250 jobs. Aboriginal groups are also being invited to participate in economic development plans for Kenora, as well as Northwestern Ontario. In his remarks, city Councillor Chris Van Wallegghem pointed to the banner at city hall, as well as the proclamation, as ongoing signs of a recognition of the area's First Nations population. The Common Land, Common Ground process hopes to bring together the city and Treaty 3 members through the Tunnel Island and Old Fort Island heritage developments. City council has also refused to join in the Common Voice document with other municipal leaders in the northwest, until First Nations are at the

table. This year, events were held at Anicinabe Park, which was the setting for the uprising of youth a generation ago, as well as the subject of a land claim. Recently, one of the leaders of the historic stand-off, Louie Cameron, called upon demonstrators to use peaceful means, saying it required more courage than violence. (*Daily Miner and News*)

January 31, 2009

Cooperative approach key words in Kenora Forest discussions

It's no joke. By April 1, Weyerhaeuser's expected to give up its licence to harvest in the Kenora Forest, in favour of a more cooperative approach. It's all part of a plan by Queen's Park to give up the referee's whistle and get industry to play nice with their partners in Aboriginal communities. By the end of March, industry and First Nations are being asked to form an agreement on how to manage the Kenora Forest so a new cooperative model can be put in place that includes Aboriginal communities. "The whole idea of shareholder management is so that no one big company can call all the shots and no small company can block everything," said J.P. Gladu, a professional forester advising First Nations.

The process has evolved from the Memorandum of Understanding reached with Trus Joist at Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) First Nation in 2000. The community has since entered into a partnership with Moncrief Construction, which has helped pave the way for harvesting within the First Nation's Traditional Land Use Area that offers benefits to community members. Historically, Aboriginal entrepreneurs interested in the forest sector have struggled getting enough wood allocation, so they can make payments on the expensive equipment required. Gladu suggested agreements could be structured, so that First Nations are given first right of refusal on new opportunities. They may also sub-contract with industry partners, and learn from them, until they have enough wood and expertise to operate on their own, he added. For existing operators, independent loggers, investors and municipal neighbours, the creation of a more cooperative model that involves First Nations offers the possibility of greater certainty. When bankers have concerns about access to supply, due to roadblocks or protests, it dampens the business climate.

In the neighbouring Whiskey Jack Forest, Grassy Narrows members have maintained a permanent blockade for more than six years, as they seek an end to clearcutting in their traditional lands, in order to protect what's left of their traplines. "This process isn't perfect. We're not going to get everything we want," Gladu acknowledged, during an information session Wednesday



Treaty 3 First Nations pow wow.

in Kenora. There remain many important details, such as the process for consultations and harmonizing the agreement with Treaty 3's Resource Law. Working groups are expected to continue meeting on a regular basis in Kenora. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

March 18, 2010

Two Feathers project update very positive

One of the more promising opportunities on the horizon in Northwestern Ontario is the Two Feathers forestry initiative. Last week, a spokesman for the company, Terry Favell, provided an update on their ambitious plans for those gathered at a Treaty 3 conference in Wabigoon. Naturally, she was in a buoyant mood after the company received an injection of \$5 million from the federal government in order to help bring it a step closer to reality. MP Greg Rickford made the announcement last week of the funding which brings the total federal government contribution to the project to almost \$14 million. "Two Feathers asked for \$10.5 million towards this project, and after all is said and done, the federal government will have exceeded that request by more than \$3 million. This really is a great day for northwestern Ontario," he said.

The partnership brings together a consortium of engineers from Finland with First Nations and municipalities in Northwestern Ontario, so they can market wood products to the Asian market. "We're in for the long run," said

Favell. When successful, Two Feathers will have used wood fibre from the Pikangikum area, then processed it in Red Lake. This will include sorting, drying and grading of the wood, including some that will be made into materials for post and beam construction. Another planer mill will also go into operation at Eagle Lake, where the company will make buildings ranging from tool sheds to three-season cottages. Wabigoon will act as the planning and operations centre, while Dryden will add some training facilities, Favell said. When it all comes into operation, the project should add a total of about 300 jobs to the regional economy. In the 2009 Economic Action Plan, Prime Minister Stephen Harper pointed to the Two Feathers Project as a model for real economic development in Northern Ontario.

A summary of funding contributions to the Two Feathers Project showed \$5 million will go for Human Resources & Skills Development; another \$900,000 will be spent on Wood Processing Plant Site Preparations through the community adjustment fund. The federal government will kick in another \$4.5 million through Indian and Northern Affairs, while FedNor will contribute \$2.3 million for the Nungesser Road Industrial Park Development and \$500,000 for the extension of sewer and water service to the new site. Another \$691,000 will be spent on a post-secondary training facility in Pikangikum through a community adjustment fund. Not only is it an example of value-added manufacturing for the area, it's also going to be efficient, in that all wood waste will be used. Any left over bark or wood chips will become fuel for the co-generation plant, while the sawdust will get compacted into wood pellets, Favell added. "We use absolutely everything," she said. Even though Two Feathers has been in development for the last three or four years, she hoped construction would take place within the next 18 to 24 months. "We're closer than ever," she promised. (*Daily Miner and News*)

March 20, 2010

Former National Chief addresses rights, responsibilities

Phil Fontaine has spent so many years on the stump; it barely seems to phase him. So, when he was invited to address a top-notch conference on treaty rights and resource development last week, he barely seemed to break stride. Dressed in a dark blue T-shirt and slacks, Fontaine slowly laid out his modern-day views on treaties. While Aboriginal people have had a special relationship with the Crown for more than 100 years, the recent recession and current recovery process are redefining the relationship, he argued.

Historically, First Nation leaders and the government have sought a "peaceful coexistence" that's been based on a sharing of the riches of Mother Earth, he

said. Since damage done to the land through development can be irreversible, the obligations involved in the treaty are “forever,” he reminded his audience. As Canada’s economy attempts to recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression, Fontaine said the country’s ability to generate wealth was still largely dependent on natural resources. This means industry is, again, looking for access to traditional lands, and there’s a renewed emphasis on building strong relations with First Nations. “We’ve already witnessed what doesn’t work,” he said, referring to the imprisonment of Chief and Council at Big Trout Lake, or Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI). “They thought they could do what has always been done,” Fontaine said, asserting there was a lack of consultation and due process, before police were called. By contrast, the Victor Mine near Attawapiskat was a very different experience, he emphasized, as he described how De Beers consulted extensively with Aboriginal leaders. The result has been a project that is creating billions of dollars for the regional and provincial economy.

The Ring of Fire deposit can also add to this legacy, if it’s done properly, Fontaine added. However, this type of opportunity comes with obligations for Aboriginal communities, as well, he emphasized. Treaty 3 members have to prepare themselves, in order to take advantage of the opportunities, if they want to share in the benefits. In the past, band councils have looked to the federal and provincial governments, in order to close the gap in living standards. This hasn’t worked and the large deficits being faced in both Ottawa and Toronto mean the gap isn’t likely to close any time soon, he added. At this point, Fontaine said there were about 27,000 First Nations children in care, more than triple the number at the height of the residential school era. Most are taken away from their families for issues related to poverty. “Mommy and daddy and the community are too poor to look after children and they’re moved to a healthier environment,” he said. As a result, he advocated expanding the treaty relationship with the Crown to include industry, because the private sector are the only ones with the ability to help close the financial gap faced by Aboriginal communities, he said. Even among the children’s aid services, there’s a 22 per cent gap between the funds received by Aboriginal agencies and provincially-run counterparts, he noted.

In recent months, First Nation leaders had received support from court rulings, he said. This included the duty to consult, as well as a more recent obligation to accommodate, but both of these principles were still be defined, he emphasized. This meant there was considerable uncertainty among investors, which is just the opposite of what business leaders like to see, while considering an opportunity. While Aboriginal leaders are in a strong position to assert their rights, they must still be open to working with industry and government on opportunities, which may provide mutual benefit, he argued. “It’s incumbent on us to respond positively, when people reach out to us,”

he said. After retiring from the national Chief's office last year, Fontaine has taken a position with the Royal Bank, where he recently helped work with the Vancouver Olympic committee. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

May 27, 2010

Minister moves to calm fears over reform

As the cabinet member responsible for overhauling Ontario's forest management system, Michael Gravelle is very much on the hot seat these days. After some stormy sessions in Thunder Bay and Dryden, Gravelle sought to calm the waters before heading into Tuesday night's meeting in Marathon. "I think this is a process, and you need to understand what we've set out to do," he said, as he took a break along the Trans-Canada. "We're eager to see fibre in our forest is put to work," he emphasized, repeating a mantra from the reform document. Certainly, the deep desire to get people working again in Northern Ontario isn't lost on anybody. The province's second largest industry has seen devastating losses in recent years, and the effects are transforming communities. "We want people to be employed in the forestry sector," Gravelle stressed, during the brief interview. He was sensitive to the need for stability for larger companies -- the Weyerhaeusers, Domtars and Tembecs -- while also acknowledging the importance of providing new opportunities for smaller operators.

In order to obtain financing for future operations in tough times, businesses are looking for some secure contracts that include access to wood supply, the minister acknowledged. He also agreed there would need to be some sort of transition period, in order to help investors move between their existing licences and the new system. However, he stayed away from offering specifics, in terms of how long a transition might be involved or what kind of supports might be offered. This, he said, would be where feedback from the industry would be helpful. "We're trying to find a balance that works with established companies and new opportunities, particularly with the bio economy," he said, noting the important changes in how forest products are being used, such as biofuels and pellets.

In their previous round of consultations, the province heard how residents wanted more control over how the supply was managed in order to avoid situations where a company had closed their mill, yet still harvesting for other operations. In other words, people wanted benefits from the wood to stay local, the minister said in summary. The Local Forest Management Corporations were designed to help respond to those comments, he added. While the management corporations had to be a certain size in order to ensure they were financially viable, this may end up being too large for residents to feel like they

have local control. Under the proposal, there would be five to 15 Local Forest Management Corporations established, rather than the existing 47. Staff for the minister noted the area of Ontario in question is only about one-third of the total, so there a strong possibility there would be more than one management unit for Northwestern Ontario. Under the proposed model, each would be run by a board of directors, which would have between nine and 12 members. These could include specialists familiar with legal, environmental and business issues associated with managing a commercial forest, as well as seats set aside for community members and Aboriginal peoples' input, the province has suggested.



Honourable Michael Gravelle, Northern Development and Mines. Photo courtesy Daily Miner and News.

During the Dryden session, representatives from Domtar felt the proposed changes to the tenure system went too far, while smaller operators sought assurances they would get help with the transition to a new licensing system. Aboriginal communities have also voiced their opposition to a management model that would leave them with only one or two seats on a board, rather than engaging them in the nation-to-nation model based on joint responsibility and shared benefits. Gravelle noted there will likely be pilot projects in Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario, in order to iron out the wrinkles, before the new tenure system is formally adopted province-wide. The minister also continued to welcome innovative partnerships between First Nations and private industry, such as Wincrief or Two Feathers, but he didn't want to go into detail on how these might be accommodated in the new structure. (*Daily Miner and News*)

CHANGE IN GOVERNANCE

August 6, 2004

Winnipeg Mayor, Manitoba premier lobby McGuinty over Shoal Lake gold mine

Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz joined Manitoba Premier Gary Doer Thursday in objecting to plans to develop a gold mine on Shoal Lake. Both Katz and Doer said the area is too environmentally sensitive, since it is the city's main water source. "There can be no compromise when it comes to the safety of our water," said Katz in a press release. "Winnipeggers expect their elected officials to work together on this matter. I will provide all possible support to Premier Doer and his government to ensure our water supply remains safe," the Mayor said. Doer also sent a letter to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty expressing his concerns about the project. Last week, Halo Resources of Vancouver completed a deal with Sheridan Platinum Group of Toronto and Shoal Lake 39 band councillors to purchase the historic Duport property on Stevens and Cameron Islands.

