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2020 Grad Photo Contest Winner

Annakah Ratt is the winner of the EFN 2020 Grad photo contest. From Prince Albert, the graduate begins the SUNTEP program at the U of S in the fall.



Photo submitted by Annakah Ratt

*By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News*

It's our favourite time of the year again where we proudly feature some of the province's Indigenous graduates in our annual grad photo contest. It's always a challenge to pick our winners but through all the submissions, we choose our top three contestants. Here are their stories.

Annakah Ratt from Prince Albert won first place in the grad photo contest. Ratt is a prominent lacrosse player who used the sport to help overcome her shyness in high school. She graduated from the École St. Mary High School and celebrated on June 29 with family. Ratt will miss seeing her friends in school but mostly she will miss her teachers.

"I just loved all the teachers I had especially my English teacher who taught me a lot of things," said

Ratt, who will be entering the SUNTEP program at the University of Saskatchewan in the fall. "I liked the teachers I had in the past who inspired me and showed me what teaching really holds. My mom was a teacher so she definitely was a big inspiration."

When Ratt first heard that she won first place in the Eagle Feather News grad photo contest, it was something that she didn't expect.

"It was so amazing. I was so surprised when my mom texted me that I won [first place]," she said. "I was ecstatic and I actually feel quite honoured because it was a special picture with me [holding] my lacrosse stick. It's a big part of my life." Ratt has been playing lacrosse for the past five years. Ratt has been playing lacrosse for the past five years. She competed in the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) in the past...

continued page 10



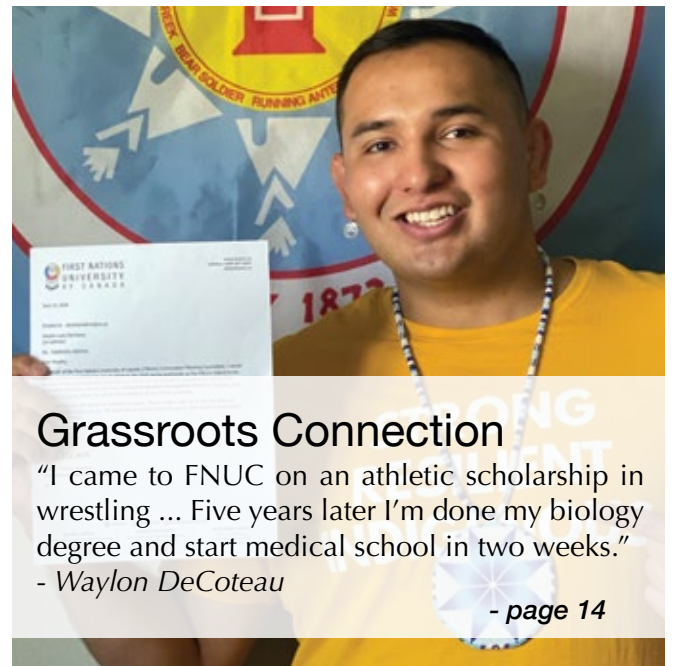
A Story of Perseverance

"I managed to not only get through that but graduated with great distinction and 95 per cent attendance as well." - Lynda Ahenakew
- page 6



Culture, Pride, Hard Work

"I've learned to work hard. You will always have challenges in life. I had encouragement from my parents, siblings and teachers. I've always wanted to graduate." - Morningsong Benson
- page 9



Grassroots Connection

"I came to FNUC on an athletic scholarship in wrestling ... Five years later I'm done my biology degree and start medical school in two weeks." - Waylon DeCoteau
- page 14

July 2020 is our
GRADUATION ISSUE
NEXT ISSUE IN SEPTEMBER
WHAT'S NEW IN EDUCATION

Oskayak valedictorian encourages perseverance

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Formally speaking, a valedictorian is often the student with the highest ranking among their graduating class. But in its more colloquial application, the valedictorian is commonly chosen by his or her peers as the student who has accumulated highest social credit – not popularity, necessarily – but goodwill amongst their peers.

Based on that understanding of valedictorianism, Dante Gamble, the 2020 valedictorian from Oskayak High School in Saskatoon, may be the most valedictorian valedictorian of them all.

“I think my classmates chose me because I was friendly to everyone. I tried my best not to make any enemies. I want to be a person on neutral ground with every circle,” said Gamble.

Gamble, 21, from Beardy’s and Okemasis Cree Nation, said how overwhelmed he was, not only to graduate, but to represent his class as valedictorian. The path to get there wasn’t without its obstacles, he said. Gamble took a few extra years to graduate, struggling with one of his biological parents who regularly discouraged him, as well as some weight issues.

As such, Gamble’s valedictorian address, which was recorded in the Oskayak gymnasium and sent out remotely to his classmates, centred on perseverance.

“I spoke about not giving up and never forgetting where we all came from. No matter the odds

or obstacles, we are still able to overcome them. No matter what people say or try to get us down, we are still able to achieve what we wanted to achieve.”