In the late 1980s, Consolidated Professor planned to invest more than \$53 million into a similar project and create close to 600 jobs during the development the property, but their plans were shelved after an outcry from Winnipeg residents and Manitoba politicians. In the mid-1980s, the band hired former Indian Affairs Minister and future Prime Minister Jean Chretien to lobby on its behalf, as they pushed for a 350-lot cottage development on the lake, but it was also shelved. Shoal Lake 39 Chief Fraser Greene reserved comment on the issue of water quality last week, but was encouraged by the agreement with Halo, which could bring more than 100 jobs to the reserve, which has chronic levels of unemployment ranging in the 70 % range. The agreement could also bring much-needed revenues to the reserve, in the form of royalties.

Dr. Sande Harlos, medical officer for the Winnipeg Health Authority, said she opposed any plans, if they put city residents at risk. "If any development is done in the watershed, they (the parties involved) would have to clearly demonstrate it wouldn't have any impact on water quality," she said. Ontario's Ministry of Northern Development and Mines spokesman Laura Blondeau



Manitoba Premier Gary Doer. Photo courtesy Daily Miner and News.

replied on behalf of the premier's office. Blondeau said it was only a proposed project at this point, with no decision to develop the property at this point. She added the company would have to undergo a rigorous environmental assessment process, if it decided to proceed with development. "Our government will continue to work with the Manitoba government to ensure any concerns are addressed," she said.

Winnipeg has drawn water from the watershed since an agreement in 1913. Four years ago, a panel of experts on water quality recommended the addition of a \$204-million water treatment facility, for the city of 650,000. "The rationale for construction of a water treatment plant is based primarily on health concerns," said Dr. Margaret Fast, medical officer of health for Winnipeg in October 2000. The city's public works chairman, Councilor Gord Steeves, said he was surprised by the news, as well as concerned because the city didn't have control over its source of drinking water. "We're not screaming the sky's falling. We just want to be included in the (development) process," he said. He noted mining projects in the northern part of Manitoba have fallen through, leaving governments with the responsibility of cleaning up after them. In 1992, the Kenora Chamber of Commerce wrote to then Ontario Premier Bob Rae in support of the Shoal Lake mining project, saying it would inject more than \$10 million into the local economy, as well as create close to 600 jobs. Gold extraction processes can include the use of cyanide in the milling of raw ore, which is a major concern for Winnipeg residents who have camps on the lake, as well as those downstream who drink the water.

In its 1980's proposed development, Consolidated Professor offered to ship its ore for extraction away from the watershed, as was done during the 1930s, when the mine was last active. However, their argument failed to sway anxious opponents. Halo Resources, the current owners of the site, have not said what their plans are for the extraction of gold at the mine. They also have not issued a timetable for their development plans. Treaty 3 spokesman Adolphus Cameron said he expected to meet with band leadership next week. In June, newly-elected Grand Chief Arnold Gardner said he favoured a 50-50 approach to resource development. Assembly of First Nations National Chief, Phil Fontaine met with Gardner in June. At the time, Fontaine said he was concerned with the issue of resource development on Shoal Lake, and hoped to pursue the matter with Winnipeg's Mayor. (*Daily Miner and News*)



National Chief Phil Fontaine.

December 21, 2004

Policing key issue in Common Ground

Kenora and First Nations leaders remain committed to bridge building between their communities. Monday, Mayor Dave Canfield sat down with Wauzhushk Onigum Chief Ken Skead, Deputy Police Chief Dan Jorgensen and Lake of the Woods Business Incentive Corporation special events coordinator Buck Matiwski as part of that process. Homelessness in Kenora continues to be a growing concern, as the only shelter in town continues to be overcrowded as wintry temperatures continue. Calls for service for public drunkenness range between 3,000 and 4,000 a year, adding to the cost of policing that has to be carried by local ratepayers. Deputy Chief Dan Jorgensen acknowledged there may be ways for the three different police forces in the area to cooperate. Aside from the city's officers, there are OPP and Treaty 3 officers in the area. Jorgensen noted he has scheduled meetings with his counterpart at Treaty 3 Police, Wally McLeod, in an effort to find ways they can work together more effectively.



Mayor Dave Canfield.

Another area of common interest is the recruitment of Aboriginal officers, as well as opportunities for visible cooperation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal law enforcement officers. In August, Jorgensen said he was having trouble finding enough qualified applicants of First Nations ancestry. At the same time, Treaty 3 Police were reporting some success in their efforts. Last summer, 78 % of Treaty 3 police staff, or 43 of 55 officers, were of Aboriginal ancestry, and they were looking to add another 15 to their complement. "It's not going to happen overnight, but I think it's going to happen soon," Canfield said, referring to partnerships between the city and First Nations. The Mayor added he felt there was enough willingness and momentum to continue pushing the process forward, in spite of recent events. In particular, community leaders are wary of public reaction to legal findings related to the death of Max Kakegamic. The North Spirit Lake resident was found beaten to death four years ago, prompting an outcry from the Aboriginal community. A judge's report released in the spring criticized the investigation by police, leading many First Nations leaders to call for a public inquiry. Four years ago, an Aboriginal teenager -- Chippy McDonald -- was found dead in the north end of the city, not far from where she was reported missing several months earlier. This led to comments from some First Nations residents that Ojibway people weren't treated the same way by police.



Family members pay their respects to Max Kakegamic during a visit to the spot where he was killed in downtown Kenora. His killer was never found.



Police services board chairman Councillor Colin Wasacase.

As a result of the growing tension between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the area, Canfield and former Treaty 3 Grand Chief Leon Jourdain formed the Common Land, Common Ground committee, in hopes of finding solutions to their common concerns about economic and social issues. On Monday, Canfield referred to a workshop last August with representatives from The Pas and Opaskayak Cree First Nation, who outlined how their long-term divisions turned into a prosperous economic partnership, which allowed for the development of social services in both communities. “I think we have a picture now that leaders from the different communities are willing to work together,” said Chief Ken Skead, at the end of the meeting. Matiowski suggested there was a division between the social issues facing youth and those facing adults within the area, which included food, shelter and employment opportunities.

Treaty 3 recently declared a state of emergency, due to youth suicides in Whitefish Bay and Whitedog, while Kenora city council is looking at imposing an overnight curfew, in response to youth vandalism. Canfield suggested government representatives at all levels in the area may help create employment opportunities as well as increased affordable housing in the area, by backing his home in a box idea. Canfield’s vision is for a series of small plants on several First Nations building modular homes using First Nations

employees. The homes would be for use by residents of the First Nations and for sale to others. Using wood products produced by mill workers in Kenora is an example of a value-added commodity that could benefit everyone, he said.

One pilot project estimated there is a need for at least 1,000 new homes on Aboriginal communities in Treaty 3 within the next 10 years, with each requiring building contractors, furnishings and utilities. Canfield also suggested meeting with Kenora MP Roger Valley and Prime Minister Paul Martin's senior adviser on Aboriginal affairs, Jeff Copenace, in an effort to find funding for solutions to social problems. A possible solution is the Samaritan Centre in Sudbury, which recently received provincial funding to help provide food and shelter to the needy through the Northern Ontario Heritage program. The next meeting of the Common Land, Common Ground committee is scheduled for February 28. (*Daily Miner and News*)

February 3, 2005

Wauzhushk Onigum pushes for concrete action in talks

Wauzhushk Onigum (Rat Portage) Chief Ken Skead is calling for more concrete action as race relations talks with the city continue. "We've got to get down to who's going to do what," he said Wednesday. Skead has been meeting with Kenora Mayor Dave Canfield in an effort to smooth over tensions in the area. An important area of contention is the treatment of Aboriginal people by city police. Even though Treaty 3 Police Service was created to provide more culturally-sensitive policing, their main mandate is to serve outlying communities. The OPP also handles calls in the Kenora area. Canfield has consistently said he is committed to co-operating with the four-year-old Common Land, Common Ground process, which includes improvements to law enforcement.



Chief Ken Skead of Wauzhushk Onigum. Photo courtesy Jon Thompson.



Special events director Buck Matiowski.

Shortly before Christmas, Canfield met with both Skead, Street Brigade co-ordinator Buck Matiowski and Dan Jorgensen, who has since been promoted from deputy police chief to acting chief. Discussions during the meeting also focused on ways of reducing crime. Meanwhile, the First Nation continues to offer help to street people in Kenora. Councillor Pat Seymour said their program of providing lunch once a month for visitors to the Kenora Fellowship Centre's drop-in program will continue. "We

want them to know we haven't forgotten about them," he said, noting the project started a year ago. Nishnawbe Aski Nation leaders have expressed an interest in attending the conference on policing, along with Treaty 3. (*Daily Miner and News*)

April 2, 2005

Manitou Rapids puts past behind them with historic settlement

From the steps of the band office, signs of the spring thaw are everywhere at Manitou Rapids First Nation. But they aren't the only reasons for smiles among band members. They're among about a dozen bands across the province to have successfully settled a land claim. While the final details have yet to be worked out, the agreement will allow the First Nation to buy back land expropriated from them more than 90 years ago, as well as invest \$70 million in community trust funds for the benefit of the 700 Rainy River First Nations members affected. "I take great pride in living here," says band member Nicole Cochrane, who assisted with negotiations. When you look around, the public buildings are freshly painted, the roads are paved and without potholes, and yards aren't strewn with debris. When Cochrane talks about children's programs available on the reserve, she finishes by saying, "These kids are spoiled."

Around the corner from the administrative offices, the band operates its own fish hatchery. Down the road are two thriving businesses employing band members: Manitou Forest Products and Manitou Mounds. The sawmill operation offers employment for about 35 area employees, and roughly 80 % of them are from area First Nations. Mill manager Dale Kaemingh formed a partnership with the band about seven years ago, and he says sales have continued to grow. While similar operations in the area have suffered from export duties and a rising dollar, Manitou Forest Products has benefited from a partnership with Ainsworth in Barwick, as well as their proximity to the American border. Together, they work to produce value-added products such as oriented strand board and flooring to local wholesalers and retailers. With sales reaching a level of between \$3 million and \$3.5 million a year, the company is in an enviable position. "It's a good partnership," said Kaemingh, noting others have closed, such as Devlin Timber.

Having jobs for their younger generation adds to a sense of hope in the community, which comes as a surprise when you consider its history. The original Rainy River land claim dates back to 1914, when the Great War and the Colonial Era were coming to a close. At that time, six of the seven reserves that formed Rainy River First Nations were forced to leave behind developed communities and live together at Manitou Rapids. They left behind more than 46,000 acres of land, including sacred burial mounds that date back an

estimated 8,000 years. As a result of last month's agreement, both the federal and provincial governments have agreed to cooperate with the band members, as they try to restore the original lands, as well as compensate band members for lost revenues from resource development. Although no private land will be expropriated as a result of the accord, the band is now in a position to buy it back from those willing to sell.

"Today's announcement represents a significant step forward in meeting the continuing commitment of the Rainy River First Nations, Canada and Ontario to finalize and resolve this claim," said Chief Albert Hunter, at a special ceremony to mark the occasion. The mounds themselves can be viewed at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung (Place of the long rapids) Historic Centre, sometimes referred to as Manitou Mounds. It is the single largest collection of Aboriginal burial grounds in Canada, and they have been recognized as a national historic site. The artifacts and displays allow us a glimpse into civilizations dating back 8,000 years. The museum's collection reflects a time when woolly mammoths roamed the Earth, and Aboriginal history was recorded in pictographs or pottery. Now preserved in a world-class interpretive centre, it provides a vital link to our cultural roots, particularly for those of Aboriginal ancestry. Now in their tenth year, the marketing plan for the interpretive centre has been expanded to include hunt camp owners and tour operators from across Northwestern Ontario, Minnesota and into Manitoba. "What's good for us is also good for you," says marketing consultant Brian Kahler, during a tour with local businessmen.

A recent survey showed there were a total of 6.3 million overnight visits in Northwestern Ontario, with 100,000 in the Rainy River District, Kahler added, noting 16 % of those were for cultural reasons. Camp owners acknowledged there is room for more family-oriented stops in the area, which provide a variety of entertainment for visitors. For this reason, staff have broadened their appeal to include arts and crafts workshops, along with outdoor experiences ranging from three to two weeks. Tourists can use tipis, an Elders' centre and a roundhouse as they explore the northern Ontario. "What we're trying to do in the last year is not only put our culture on display, but to allow our customers to interact with it and ask questions," says Cheryl Copenace, executive director of the centre. On a good year, their guestbook contains names from across North America and Europe, and Copenace is trying to improve upon their statistics by creating links with other attractions along the Winnipeg to Thunder Bay corridor. Their first opportunity of the season will come in May, when leaders from all levels of government are expected to gather for the First Nation's annual fish fry and the official signing ceremony for the land claim settlement. On the grassy banks of the river, Chief Albert Hunter is expected to gather with ministers of the Crown, so they can put a difficult past behind them and shape a vision for a prosperous future as partners. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

September 24, 2005

Stronach announces skills development funding for area youth

Human Resources Skills Development Minister Belinda Stronach sympathized with the needs of rural Canadians Tuesday night. As she addressed party members at a fund raiser in Dryden, Stronach said there was a continuing need for skills training and a quality postsecondary education system in smaller communities. This will help them continue to offer good opportunities for young people, as well as older workers seeking to retrain themselves for a changing job market. "When there is change, whether it's because of global competition or pressure from market conditions, the best investments are in transitions and providing dollars for retraining," she said.

Stronach was clearly aware of the crisis facing the forest industry in northwestern Ontario during her trip. As she met with community leaders, the minister heard from many voices about the challenges facing northern communities. "It was very interesting for me," she said, after listening to First Nations and youth delegations. The minister also emphasized the need for more training in the sciences and trades, as she addressed the faithful in Dryden Tuesday. Speaking before a full-house Liberal fundraiser, Stronach urged young and old to continue learning, especially trade workers. "It's amazing how fast and how competitive this global economy is," she said. As she reflected on her days with Magna, the auto parts giant, she described her experiences while touring plants in developing countries. "If young people knew what was coming... It's scary," she added.

A factory worker in Canada might make \$30 an hour, compared with \$3 an hour for the same job in Mexico or \$3 a day in China, she said. The minister argued for continued improvements in skills training, so Canada could improve its global competitiveness. Since trade surpluses are going to help us pay for our continued quality of life in years to come, she encouraged a culture of lifelong learning. This applied to youth making career decisions, as well as mill workers facing layoffs. "Canada's not up to where it should be," she stated.

Stronach's last visit to Northwestern Ontario came in February 2004 during her bid for the Conservative leadership. Since then, she described her life in politics as a "big wild ride." She also acknowledged she's developed a thicker skin, as a result of some of the criticisms she's received -most notably for crossing the floor from the Conservatives to Liberals this year. However, there were many women in her audience who looked up to her as a role model. "I feel as though the minister has changed what history may have been," said Laura Hamilton of Dryden, in reference to Stronach's decision to cross the floor and, in part, save the Martin minority government which could have lost the spring budget vote. Earlier in the day, the minister announced more

than \$300,000 in funding for skills development for 30 young people in Dryden and Red Lake. Stronach pointed to the project as part of the \$125 million set aside for workplace training in the federal budget. “Our shared goal is to help young people secure long-term jobs,” she said, referring to her department’s partnership with educators in the community. The minister emphasized the need for skills training in the trades, which has been lacking in many of the communities she has toured recently. “It’s evident across the country,” she said, noting post-secondary education has to mean more than university or college. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)



Belinda Stronach came to the riding first as a Conservative, leadership candidate, then as a Liberal cabinet minister.

January 28, 2006

KPS Chief pursues initiatives to restore public faith in police

Kenora’s new police chief, Dan Jorgensen, took the bull by the horns Monday, as he addressed criticism of the department following a stinging attack by the CTV current affairs program W5 last Saturday. “Obviously the Carambetsos



Deputy Police Chief Dan Jorgensen.

case has caused us to look critically at the way we do business,” he said. Five years ago, Kenora businessman Justin Carambetsos was arrested in connection with the beating death of North Spirit Lake First Nation resident Max Kakegamic. The pub owner has since had charges stayed, a \$5 million lawsuit has been launched against the city and misconduct proceedings against one of the investigating officers are ongoing. As forensic officer on the scene at the time of Kakegamic’s death, as well as the new leader of the force, Jorgensen has accepted responsibility for both his role in the flawed investigation, along with the difficult task of

restoring the reputation of his men in blue. Since he has received legal advice that doesn’t allow him to comment on the case itself, the Chief is focusing on restoring public confidence in his department and rebuilding trust with Aboriginal people in the community. In subsequent investigations, members of the OPP and Thunder Bay police forces have been called in to supplement local efforts, when required, he said.

The province has also introduced mandatory procedures to be followed in all communities, including Kenora. “We don’t do these every day,” he said, noting police working in larger centres can add more experience or more expertise to existing resources. This is particularly true initially, when crime scenes need to

be secured for long time periods or witnesses need to be interviewed. Both activities can overwhelm the resources of a smaller community, he noted, adding case managers have also been brought in to help bring suspects to justice. A training officer has been assigned the task of keeping procedures and policies up-to-date, while adding training materials to help prepare staff for future situations. The new manual is now available on-line for easy access, he noted. In an effort to address the concerns of First Nations residents, Jorgensen says he has attended numerous meetings and events, to build bridges between the two communities. These have included one-on-one meetings with First Nation leaders, as part of the ongoing Common Land, Common Ground initiative.

Jorgensen acknowledges the low levels of trust that exists between Aboriginal people and police, so he is also reviewing the complaints process, in an attempt to ensure those who have the courage to bring their concerns forward are satisfied that their message has been properly heard. Along these lines, he suggests inserting a mediator, who may assist complainants with both the formulation of their complaint and an explanation of the end results. Allegations involving serious criminal wrongdoing, including assaults, may also be referred to officers with the OPP or Treaty 3 Police, in an attempt to ensure a proper investigation. Systemic racism within the justice system remains the goal of a two-year \$250,000 study being conducted by Treaty 3, which Jorgensen has joined. He is also a strong proponent of the community-based policing philosophy, which tries to prevent situations that may lead to crime by having officers present and approachable within the city.



Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner talks about Aboriginal issues with the media in 2005.

Recruiting drives for new officers with KPS continue to target local Aboriginal candidates, as existing staff have agreed to help with the police foundations course at Confederation College. The Chief is also interested in mentoring promising applicants, who may require guidance in their quest for a career in policing. Jorgensen noted it can take up to five years to get on a police force, even after completing a two-year post-secondary program. Many of the Aboriginal candidates he sees are missing some technical skills, which mentors can help applicants develop, in order to qualify for future openings, he added. "As chief of police, I am firmly committed to improving our relationships with area First Nations and to seeing that their concerns are addressed," he said in a prepared statement. "I am working very hard in that direction and have made personal progress, but acknowledge that there is much to do." Jorgensen also noted that he has talked with the parents of Max Kakegamic, who are continuing to seek answers in connection with the death of their son. "I acknowledge their right to seek answers," he says. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

May 4, 2007

Shoal Lake 40 residents complete walk to Winnipeg to demand road

Residents of a reserve have set up a camp at the proposed site of a human rights museum to fight for a road to their island community. About 100 men, women and children from the Shoal Lake 40 reserve set up Thursday at The Forks in downtown Winnipeg. They are trying to pressure the federal government to build them a 20-kilometre road for \$25 million. Chief Vernon Redsky said his community was left marooned on a man-made island after the federal government expropriated their original homes in 1913. It was done to make way for the entrance of the aqueduct, the source of Winnipeg's water, and sliced a canal through the peninsula, creating the island. For years, the neighbouring Shoal Lake 39 band allowed them to use their road after taking a ferry there, but recently the community stopped allowing them to use it. To protest and bring attention to the issue, about a third of the population of the community, located 137 km east of Winnipeg, decided to march to Winnipeg. The Chief said both the civic and Manitoba provincial government support the road. He said setting up camp where the new Canadian Human Rights Museum will be built was intentional. "This is a human rights issue and that's why we're here where the museum will be. We're denied access to go home because of the government of Canada." With her 11-month-old daughter, Laney, sitting in the stroller she pushed for more than 100 km, Feather Redsky said if they get a road it will be more than worth the sore muscles. "It was tiring and it was hard, but I'm doing this for every kid and others there." (*Daily Miner and News*)

September 1, 2007

Treaty 3 opens new police headquarters at Round Lake

It was a day for the history books. On August 24, dignitaries gathered around the drum. After paying their respects to the sacred items, chiefs and leaders celebrated the completion of the new headquarters for the northwest region of the Treaty 3 Police Service. In the journey towards self-government and self-determination, it marked the realization of a dream and a vision. The Anishinabe Nation had created its own police force four years ago. Now, they have their own headquarters. From their state-of-the-art base on Homestake Road, roughly 40 officers will patrol the northwest region, including such communities as Shoal Lake #40, Whitedog and Grassy Narrows. "This is truly a great day for us. A day for us to join together and reflect on," said Joe Red Thunderboy, the chairman of the Treaty 3 police board. Thunderboy was among the first Aboriginal police officers in the area, when he was first



Constable Tara Kelly helps open new Treaty 3 police headquarters.

hired more than 30 years ago. He's also overseen the birth of the new service, as well as its facilities.