This spirit of community and enthusiasm was recognized by the school staff too. Guidance councillor David O’Soup said Gamble’s kindness made him a perfect choice to represent his class.

“He’s just a really good kid,” said O’Soup.

“He represents the students well. He’s at the forefront of a lot of school activities. Naturally, as an actor, he’s bold and courageous. He’d often be front and centre of any sort of school gathering, and always presented himself well.”

O’Soup said that students now are often growing up quiet and afraid to share their voices.

“Dante is not one of those kids. He’s a natural leader, and not afraid to make his opinion known.”

Now that Gamble has put a feather in the cap of his high school career, he’s tentatively thinking about pursuing acting. He has done voice acting work, performed in a short film, and acted in several stage plays and musicals.

“I got into acting because I really like seeing people smile. I like being a part of that joy,” he said.

“I don’t like to focus on the bad stuff going on. I like to stay positive. Life is too short to focus on that stuff anyways.”



Dante Gamble, valedictorian of the Oskayak High School 2020 graduating class. Photos courtesy of Dante Gamble.

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No challenge too great to stop Kkaikka from achieving education goal

By Michelle Lerat
of Eagle Feather News

Cynthia Kkaikka is graduating from her teaching degree with distinction and wishes to add more Indigenous content to school curriculums.

Kkaikka, from Hatchet Lake Dene Nation, moved to La Ronge when she was 10. She recently graduated from Northlands College there.

Kkaikka dropped out of high school in grade 11 when she was 16 because of being bullied for her Dene culture in the mainly Cree community. There was not a lot of knowledge about Dene culture and as a result of the bullying she began to internalize racism.

She became pregnant at 17 and when her son was born, she realized the importance of education. The first year of being a mom was difficult. Kkaikka and her mother lived with various family members and while she was grateful for the help, she dreamed of raising her son on her own.

She and her mother eventually got their own home and she went back to high school at age 19.

She was nervous to go back to the same high school, but her new, younger peers were more open-minded and respectful of other cultures and it was a positive experience. Going back opened up a lot of doors for her and she now holds education close to her heart. She earned many awards in high school including the Graduate of the Year from Churchill Community High School.

“No matter the dark times I went through, education always provided hope for me,” she said.

Kkaikka also faced challenges in university.

Things went smoothly in the first year, when she was enrolled in the Northern Teacher Education Program, (NORTEP) which was affiliated with the Universi-

ty of Saskatchewan.

But in second year, NORTEP was closed and Kkaikka had to relocate to continue her degree. She was accepted to Cumberland College in Melfort but was only able to take electives because they didn't offer second year Education classes. When Northlands College in La Ronge resumed the Education degree program affiliated with the U of S, she returned to La Ronge. The disruption caused by the NORTEP closure resulted in Kkaikka having to take extra classes every semester after that to graduate on time.

A month before her third year began, her aunt, who was like a sister, to her died from breast cancer. Kkaikka and her family cared for her aunt in her final months. It was difficult to return to school that year but she carried on. She became pregnant that year. Friends and family doubted she would continue with school, but one week after her son Carson was born, she arranged for family to care for him while she returned to her pre-practicum.

Kkaikka is a fluent in Dene and is passionate about teaching, preserving, and promoting the language and culture. When she is home, she and her mom speak mostly Dene so her sons can learn it.

She created the Dene Language and Culture Club at Pre-Cam Community School in La Ronge, where she taught grade six for her extended practicum. In the club she taught Dene culture and language. She was surprised at how quickly they could use the different Dene sounds and pronunciations.

“Last year 42 students signed up and it was so large I had to split them into two classes,” she said.

She wants to provide Dene culture to her students because there was none when she was in high school.

“I wish to become someone who I needed when I was younger,” said Kkaikka. “My goal as an educator is



Cynthia Kkaikka, of Hatchet Lake Dene Nation, graduates with a Bachelor of Education degree with distinction from Northlands College in La Ronge. Photo submitted by Cynthia Kkaikka.

to Indigenize education and teach young students about traditional Indigenous cultures.”

Kkaikka maintained an 84 percent average during all four years of university and won many awards. She was the last recipient of the Duncan Bird Memorial Scholarship from NORTEP before the program closed. She earned an Inspire Scholarship, the Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission Scholarship, the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union Aboriginal Scholarship, and the Northlands College Scholarship Award.

“With education and our cultural knowledge, we have so much power,” said Kkaikka. “I wish more people knew that ... there are so many opportunities out there and a need for Indigenous teachers, Indigenous nurses, and Indigenous lawyers.”

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July Editorial Notes

Hello summer! And welcome to our July Graduation issue. Usually, this is the time when kids are excited to be away from the books for the summer but with COVID-19, times are different. I've seen many schools give virtual acknowledgements in video posts to their graduates, which is great to see. In Regina, I saw a parade of vehicles decorated with balloons and colourful signs congratulating their kindergarten graduates. I thought that was pretty neat and exciting for the kiddies. These are great acts of acknowledgements to show students that their accomplishments are not forgotten. COVID-19 restrictions have made people think outside the box when it comes to celebrating birthdays, announcements, anniversaries

and graduations. We're in a time that we need to adapt and find creative ways to make change fun. When things return to somewhat normal, I'm sure special occasions will be celebrated with a bigger bang.