Grand Chief Arnold Gardner was also quick to emphasize the importance of the occasion. "There are young people looking for careers in law enforcement. It's great!" said Gardner, with a smile. "This is a proud day for each and every one of us," he said. Beside him on the podium was Deputy Mayor Andrew Poirier, whose comments continued in the theme of relationship building. "We are building a productive alliance between friends," he said, referring to the Common Land, Common Ground initiative. Along with the joint develop-

ment of Tunnel Island, the city also joined in with Treaty 3 for the National Day of Action in June, as they demanded more action by provincial and federal governments on Aboriginal issues. It took more than 40 years, but Treaty 3 Police Chief Brian Rupert finally got his wish. No longer would the words substandard be applied to his officers or his building. "It wasn't that long ago, one couldn't even comprehend a stand-alone force and building," he said. "This is ours," he emphasized, noting it had been designed and built by Ojibway people. "Today is a good day to be Anishinabe." The history of the service has deep roots in the region. Some dates to remember would include December 2001, when chiefs stood in unison in support of their own force. The hiring of officers began in 2003, and they have now reached 77 officers, of which three-quarters have Aboriginal heritage and 70 % are Treaty 3 members. Speakers were also sure to emphasize the importance of cooperation between neighbouring police forces and governments. The facility, itself, will mean the 40 officers sharing 400 sq. ft. of space with the OPP can now have their own 14,000 sq. ft. headquarters. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

December 13, 2007

Survivors from Wabigoon River settlement seek compensation

Betty Riffel was working at Birchwood Terrace, talking with compensation recipients from Grassy Narrows and Whitedog, when she realized she may also be suffering from the long-term effects of mercury poisoning. She recognized the symptoms -- headaches, dizziness and problems with her bones -- could be related to the water she drank, while growing up on the

banks of the Wabigoon River. Her family was among about 60, who lived at Quibell, just north of Vermilion Bay. Today, there's only about nine of them left, and time isn't on their side. According to Elders, the original Ojibway settlement at Lac Seul split, with one group going upstream to Wabauskang Narrows. However, when settlers came for logging at the turn of the last century, they also brought with them diseases such as smallpox. "All we heard was the sound of coffins being made," said Riffel, recalling the words of her mother. The community of about 1,000 was decimated, so they moved upstream to Quibell. A half-century later, with the community reduced to about 60, the Dryden mill became renown as a source of mercury contamination. In time, Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations were compensated through a landmark agreement, but those at Wabauskang never were.

According to Riffel, a Wabauskang band member, their chief became ill at key moments of negotiations. She recalled he was in a Winnipeg hospital, where he was having surgery on his stomach. Her own status as a community member wasn't recognized until a decade later, when Bill C-31 reinstated many women and descendants, making them eligible for claims through their First Nation. The issue became more urgent last October with the death of Bertha Petiquan, who'd also spent a lot of time putting together the documents to define their experience. This is when Riffel, 68, realized she could count the number of survivors on her fingers. As a result, Riffel's re-dedicated herself to the task of getting justice for those who are left. During her time at Birchwood, Riffel remembered she would talk with residents suffering from the long-term effects of Minimata Disease. They included stomach problems, headaches, the loss of minerals in bone material, along with neurological symptoms such as tingling in the extremities, seizures, numbness, shaking and tremors.

Back in Quibell, many residents were exposed when they were growing up, since the community used polluted water from the Wabigoon River for formula for their young babies. Sadly, she recalled many infants passing away such as her own brother, when he was only nine months old. "There was no need of them dying the way they did. They never did anything wrong. They didn't get a chance to live, at all," she said, during a short interview last week. As she goes through the files with her brother Pat, there are the names of more than 40 Quibell residents, who didn't live long enough to have their claims recognized by the governments and the courts. They also include the name of a long-time street person from Kenora, who is living out his senior years in a modest downtown apartment.

Some of the documents include reports from Japanese experts, who've visited Grassy Narrows over the years, measuring the effects of mercury poisoning over time. There's also a draft paper from a doctoral candidate, who researched their community's history, as it related to the contamination. Of course, the process for recognition will be expensive, since experts will have to



Betty Riffel and her brother Pat go through the faces and the names of those affected by mercury poisoning from Quibell on Wabauskang First Nation.

collect evidence and lawyers will have to fight legal battles, before any cheques are made or apologies issued. As a result, Riffel pulls out a letter requesting support for legal fees, in order to help press their case. An e-mail on the table lets them know about an environmental conference in mid-January. Even when this issue is settled, Pat Petiquan may not be satisfied. As he goes fishing on the lakes and rivers nearby, he still sees things that bother him, such as deer with grey-coloured livers and muskies with fungus floating to the surface. A more detailed study of traditional foods in the region has already been recommended, since a 2001 study found clear signs of contamination. (*Daily Miner and News*)

May 3, 2008

Treaty 3 conference tackles regional mining issues

It was a moment for the ages. For two days last week, First Nation leaders mixed and mingled with mining company representatives, as well as provincial officials in Kenora. With millions being spent on exploration and development across Northern Ontario, conference delegates and organizers were clearly hoping some solutions could be found, in order to take advantage of historic opportunities for prosperity. Canadian Arrow president Kim Tyler said he hoped to bring 150 mining jobs to the Sioux Narrows area, and production could begin at their Kenbridge site as soon as 2010. The company

also hoped to bring in \$108 million worth of construction, as they get ready to open, and they could make a profit of \$43 million a year, according to their projections.

Tyler was addressing the Treaty 3 mining conference in Kenora Wednesday at the Travelodge. Delegates included private industry, First Nations and provincial staff in hopes of dealing with some highly controversial topics. He also noted he has a formidable challenge ahead of him, as he tries to raise the money necessary for the project from financial institutions, who are suffering through the sub-prime credit crunch. The company's stock closed at 36 cents a share Wednesday. Former Regional Chief Charles Fox, hosted the workshops, and he reminded everyone of the volatility of the situation, when he referred to band council members from Kitchenumaykoosib Inninuwig. "Those people, who are in jail, are my cousins. They're my relatives... As a person who was brought up and who believes very strongly in our rights, it aroused anger," he said. Fox also offered a conciliatory note, when he said it was important for those of us who lived together to get along with one another, for the benefit of our young people. He noted 70 % of First Nations are under-25 years-old. "So there's challenge and there's opportunity," he said.

In his remarks, Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner stressed the importance of having a rights-based approach to partnerships based on the treaty signed between First Nations and the Crown in 1873. "We're here to stay, and you're here to stay. So let's work together," he said. Gardner also addressed Anishinabe members of the audience, noting they'd been asleep for too long, and it was time for changes. Kenora Mayor Len Compton also referred to the treaty, when he addressed the conference Wednesday. "We can move forward successfully, only if our treaty is respected," he said.

While discussing their disagreements as part of the Common Land, Common Ground discussions, the Mayor said they discovered deep commonalities. If they wanted to ensure lasting, local benefits for local people, they needed to get federal and provincial officials to respect the treaty, he added. With more than 400 companies expected to work 308,000 claims in the province this year, there could be \$600 million worth of exploration on 800 projects, according to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. Together, the province says the mining industry brings in an estimated \$426 million worth of federal, provincial and municipal taxes. However, the local share is based on property assessment, not royalties, and it excludes First Nations.

Northern Development and Mines representative Lori Churchill said the government committed to resource benefit sharing in their Throne Speech, and they'd recently added an Aboriginal Relations Branch to the ministry, in an effort to help resolve long-standing issues. The 43 mines in the province are expected to have a payroll of \$18 billion, Churchill noted, during her presentation. Treaty 3's Great Earth Law got a full endorsement from Tyler,

who said he'd been in discussions with the Grand Council staff for a year. Like many junior mining companies, he was working in an office of two, when he discovered the importance of consultations with First Nations. He encouraged his peers to do the same, since the law brought certainty to the development process. Essentially, companies who want to do business within Treaty 3 would have to get permission from the Grand Council. This would include agreements on benefit sharing, environmental and cultural issues. Currently, companies can get permits from the province, without permission from First Nations. Andrew Johnson, who's been involved in Aboriginal politics for 23 years, explained how the Great Earth Law developed from Anishinabe government through community consultations, as well as a Bell telephone project involving the construction of lines through Treaty 3 territory. It was the first time the Grand Council took it upon them self to negotiate with the company directly for the benefit of First Nation members. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

July 4, 2008

Hydro chairman apologizes to Dalles members

Jake Epp, the head of Ontario Power Generation, made a personal visit to Dalles First Nation Thursday so he could acknowledge the pain caused by the devastation of flooding associated with hydro dams. Epp, who has served at the federal cabinet table, recognized the self-sufficient lifestyle that existed before industrialization was impacted by development along the Winnipeg River. "Over 50 years ago, your land was flooded by the construction of Whitedog Generating Station ... In the years that followed the flooding, and construction of the generating station our people did not appreciate nor respect the importance of your cultural and social practices. Procedures were followed that neither properly informed you nor allowed for your direct participation," he said, during his address to the community. Epp, who served as a cabinet minister and MP from Provencher, MB, noted he'd become familiar with the area and the issue, during frequent trips to the area with his family.

Historical records for the Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining First Nation, date back to 1893. Five years later, the Norman Dam was built, and the government started to get involved in regulating the water flow upstream. By 1917, reports show a major impact on members of the community, which was made worse by the introduction of the paper mill. In 1939, non-native land owners were compensated for their losses associated with logging, but not the First Nation. Instead, the government tried to get members to surrender the land, so further diversion work could be done. Between 1956 and 1970, the population declined steadily, until there was nobody left. At this time, the commercial fishery was also closed, due to an excess of mercury contamination. Elder



Ontario Power Generation chairman Jake Epp (right) apologizes to Dalles First Nation Chief Lorraine Cobiness (left), Elders and members, during a special visit.

Alice Kelly, who was born on the First Nation, recalled the memories of her mother, auntie and brother, as she spoke of her time on the grievance committee. “I’m really happy to see everybody come and share in this,” she said. Band councillor John Henry had been involved in the settlement process for more than a decade. He promised the money involved would be placed in trust for 40 years, so the benefits could be shared with children and grandchildren. “This is a great moment in our history here,” he said. Chief Lorraine Cobiness noted she wasn’t born yet when these tragedies occurred, but she still recognized the importance of the apology and restitution. “A lot of the wrongs that have been done to this community have been acknowledged here today,” she said. “Rest assured ... In the future, we will be heard.”

The Chief also called for a new era of open government, as the community rebuilt for future generations. While Grassy Narrows and Whitedog came to terms in the 1980s, Dalles and Wabauskang were left out of the process. Residents from these communities have since come forward with their stories of destruction and loss. The terms of the agreement between Ontario Power Generation and Dalles were not released. Dalles has been struggling with the combined effects of a booming youth population and a lack of employment. Last winter, an addictions counsellor from the community crawled on his hands and knees toward Kenora, in a bid to get help.

An important part of the rebuilding process is economic development. This includes the Common Ground initiative with the city, neighbouring First Nations and Treaty 3 at Tunnel Island. Professional facilitator and amateur historian Cuyler Cotton was initially invited to help the Dalles in its negotiations with Ontario Hydro. He's also involved in the Common Ground talks. "The land takes care of us, and we need to understand that," he said Thursday. In his research, he'd found the community was once the traditional seat of government, since it controlled the trade routes. There were also healthy supplies of fish, game, wild rice and berries around. Band Councillor Terry Greene, whose family used to live on an island near the community, compared this week's statement with the prime minister's apology to residential school survivors last month. While it was good to hear governments acknowledge past wrongs done to former students, Greene was still waiting for the government to fully honour his claim. The community of about 300 is located about 20 minutes north of Kenora. (*Daily Miner and News*)



Residential school survivor, Terry Greene.

January 23, 2009

Land claim settlement approved at Rat Portage

Wauzhushk Onigum band members have voted 68 % in favour of an agreement with the province of Ontario. Results were released Thursday. Terms of the deal were not made public, due to a confidentiality agreement between the province and the First Nation. The claim is based on gold taken from the Sultana Mine a century ago without the permission of the community. Negotiations are also ongoing with the federal government on issues that include remediation of the land. Chief Ken Skead said Thursday, "It's a good day for the community."

The decision will allow band council to move ahead with economic development projects, he added. A formal signing ceremony will follow, and band members will be consulted on any future developments, before decisions are made, the Chief emphasized. Rat Portage has about 600 members. According to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, between 1890 and 1910, mining activity near Lake of the Woods accounted for over 55 % of gold production in the whole of Ontario. Production peaked in 1899 with the Sultana, Regina and Mikado mines as the major producers. There were also three reduction works in Kenora and Keewatin, according to ministry records, but recovery of gold at these mills was not great and they proved unsuccessful. (*Daily Miner and News*)



The old Sultana Mine processed gold ore near Rat Portage at the turn of the last century. Courtesy of Lake of the Woods Museum.

June 12, 2010

More than words required downtown

Eighty-one year-old Elder Nancy Morrison looked tired Wednesday evening. At a vigil in front of the old Knights of Columbus Hall for Helen Proulx, Morrison urged her mainly First Nations audience to pray for peace in Kenora's downtown. Exhausted, after a day of reaching out to angry residents, the Elder still managed to find the energy to once again call for people to work together in a time of crisis. In her lifetime, Morrison has been a student of the residential school system, where they tried to take away her language and traditions. She has also experienced the loss of the traditional way of life, when the fields of wild rice, hunting and fishing grounds gradually faded away. It's taken her many years, as she sought to heal her broken soul, before finally finding peace. As she nears the end of her journey, she understands all too well, the roots of the tensions that boiled over last week, when a distraught woman was shot by a police officer.

Despite the great losses, Morrison still chose to call for cooperation in search of solutions. Reconciliation and reparation was still on her agenda. Similarly, at the same gathering Wednesday, Grassy Narrows member Chrissy Swain chose to overcome her anger. Instead, she spoke of the need to work together. Even though Swain felt last Monday's shooting was entirely predictable and preventable, she called upon leaders from the city and its First Nation neighbours to work for a better future. It was important for all their children and

grandchildren. It all happened on a beautiful summer evening. There were lots of people out on the street enjoying the weather, when a lone female constable responded to the call for a domestic dispute. Around 8:30 p.m., the officer found herself face-to-face with Proulx. According to comments from witnesses, the Grassy Narrows member was in a highly emotional state. As the constable approached, they allege there were warnings for Proulx to drop the knife she was carrying. At first, it looked to some like she was going to slit her own wrists, but when Proulx decided to turn the knife on the officer and attacked, she was shot twice. There are witnesses from neighbouring buildings, who questioned the officer's use of a gun, when the victim had only a butter knife. They also questioned the response of medical attention, saying the police paid more attention to crowd control than first aid. What hasn't been described in many of the reports was the presence of an aggressive group of youth in the area, who added to the stressful situation. In essence, the officer had her hands full, and many on-line commentators have given her credit for wounding and not killing her assailant.

Unfortunately, the hard feelings between Aboriginal people and police have deep roots. For some, they go back to the day they were forcefully removed from their homes by Mounties and taken to residential school. There are also young people, who feel they've been mistreated in recent years, but don't feel they're complaints are being heard. It was interesting to note that Swain placed the responsibility on both native and non-native people, including their leaders. She referred to the recent blockade at her community that she led, which called for changes at Treaty 3 Police Service, as well as an appeal she'd made to the Grand Chief for reforms.

The Common Ground movement in Kenora started almost 10 years ago, in the fall of 2000, when a pair of brutal killings sparked racial tensions. At the time, the Grand Chief Leon Jourdain and the Mayor Dave Canfield felt they had more to gain through cooperation was necessary, than in confrontation at the local level. A decade later, politicians are still grappling with the fundamental structures underlying the deep inequalities exhibited in the city's downtown. Words, in this case, aren't enough to ease a worsening housing crisis, reverse a grim employment picture for unskilled workers or offer future pathways for youth at risk. As tired as the Elder may be, she still knows the tough work is yet to come, and she may not live long enough to see it. Still, she persisted in providing an example for us all. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

July 9, 2005

Fobister family history reflects changing lifestyles at Grassy Narrows

When Raphael Fobister was young, he lived in the bush near Grassy Narrows First Nation, just as his father and grandfather had done. Together, the family would hunt, fish, trap, guide and do whatever was necessary to live off the land. All that changed in the late 1960s, when mercury contaminated the English River system. The fishing, guiding and tourist trade all came to an end, forcing young people to find another way to live. “We just lived in the bush, and there was nothing to do,” Fobister remembered. “I saw other kids going to school, and I inquired about it, so I went,” he recalled. Ten years later, in 1979, he became the first in the family to earn a university degree, overcoming the passing of his father, grandfather and brother during his first year at the University of Manitoba. With good enough grades to enroll in the Master’s program for economics, he set his mind to studies in business and marketing, before being lured away by Indian and Northern Affairs. He has since returned to his home community, where he worked for the band, married his wife Barbara and started a family. As a board member of the new Abinoojii child and family services organization, he continues to be involved in the development of policies and objectives for the Aboriginal-run children’s aid society. He has also helped set the direction for talks between First Nations



Raphael Fobister.

and the provincial government, as it tries to chart a new course for infant and pre-school support services across Ontario. In his home community, he has also set the tone for the innovative Ojibway immersion program at the local school, which may set the pattern for educators across Treaty 3, who are hoping to retain young students by offering them more of a taste of their own culture.

Despite his broad education, Fobister himself admits to having lost the ability to speak his own language.

Even though his wife is a native language instructor, his children aren't fluent. Instead, his children have followed his footsteps to university. His oldest daughter, Yolanda, graduated with a degree in economics last February while two others are still in university. Within a generation, they've literally gone from the deep woods to the halls of higher learning, completing a remarkable transformation. And yet they seem to have missed something along the way.

Along with sessions on clearcutting, anti-racism, mercury and forest management; organizers of last week's youth powwow and environmental conference invited Elders from within the community to teach the old ways. Leaders on the First Nation have noted the widening generation gap, along with its implications for life on the reserve, which for some includes a dependency on the welfare system, says Chrissy Swain, who works with youth in the community. "I feel like we're accomplishing something, because there's little kids coming out and learning," she says with a smile. The environmental week and youth powwow ran from June 28 to July 3. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

January 21, 2006

Martin rallies for final sprint

Prime Minister Paul Martin said he would blame both Stephen Harper and Jack Layton, if the Kelowna agreement with Aboriginal people and the provinces falls through. "All I can say is that I disagree with Stephen Harper violently, but it is consistent with his philosophy," Martin said during a brief interview Wednesday. While referring to recent comments by the Conservative leader, who is distancing himself from the \$5.1



Prime Minister Paul Martin visits Kenora in 2005. Photo courtesy Shelley Bujold.

billion deal, Martin said years of work went into the accord that spelled out clear targets for improving the "shameful" living conditions on First Nations. If NDP Leader Jack Layton had agreed to postpone the election until March, as originally agreed, then the Kelowna agreement would have passed, Martin noted.

While recent numbers have shown a significant shift towards the Tories, even in Central Canada, Martin remained optimistic he could turn things around, just as he did during the last campaign. "Losing has not crossed my mind," he stressed, while praising the strong work of his incumbent MP, Roger Valley. Locally, Valley is facing a stiff challenge from NDP candidate Susan Barclay and Conservative Bill Brown. Last election, Valley defeated Barclay by just under 1,000 votes, with Brown coming in a close third. The Liberal party has

dominated the riding for the past 80 years, losing only once, in 1984 to the NDP. In light of recent polls, Martin took dead aim at Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's views on partnerships with industry, government support for communities. "We put a billion and a half dollars into a forestry package to support situations exactly like Kenora's, where you have a mill that's in trouble and closes," he said. "I think it is the responsibility of government to stand behind a community, when this happens... You can't let communities die," he added. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

October 29, 2007

Harper rolls up his sleeves

Prime Minister Stephen Harper rolled up his sleeves and took his own notes as he listened to the concerns of community leaders in Northwestern Ontario Friday. In a region hit hard by closing lumber mills and rising social problems on First Nations, Harper asked questions and asked for submissions in an effort to respond to local challenges in both Kenora and Dryden. Kenora Forest Products mill manager Rod McKay pressed for relief on quotas for softwood lumber, as his mill prepares for an unscheduled shutdown at the end of the month. Hotel manager Mark Duggan wanted Ottawa to put Canada on the map on the international tourism market. Some also looked for help on the passport issue. Retailer Lisa Yeomans of Kenora Flooring Centre sought relief from cheap imports from China, which are flooding the market with inferior product. "Let's get behind a Made in Canada policy" she said.

Kenora and District Chamber of commerce president Thelma Wilkins-Page lobbied for help in education and training. She pointed to a recent survey, which showed 35 per cent of local jobs went unfilled, while thousands of young First Nations people were looking for work. Pikangikum First Nation, for example, had an 86 per cent increase in their population since the last census, and roughly half their 2,000 residents are under the age of 9. National Crime Stoppers executive member Ralph Page traveled to Dryden, so he could fight for mandatory treatment programs for addiction-related crimes, in an effort to stop the revolving door of justice. He also submitted the annual report from Making Kenora Home, which showed eight per cent of the community were looking for affordable housing, one of the highest rates in the country. Lawyer David Gibson was asked to send a memo to the prime minister's office on the notion of an ombudsman's office for treaty rights.

Band members often travel back and forth from their First Nation to centres such as Kenora, but their treaty rights don't follow them. On reserves, the federal government is responsible for paying for their education and health care, but in the cities the provinces pay the bill. Gibson noted community leaders



Kenora MP Greg Rickford hosts Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

are working hard to avoid the confrontations and frustrations of Caledonia, and Ottawa should help. “You’ve got to build on that,” he said. It’s the same for resource development, where Grassy Narrows and Big Trout Lake have been embroiled in some pitched battles with the province over issues of consent. After the meeting, Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner thanked Harper for his commitment on the residential school settlement, and hoped to get time with the new Indian Affairs minister, Chuck Strahl. Whitefish Bay Chief Warren White was happy to see the prime minister in the area, but was still cautious with his optimism. He noted homes in his community were still in need of clean drinking water, and he was waiting to see the commitments of the Kelowna Accord kept.

May 19, 2009

Prime minister, premier announce \$100M for Trans-Canada

As a long line of holiday traffic wound its way into cottage country for the Victoria Day weekend, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty were in Kenora Friday to announce \$100 million for twinning a portion of the Trans-Canada Highway. Both levels of government will contribute \$50 million towards doubling the two-lane stretch of highway along a 10-kilometre section, which would begin at the Ontario-Manitoba border and stretch eastward. It represents the first stage of a planned 40-km highway expansion that will eventually extend to Kenora. “This investment will improve highway safety, create short-term jobs, and help local businesses

take advantage of new economic opportunities. By making this investment today, we are helping the people of Northwest Ontario seize the better jobs of tomorrow," said Harper, who noted 'Northwest Ontario has a tremendous future as a corridor for increased travel and trade between eastern and western Canada.' In the summer, traffic almost doubles from 4,000 vehicles a day to 7,000, noted McGuinty."Clearly, a two-lane highway no longer suffices," he said. The project, one of many job-creating investments contained in the federal government's Economic Action Plan, is supposed to create 700 jobs. Following the completion of an environmental assessment, construction is scheduled to begin in 2010. There are plans to complete a total of 40 kilometres, but no estimate of cost or time line for completion was offered.

Kenora-Rainy River MPP Howard Hampton, one of several distinguished guests in attendance for the announcement, agreed Friday's announcement was good news for the area, but noted it will still be some time before whole section between the Manitoba border and Kenora is finished. Others attending, included Kenora MP Greg Rickford, Vic Toews, president of the Treasury Board, Ontario Minister of Northern Development and Mines Michael Gravelle and several area mayors. In his introductory remarks Kenora MP Greg Rickford stated, "This Prime Minister has shown us again and again that he cares deeply about the future of Northern Ontario. He has graciously visited our area three times in the last year and a half." Rickford pointed to recent grants that have

July 19, 2008

Winnipeg River: A trip down Memory Lane

A trip up the Winnipeg River with Dalles First Nation resident Larry Henry led to a walk down Memory Lane. The Henrys, of course, have lived on the river for generations, so the former chief and band councillor is an ideal guide. Throughout the day, between stops at favourite fishing holes, he pointed out places where his family would camp, cast their nets, pick berries or help with the wild rice harvest. Although he has spent time as a police officer and mental health worker, it's clear his heart is still deeply rooted in the traditional lifestyle of the Ojibway people, who settled all along the river and into Lake of the Woods. ...Along the north shore of Darlington Bay, across from Tunnel Island, there used to be good blueberry patches, he said. As he says this, he wistfully noted the new signs for cottage development posted along the Lot lines.

Across the Taco Pass at Jay Island and under the bypass at Kimberley Rapids Narrows, the water levels are unusually high. The stormy weather also plays with the changing currents, as we look for our first fishing spot. The Lake of the Woods Control Board manages the dams and water flow along the basin. According to their charts, levels have been rising steadily for the last



Former Dalles First Nation Chief, Larry Henry, on the Winnipeg River, 2008.

two months, and they're up seven feet since May. This means they're up two feet over normal, with peaks that are four feet above the average. It's yet to be seen how the high water levels will impact the wild rice harvest, Henry noted, as he points to prime locations for rice patties on Poplar Portage and quiet bays next to the Dalles.

A few minutes later, at the base of the hydro line crossing, Henry indicates a point where his family used to camp out. In the area are several places where they would fish. By now, my guide is sharing stories from his days as a fishing guide, and finds us

a nice honey hole near a fold in the current not far from the Powder Puff. Commercial fishing was also a part of their heritage, but it is hard work and the 16-hour days make even young people think twice before taking it on. The use of nets on the river has, in the past, caused some friction with area residents. While marking their nets offered a warning to boaters, the buoys also made them easier to find for thieves. Another point of contention is near a hunting spot at Little Dalles Rapids, where the land rights of camp owners intersect with traditional land use claims from the nearby First Nation. Fortunately, there hasn't been any escalation, since there's lots of deer to go around and lots of space.

After a couple more fishing lessons, we move toward the reserve itself. Along with the regulated water levels, the blasting of a second channel in the late 1950s dramatically changed the currents around the community. When Henry was younger, he remembered being able to walk across to the sacred rocks, where they made offerings for a safe trip. Considering his father died on the river, after his boat capsized, the site isn't a historical anachronism.

Further along the south shoreline, Henry has built his own tipi and sweat-lodge, as he maintains his traditional ways. He also mentions preparations for the upcoming feast at the community's powwow, set for the end of the month. Up in a tree top, he points to an eagle's nest, where two young are still gathering strength for their first flight. Not far from his home, are a flock of pelicans he humorously refers to as the Dalles Air Force. On the other side, near Silver Point, an overnight lightning strike provokes a call to the MNR. Residents are happy to offer a helping hand to attack crews, who have the fire out and are back at the base in time for supper. At this time, we start to head back ourselves. By now, it's clear how the various families and their campgrounds evolved over time. They would each have their loosely defined territories with

enough fish, game, wild rice and berries to sustain them through the year. If one was having trouble, then their neighbours would help out, because it was a matter of survival then. The families would also meet along the river and camp out together, allowing their sons and daughters a chance to meet and get to know each other. When the time came for marriages, the transfer of a daughter from one family to another would also take place during gatherings along the river, Henry said.

Over time, the family territories were formalized into bands under the Indian Act, as well as moved to make way for flooding by the hydro dams. Today they are recognized as First Nations such as Whitedog, Dalles and Washagamis Bay. Back at the dock in Keewatin, he promises to continue the history lessons another day, along with a bit of fishing. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

September 29, 2008

Layton platform promises help for families

If you thought \$100 a month from the Conservatives was good news, imagine getting \$400. This was the message from federal NDP Leader Jack Layton Sunday as he again emphasized his chances of success in the federal election in Northern Ontario. As weekend polls showed his party continued to close in on the opposition Liberals, Layton was almost licking his chops as he looked over races in the region. Along with a two close contests in Thunder Bay, the Kenora constituency has been a tight three-way race that's seen high profile visits throughout the campaign. "We're very optimistic there, because people just don't appreciate the way Stephen Harper has handled forestry," he said during a short phone interview. As he budgeted his campaign promises, Layton said he would claw back close to \$50 billion in tax cuts for businesses, save money by pulling troops out of Afghanistan, as well as, raise more money from polluters. He would then move the money to those in need. "More and more people want a prime minister who puts hard working families first, and who isn't interested in just listening to people sitting at Bay Street boardroom tables," he said.

Layton also had a plan to get unemployed mill workers back to work through a home renovation, which would help families carry out energy conversions to cut their heating bills, provide jobs in a tough economy, as well as reduce greenhouse gases associated with energy consumption. "You don't have to go to Alberta to find work. You can help Mrs. Smith down the road," he said. The party also pledges to cap credit card rates, limit automatic teller charges and look at price gouging at the gas pumps. "There are just far too many who are right up against it," he said. In response, Liberal leader Stephane Dion quickly accused the NDP of "promising the moon" in an effort to get elected. Given the small odds of an NDP government, Dion noted Layton can say anything



NDP leader Jack Layton is joined by Mayor Len Compton, and union leaders in Kenora.

he wants, without having to worry about carrying it out. The prime minister had a day off from the campaign trail after attending his high school reunion in Southern Ontario.

In Sunday's interview, Layton said his candidate Tania Cameron was well-suited to the role of helping to resolve land disputes that are plaguing the resource industry, such as the permanent blockade at Grassy Narrows. A vote for the party would also be a vote for restoring the Kelowna Accord, increasing funding for land claim resolution, and closer attention to conditions on First Nations, Layton added. The party is clearly hoping for a repeat of 1984 when a disastrous Liberal campaign allowed New Democrats to take the local seat, the Grits only defeat in the region at the federal level since the riding was created. However, New Democrats slipped to third last time out, just a few hundred votes behind the Conservatives, following a strong showing by Bill Brown in his second campaign. Two years later, there have been two visits by the prime minister including a stop in incumbent Roger Valley's home town of Dryden a week ago, as nominee Greg Rickford tries to close the gap of 1,500 votes to post the first win in the area by the federal party. Valley, in his bid for a third term, welcomed Bob Rae earlier in the campaign, and he'll play host to leadership candidate Michael Ignatieff Monday evening in Kenora. (*Daily Miner and News*)

November 28, 2009

Ignatieff hosts town-hall meeting in Kenora

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff was in Kenora again last week, where he offered to listen to local concerns. In his fourth visit within three years, he encouraged residents to persist with their plans to rebuild the regional economy. In recognition of the party's standing both nationally and within the riding, there was no charge for the event and most of the evening was spent taking questions from the floor. Still, the Leader of the Opposition was allowed to make a few opening comments. He used the opportunity to praise the city for its recovery plan and he encouraged the local audience to continue pushing forward with their transition. Turning the regional economy around will mean a commitment to lifelong learning and skills development, he said, noting the need to lower energy and labour costs. He emphasized the key to the new realities of a global marketplace meant the development of value-added products. "When we do, we do it very well," Ignatieff said. He cited the examples of resource towns in New Brunswick and B.C., where residents are trying to restructure. "Kenora, you're not alone," he emphasized. He gave the example of the plan created by the Lake of the Woods Economic Development Commission, which focused on the beauty of the surroundings and the central location at the Crossroads of the Continent.



Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff attended a town-hall meeting.

Elder Peter Kinew, who spoke openly about his long ties with the Liberal party, stressed the importance of a working relationship between First Nations and their neighbours. He offered the example of New Mexico, where there's a close relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. "This is something that needs to happen here," he said. Kinew, who is also known by Peter Kelly, added it was important for First Nations people to learn how to be entrepreneurs. In response to a question on health care, Ignatieff said investments in proper diet, exercise and disease prevention will help governments get away from their spending on hospitals and chronic care. He categorically denounced the selling of bulk water, and called for the end of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan in 2011. The country's role may shift to a development focus at that time, such as building schools, but not troops, he said. In response to a question about undesirable immigrants who were bringing violence to Canada, Ignatieff stood firm, saying his father was an immigrant as well, who faced a lot of prejudice. What was important was that his father respected the laws and customs of the country, while helping to build it with

his bare hands. The Opposition Leader closed by praising the efforts of local candidate Roger Valley, who will face a battle in his bid to regain the seat from the governing Conservatives and incumbent MP Greg Rickford. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

May 11, 2010

History revealed at spring feast

As dog-walkers trekked along, amateur historian Cuyler Cotton continued to share stories of the Common Ground site Friday. On the occasion of the annual spring feast for Ojibway people, Cotton described in some detail just how dramatically the landscape had changed. Using archival photos from the Lake of the Woods Museum, Cotton showed how the rapids had flowed through the channel towards the site of the Norman Dam, until an agreement was reached to increase the outflow from Lake of the Woods. Cotton told how excavation crews increased the amount of flow by one-third around 1925 to appease competing interests at the Canadian-American border. Not only did this mean drastic changes to a gathering place, where Elders made offerings to the water spirits, but the water levels also increased downstream, Cotton noted, as he alluded to the flooding of traditional lands.

Two years ago, the head of Ontario Power Generation offered an official apology to Dalles First Nation members, noting the tremendous changes in the geography of the area in the early part of the 20th century. On hand Friday to hear the stories and visit with Elders were students from the University of Winnipeg to learn more about the developments around Common Ground. Cotton has been active in recent days as he helped lead a march to illustrate the plight of the homeless May 1, as well as a tour of Tunnel Island for artists May 4. Together, they hope to create a public piece of art for the park, which is to be completed by July 14. He is set to lead a boat tour Sunday afternoon, May 16, which will offer a view from the water of the many changes to the natural landscape. Common Ground has been the focus of local attention for many years, as there's hope for the development of a heritage park and tourist destination. Cotton said lawyers are still engaged in talks over the creation of a legal entity that satisfies leaders from the city, as well as Grand Council Treaty 3. Once these wrinkles are ironed out, the work on visioning and public consultations will begin, he said. There were no deadlines set for next steps on the project. (*Daily Miner and News*)

May 20, 2010

Artists take river cruise history lesson

Sunday was a perfect day for a scenic tour of the Winnipeg River. Last week, local historian Cuyler Cotton led a delegation through a walking tour of Tunnel Island. Sunday, he continued to offer local artists his insights into the island's heritage sights, the Common Ground site and Bigsby's famous Rat Portage by way of a makeshift flotilla. From his vantage point just east of the Darlington Bay Bridge, Cotton described how the neighbouring communities of Washagamis Bay, Dalles and Rat Portage split up the surrounding land, which was rich with fish, game, wild rice and berries. "You could live here quite comfortably," he said, referring to the traditional way of life.

The Common Ground site along the Tunnel Island trail network was closer to the junction between the river and Lake of the Woods. It's also adjacent to Bigsby's Rat Portage, which was used for thousands of years by travellers crossing the continent, he added. The outlet of the portage is found along the riverbank just down from Perch Bay Resort. As you head toward the Norman Dam, you can see an indentation in the piles of rock, which have since cluttered the entry. Cotton speculates these are the remains from subsequent development, which have included hydro and railway infrastructure. The muskrats, however, have continued to find their way, he assured his listeners. Across the channel, though, archeologists have found remains of camp sites that date back thousands of years along the southwest bank of Tunnel Island, he noted.

Around the southeast corner toward Rideout Bay and Old Fort Island are the remains of the former Hudson's Bay post. This can be tricky territory when water's low, due to the number of dead heads left over from old logging booms, not to mention previously invisible rock outcrops. Still, the view of the old mill site and Kenora power house offer an insight into the early days of settlement, when pulp and paper became a staple of the local economy. The land in between, along the south shore of Rideout Bay, has been the subject of intense speculation, as Abitibi tries to dispose of land and developers look to build new tourist attractions. This is where businessman John Gale has talked about putting such facilities as a water slide, as the community reinvents itself as a destination for vacationers. Last week, Cotton's tour aimed to inspire members of the Lake of the Woods Arts Collective for an art project. He also convened a spring feast at the Common Ground site earlier this month. (*Daily Miner and News*)

October 15, 2010

Weyerhaeuser, First Nations sign forestry agreement: Partnership to manage sustainable forest licence

Weyerhaeuser Canada president Anne Giardini joined with Forestry Minister Michael Gravelle and Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) Independent Nations Chief Eric Fisher in signing an historic shareholder-managed Sustainable Forest Licence for the Kenora Forest Thursday. Under the unique agreement, Fisher will become the president of a cooperative venture -- Miiitigoog Limited Partnership -- which will see First Nations and industry share the management of the 1.2 million-hectare Kenora Forest. Dalles and Whitefish Bay First Nations have also signed on, while industry partners include Kenora Forest Products, Wincrief Forestry Products and Kenora Independent Loggers. In his comments, Fisher referred to the new arrangement as the fulfillment of the treaty signed back in 1873, since it offers the opportunity for sharing the forest, he said. "It takes a lot of work, but it can happen," said Gravelle, who is also pushing forward with another set of tenure reforms that will reshape the struggling industry. Giardini said the deal was the result of visionaries. "It's been a personal vision of mine (that) forests can be landscapes of reconciliation," she said.

The licence was held by Weyerhaeuser, who officially signed it over to the Miiitigoog cooperative at an official ceremony Thursday in Kenora. Another cooperative, Miisun, will look after the monitoring, planning and enforcement aspects. Whitedog First Nation entered into a partnership agreement with Moncrief last year to form the home builder Wincrief. Students at the community's school are looking forward to a new building next year, as well as new careers in the forest, as a result of the partnerships with government and industry. By contrast, the neighbouring community of Grassy Narrows set up a blockade of logging roads into the Whiskey Jack Forest eight years ago.

While the signing comes as good news to a community that's lost more than \$60 million in salaries in the recent downturn, the soft American housing markets continue to dampen sales for Weyerhaeuser's iLevel plant, where layoffs were recently announced, as well as Kenora Forest Products, where a restart continues to be delayed. (*Daily Miner and News*)

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

October 21, 2005

Governor General challenges Aboriginal students

Even the Mounties cracked a smile as Canada's new Governor General challenged Aboriginal students at an inner-city school in Winnipeg to combat indifference. With her trademark radiant smile, Michaëlle Jean charmed the socks off teens used to tough talk when she shared her own experiences as an immigrant from Haiti. "We live in a country that allows us to dream big dreams," she said, noting she never expected she could grow up to become governor general in her adoptive country. It was all part of Michaëlle Jean's first official trip, since being named to the post mid-summer.

Born into the intense poverty of Haiti, Jean moved with her family to northern Quebec in the late 1960s. The vice-regal representative emphasized it was



Governor General Michaëlle Jean makes her first trip to Winnipeg, where she addresses Aboriginal students at Children of the Earth.

her mother's insistence on a good education which kept her going through the tough times and paid off in the long run. As a journalist, Jean later returned to her native country, where she met a young boy who was happy to walk several kilometres to school, and he was humbled by the daily sacrifices made by his parents, brothers and sisters, which allowed him to walk several miles to school rather than work. Jean said she was inspired by the boy's dream to return the investment by helping others in need. "I want you to take advantage of it and appreciate what a treasure it is," she said, urging her audience to value their education and stay in school.

Located in Winnipeg's north end, Children of the Earth is a haven for First Nations children, who want to focus on their studies in hopes of avoiding life on the street. The school was recently featured in a national newsmagazine

for its success rate. Roughly 75 % of graduating students will go on to post-secondary studies. That is a statistic unheard of in Northwestern Ontario schools. Speaking in French, Jean emphasized how proud she was of the students and their achievements, but she also challenged them. “On my side, I want to be able to count on you,” she said, encouraging them to work hard in pursuit of their projects and dreams. While referring to the recent suicide of a Winnipeg girl, Jean said emphatically, “I think life is worth living ... Your contributions are important.”

During a short question and answer session after her speech, Jean positively glowed as she turned the tables on a young woman, whose T-shirt read “What’s not to love?” “I don’t want to end up on the street. I want a job. I want to take care of myself and have a family,” said Charlene Smith, recovering nicely in the glare of the spotlight. “You deserve it,” stated Jean approvingly. Guidance counsellor Pat Mousseau, originally from Couchiching First Nation near Fort Frances, nodded in appreciation after the 45 minute event. “She has a direct relationship with them,” she said, noting Jean’s life experiences give her immediate credibility with students. “I thought her answers to students’ questions were right on the mark,” she added. Her son, Pat Mousseau, as well as Melody White of Whitefish Bay, were among the four traditional dancers, who led the Governor General into the Assembly. White traveled all the way from the home of the jingle dress so she could take part in the occasion. “It was an honour to lead her in,” said Pat Mousseau afterwards. A Grade 10 student, Smith had dreams of becoming a social worker or lawyer, and agreed with Jean’s inclusion of Aboriginal culture within Canadian culture. “I really believe in what she’s saying and what she’s promising ... I think she’s going to do a good job,” she concluded. (*Daily Miner and News*)

November 10, 2007

Residential schools agreement commemorated in Kenora

It was a historic day. Gathered together in the Rosewood Room of the Lakeside Inn was a who’s who of the Aboriginal leadership in Canada. Alongside National Chief Phil Fontaine from the Assembly of First Nations were Bob Watts, the interim director of the new Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Order of Canada recipient Alex Janvier, whose art has inspired the country, negotiator Ken Young, Manitoba’s original First Nations lawyer, as well as William Wuttunee, the first First Nations to earn a law degree in western Canada. They joined with a collection of Ivy-league trained lawyers, who had helped put together the landmark \$2 billion agreement, along with Treaty 3 Grand Chief Arnold Gardner and a host of respected Elders led by Fred Kelly. Kelly, who led the 1965 march that eventually led to the formation of the Assembly of First Nations, also served as advisor to the negotiating

team, and he presided over the ceremony. Last, but certainly not least, was mediator Frank Iacobucci, the retired Supreme Court judge whose wisdom and skill helped settle one of the country's ugliest disputes.

More than 30 years after residential schools closed in the area, survivors have finally started to receive compensation for what's termed their common experience. This included the loss of their culture, as well as physical and sexual abuse. Perhaps, more to the point, the occasion recognized the terrible conditions students had endured. "For someone to succeed through that very difficult environment, they had to be truly outstanding," Fontaine noted. "Today, it's so different. We have thousands (of high school graduates) in every part of the country," Fontaine added. He also listed many of the graduates, who have gone on to higher learning at elite schools to become role models and leaders for future generations. In an aside, Fontaine referred to ongoing friction between Aboriginal people and the federal government, when he said there would be thousands more pursuing their dreams, if the government would end its spending cap on education.

Iacobucci, in his address, described the residential school settlement as the highest achievement in his 50-year career, and he hoped the settlement would help to reach out the hand of friendship to Aboriginal people. In appreciation of his contribution to the historic agreement, Ojibway Elders honoured Iacobucci by giving him the name Ogimah Biness, a rank normally reserved for royalty. He was also given a specially-made pipe, and he was included as a brother in the Lynx clan and allowed to wear a ceremonial headdress made of eagle feathers. The former judge was clearly moved by the emotion of the occasion. His voice broke and he paused often, during the five-hour ceremony.

According to federal government records, there are more than 80,000 students still living from about 130 schools. The last finally closed in 1996. There were six in the Treaty 3 area: Fort Alexander, Couchiching, Cecilia Jeffrey, St. Mary's, Pelican Falls and McIntosh. Allegations of physical and sexual abuse are found in 90 % of the claims. Iacobucci gave credit to Fontaine for his leadership on the issue. The national Chief became one of the first to speak out in 1990, when he began to speak openly about his experiences at Fort Alexander. The "Journey of Tears," as he described it, finally culminated with apologies from the federal government and church denominations for their roles in a dark chapter of the country's history. Calgary law professor Kathleen Mahoney got involved after she started handling the case of Dennis Fontaine, the national Chief's brother. She said she felt "ashamed" about the government's role, and she was excited to play a part. A committee is working on a display at the Lake of the Woods Museum, which will tell the story from a local perspective. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)

March 19, 2009

Harper encouraged by today's youth

First Nations Elder and statesman Elijah Harper told delegates to the Chiefs of Ontario Youth Leadership Forum he was encouraged by what he saw, when he visited with future leaders. He told them it was important to get a good education, even though universities don't recognize the importance of traditional teachings. It's only when you're on the same step with them, or higher, that they'll start to listen to your knowledge, he said. "We need to have our young people go into education, because education opens the doors into empowering our people," he said. He noted there were now First Nations people designing curriculum for children in Aboriginal communities. "It is one of the issues I felt wasn't there, when I was speaking in the legislative assembly," he added, referring to his time as both a member and cabinet minister. Youth suicides, chronic unemployment and a host of social issues weren't even on the radar screen, which is why he made his historic stand that stopped the Meech Lake Accord in 1990. He took the time to describe his personal pain, as he dealt with the suicide of his own daughter, which he said was particularly difficult because he takes his family responsibilities seriously. "That kind of pain is hard to deal with," he said. "I think all First Nation communities have this problem."



Chief Elijah Harper.

Last month, Harper agreed to visit with the Eskasoni First Nation community following a tragic wave of deaths. In response, he said his strength came from his upbringing by his grandparents, which emphasized the importance of his language, culture and education. Relations with neighbouring governments can be improved through respect for past agreements that date back more than a century. "Treaties play an important role, because they allow us to live side-by-side. We need to teach it, the relationship, to young people," he said. In a separate interview, he said it was important for First Nations to start putting themselves first, and they should become more involved in economics and politics with mainstream towns. This way they could begin to overcome historic barriers. Through new technologies and communication tools, it was possible to become more informed, but large institutions still take time to change, he warned. Further along in his speech to delegates, he reminded them there was a particular onus on First Nations people, whose core values revolved around peace and harmony. He then reflected on last summer's apology from the prime minister, saying it "unleashed spiritual bonds that had lasted 500 years." He compared the experience to finally taking a knife out of your back, which you'd been carrying around for years.

While acknowledging the lasting, inter-generational effects of residential schools and repressive government policies on Aboriginal people, Harper also encouraged his audience to move on toward healing and reconciliation. “At some point, we have to stop blaming. At some point, we have to stand on our own two feet,” he said. Still, there were trials to be overcome, such as the imprisonment of band council from Kitchenuhmaykoosib, during the dispute over mining claims. “How far have we gone. What kind of relationship do we have?” he asked, when First Nation leaders are taken away in handcuffs. Although political leaders across Kenora District called for changes in the Mining Act in support of the First Nation, Harper wondered what kind of amendments were being made to the act itself. (*Daily Miner and News*)

June 16, 2010

Special education refocused on classroom: Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

Board office staff will be moving to the schools as part of the overhaul in special education at the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. “What we’ve heard on an increasing level is that classroom behaviour and managing and supporting students that have behaviour challenges has become a greater concern than we’ve experienced before,” said superintendent of education Sean Monteith. In order to free the teacher from dealing with disruptions, so they can focus on lessons, the board will be moving supports from Norman to their individual schools. They will also be assessing unique needs of sites in order to deal more effectively with issues.

Monteith came to the conclusion following a year of discussions with parents, teachers and support staff. With the changes, the school board is hoping to provide better services for children at risk, as well as offer a better environment for learning. In the end, they hope more students will stay in school and be more likely to graduate. This will mean dealing more effectively with the root causes of disruptions. “There’s a level of frustration that comes from trying to address and support the students who have the behaviour needs,” he added. Rather than having attendance counsellors, who watch to see if classes are being missed, there will now be counsellors trained to help children overcome the obstacles that keep them from going to school. These staff members have a background in social work, and they’ll be looking at mental health, Monteith added. “We know that’s an area where we need to do a better job,” he acknowledged.

Along with training sessions on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder last fall, the board has also joined in a research project to help understand how the brain is impacted, as well as how teachers might deal more effectively with students in



Webequie First Nation drummers.

the classroom. The problem of identifying those affected remains a problem, as diagnosis is still difficult, Monteith said. He also noted the importance of including parents and community agencies in the process in order to help keep supports on the same page. If the child has the same kind of help, once he leaves school, then it keeps the momentum, Monteith said. In an effort to create a more coordinated approach, staff from children's aid, community living and provincial ministries, have also been invited to attend workshops with school board staff. This will help professional development for the board, as well as provide a more cohesive response, he added.

In previous reports to trustees, the superintendent has remarked in the increasing needs of children in care coming from remote northern communities. At one board meeting, Monteith estimated 90 per cent of students arriving from the Sioux Lookout area had symptoms related to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. There has been a renewed focus on children's mental health in the area since the tragic death of a 17-year-old student in Norman in August 2008. (*Daily Miner and News*)

June 17, 2010

First of seven national gatherings important new chapter in history

The sun shone brightly at The Forks in Winnipeg on Wednesday as residential school survivors from across Canada assembled with political and religious leaders. It was the first national event for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and they couldn't have planned a better moment. "I never thought I'd see this day," said a jubilant Garnet Angecone, as he soaked it all in. After assembling with survivors of the Pelican Falls School in 1997, Angecone confronted his abuser. Rather than accept responsibility and apologize, the man denied his role. As a result, Angecone took him to court through the criminal justice system. While there was eventually a conviction



Garnet Angecone has fought through the legal system, then the political system, to get recognition for the survivors of residential schools. After the settlement agreement, the next step is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

and a sentence handed out, Angecone would rather have had the man's contrition from the start. Angecone's complaint related to his residential school experience at the Kenora court house helped launch a national movement, which culminated in Wednesday's event. His actions, like many others, were inspired by Phil Fontaine. He became the first leader to go public with his story back in 1990, when he was Grand Chief in Manitoba. On this day, Fontaine wasn't on the platform, but Angecone was honoured with a front row seat.

From the dark halls of Pelican Falls Indian Residential Schools to the sunshine at The Forks, Angecone's journey took decades. Still, he remained optimistic. "There are reasons why we go through trying times in our lives," he said. "It's to turn around and build and lay a foundation for a good future for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren." This was a theme that resonated throughout Wednesday's event, as speaker after speaker talked about the importance of finding out the truth, and how a deeper understanding of what happened would lead to a closer and stronger relationship between native and non-native people within Canada.

Spectators in the audience during the day included the executive directors for the Kenora Fellowship Centre on Water Street and Friendship Centre on Railway Street, along with Elders and band members from nearby communities, such as Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) and Grassy Narrows. Those seeking assistance in attending were offered bus rides and accommodations by both the Fellowship Centre through the Presbyterian Church in Canada,



Treaty 3 headquarters at the old Cecilia Jeffrey site on Round Lake.

as well as Grand Council Treaty 3 through its survivor support program. In his speech, Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl referred to the text of the Prime Minister's Apology in 2008 which said, "...based on the knowledge of our shared history, respect for each other, and a desire to move forward with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us." He also made reference to the Charter of Forgiveness offered by First Nations delegates at a national conference in Ottawa last weekend.

The moderator for the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Herb Gale, noted members had offered a confession as far back as 1990 in response to Fontaine's revelations. In the document, he said they acknowledged their role in running the schools, their deafness to the complaints and their blindness to their own arrogance. "We tried to make Aboriginal people into our own image, rather than God's image," he told the audience Wednesday. In so doing, they tore children from their families and communities, and subjected them to abuse, he said, as he referred to the statement issued 20 years ago.

Speakers also described the inter-generational effects that involved an inability to protect and care for their children, as the bonds between family and community were broken. "It took us 120 years to realize we were wrong. We are wrong, but we have dedicated ourselves to try and walk together," Gale concluded. The church ran Cecilia Jeffrey at Shoal Lake and Round Lake for close to 75 years, from the turn of the last century until it became a day-school and finally closed in the mid-1970s. The site now serves as the headquarters for Grand Council Treaty 3.

St. Mary's was the other local boarding school. It was operated by the Roman Catholic Church at Devil's Gap on Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation. Some students from Whitefish Bay -- also known as Naoakamegwanning First Nation -- and Northwest Angle 33 and 37 also attended Father Moss day-school at Sioux Narrows. Other facilities in the Treaty 3 territory included: McIntosh, Poplar Hill and Ste Marguerite's in Fort Frances. Some children were also sent to the sanatorium near Portage La Prairie, if they contracted tuberculosis, which was common. A museum has been built in their honour on the Long Plain First Nation. (*Daily Miner and News*)



The late Robin Green, Elder and nationally recognized leader in Native spirituality.

June 19, 2010

Shared perspectives on healing at Truth and Reconciliation event

Lin Bishop was just a young pilot trying to earn some money to support his wife and daughter, when he got the call. He was sent to pick-up two children and told to bring them into Kenora. When he landed his seaplane, he didn't see any dock or landing facilities. He just tried to get as close to the rocky embankment as possible. There stood four people: two children and their parents. The boy was about 8 and the girl maybe 6 at the time. "I suspected - and the father confirmed - that the girl was being separated from her mother for the first time," he said, as he described the scene. He didn't realize at the time, what part he was playing in the residential school experience. It wasn't until much later that he understood he was part of a system that forcefully took young children from their communities, so they could be assimilated in boarding schools across the country. "Both wailed all the way back to Kenora. It was a long flight," he said. There was a taxi at the other end. No adults or welcoming committee. He helped load up their luggage, two cardboard suitcases, and sent them on their way. "I remember thinking, 'How cold and uncaring can this get,'" he said. Later in life, he began to read about the history of the era. "The more I read, the more significant that day became," he concluded.

Bishop was part of a ceremonial healing circle, which took place at The Forks last week in Winnipeg. It marked the first national event for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. According to the church leaders who spoke at the event, they hoped the stories told would help bring parties together, in order to move forward with a stronger and closer bond between native and non-native people. Also in the circle for the afternoon was a priest, who offered to be the face of the United Church, as survivors told their stories. "It



Murray Sinclair, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, listens patiently to stories from survivors on the first day of hearings at The Forks in Winnipeg.

was a shock,” he said, when he first started hearing about residential schools. He said he didn’t understand, at first, how his denomination had become involved, and he had developed a deeper sense of humility, as he learns about such an “evil” period of history. “We have our own journey of healing to be on,” he said.

National Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations also spoke openly about the impact of residential schools on his family. He stated publicly that his own family was in counselling, as they sought a sense of balance and peace. “You feel so deeply resolved to experience a future better than we’ve seen,” he said. He noted the families who had “gone up in flames,” as a result of alcohol and drug addiction, which he linked directly to the dehumanizing effect of the schools. He also paid tribute to the Elders, who had shouldered a heavy burden, as they fought to preserve language and culture for their children and grandchildren. (*Lake of the Woods Enterprise*)



Wabaseemoong First Nation School graduates Deana Henry, Kaylynn Kent, Traci Letander and Raelynn Wawence celebrating their diplomas, 2010.

June 24, 2010

Graduation day a community affair: Wabaseemoong School

With 32 secondary and post-secondary graduates from the Whitedog community of about 1,000, it was a day well worth celebrating. “We’re really proud, when our children graduate,” said Chief Eric Fisher, in his address. As the First Nation gets ready to move into their long-awaited new school in the fall of 2011, the Chief encouraged staff, students and parents to continue working together. “I’m honoured when I see the graduating class running out of chairs on stage. I congratulate the teaching staff,” said Principal Ron R. McDonald. Staff is starting to see some benefits from stability as McDonald is expected to be return for his third year as principal next fall. In all, he’s been with the school for more than 35 years.

In addition to five graduates from regular high school classes, four community members received high school equivalency diplomas through the school. Another nine students completed their secondary education at schools in Kenora, Winnipeg and Thunder Bay. Another 13 received post-secondary degrees, diplomas and certificates this year. They included Rosella Cameron, who completed her doctorate in philosophy at the University of Toronto, and Preston Mandamin, who could become the community’s first lawyer after graduating with a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Manitoba.

Rosella Fisher also joined the graduates on stage. She was awarded her Master of Arts from Central Michigan earlier this year.

While Elder Isaac Mandamin called for further evaluation of the education program within the community, given the high drop-out rates for Aboriginal students in Kenora, other leaders pointed to the number of graduates on stage and said that showed strong signs of progress. Chief Eric Fisher noted the gap in funding for students between on- reserve and off-reserve, saying the disparity needed to change. He also looked forward to moving into their new building, for which the community has spent a decade lobbying for completion. Their tactics included a walk to Ottawa and the assembly paid tribute to the late Freda Muckle, who went on the trek but passed away before seeing the fruition of her efforts. Named after well-respected former Chief Roy McDonald (the principal's father), Mizhakiwetung Memorial School will hold 460 students, an increase of almost 50 per cent over the current capacity of 320. Not only will this help to allow for more children in care to return to the classroom in their own community, but it will also offer them a state-of-the-art experience after years of substandard conditions. The project was one of the early stimulus projects announced by Kenora MP Greg Rickford. (*Daily Miner and News*)

COOPERATION IS THE KEY

After the Abitibi pulp mill closed, Kenora residents were forced to reconsider how they made a living. The global recession added to pressures to improve relations with neighbouring First Nations. Rather than confrontation, there was an effort to seek more cooperation, as they dealt with similar issues under the umbrella of the Common Ground talks. The failure of these discussions would more than likely lead to missed opportunities for job creation, as well as help for those on the margins: the homeless, the youth at risk, and the missing sisters. As Elder Nancy Morrison would often say, “We must all work together.”



Elder Nancy Morrison.