I would like to send big shout outs to my two nieces Lexi and Helayna who graduated together from Stobart Community High School in June. Although they both didn't get the whole graduation experience, they made the most of it. Our family came together to ensure their achievements did not go unnoticed. So proud of you both.

Their school displayed all the graduate photos outside their school walls. That was a wonderful idea to express the pride they have in their graduates.

Our July issue is always an exciting one. We get to see all the amazing Indigenous graduate submissions from all corners in Saskatchewan. It's always a hard time to decide who to award 1st, 2nd and 3rd places for our annual grad photo contest. But just know, you are all winners. Sounds cliched, eh. But it's true. An amazing milestone is achieved. Tomorrow is the start of a new chapter in your lives. Continue climbing that ladder and challenge yourselves to a bright and promising

future with your hard-earned educations. Be that change. And continue to make us, as Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, proud.

Our July issue is always an exciting one. We get to see all the amazing Indigenous graduate submissions from all corners in Saskatchewan.

Speaking of changes. Eagle Feather News will be making a slight change in next month's August Justice issue. We won't be publishing an issue next month. But we will still be fetching and bringing you stories related to the Justice theme on our website. So, be sure to check our website and social media throughout the summer. This time will help us prepare to bring you an amazing September Back To School issue. We know that we are going to see many changes in the classrooms this fall, so stay tuned to see what sort of stories we will feature in our next September issue.

With that, I'd like to wish our amazing readers a happy, memorable, and safe summer. Wash your hands and continue practice social distancing. See ya all in September!



Editorial Notes

Jeanelle Mandes



My beautiful niece's Lexi and Helayna both graduated together from the Stobart Community High School. Photo by Jeanelle Mandes.



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Pet Wars

For the past two months, I have watched a war play out in my living room. The opposing sides are Smokey the Dog and Tattletail the Kitten. (I did not choose either of those names. If I'd had my way, I'd be sharing my home with Tyrion Lannister and Brienne of Tarth) I knew that introducing a kitten to my home dominated by a big dopey lab husky cross would be risky. I had asked the vet about whether Smokey would get along with a cat and she had just raised an eyebrow.

That eyebrow haunted me throughout the cat adoption process. If you've ever adopted an animal, you know that the screening process is slightly more complicated than applying for a mortgage. In the pre-interview, there were a lot of questions about how I would keep Smokey separated from the kitten. Would I put up gates? "A gate that a husky can't jump over?" Would I consider crating the dog? "His crate is the downstairs bathroom and I'm almost sure he can break down the door if he put his mind to it." Would I take him to obedience training? "Lady, we have been to obedience training."

Somehow, I managed to pass the test, mostly because I was anti-declawing cats. And of course, I am, who wouldn't oppose such the cruel practice of removing a cat's claws? If your cat doesn't have claws, then how the hell is supposed to become the best fighter in the neighbourhood? I don't want some wimpy cat that has to be kept inside for its safety – I want to own the cat that makes the other neighbourhood cats nervous.

I've always liked cats but we adopted a kitten at the request of my son. I explained to him that kittens like to scratch but he was convinced that his kitten would be sweet and would chase yarn through a field

of flowers (we have a cat calendar and that's all those stupid cats do).

The real deal was a little different. As I carried Tattletail and her cat carrier through the backyard the dog barked loudly and lunged at her cage. When I glanced at the cat to see how she was handling the deafening roar, she was on her hind legs, hissing. It was an impressive display of impotent, 2.5-pound, rage.



It was not a good start. For the next week, whenever Smokey saw the cat he would bark loudly. I mostly kept him outside so it was like having a reverse guard-dog, he would stand at the window, staring into the house and barking in warning, "Mom there is a god-damned cat in the house. It's already in the house."

I kept them separated - but I knew that the system could not last. For instance, when it rained. Because of his thick coat, Smokey's weight doubles in size after about five minutes in the rain.

I decided to help them get used to each other. I

brought out the cat carrier and put the cat inside. Then I brought Smokey in. Oddly enough, he didn't notice the cat for a long time. He just wandered through the house sniffing the floor for cheese that had fallen off the table. In order to get this experiment moving, I had to show him the cat. Immediately he started barking frantically, both trying to get close to the cat and trying to get away from her at the same time. We ended the experiment after two minutes because it was all our ears could handle.

My worry was pretty simple, that Smokey would accidentally kill the cat, my son would be traumatized and Smokey would run away in shame to wander the countryside as a lonely, haunted fugitive.

But eventually I had to bring the two of them together in the living room. I filmed part of the interaction and posted it on Instagram. One of my friends messaged me and said that Smokey should not be allowed to bark inside and to "get on that." I do not know how to get on that so I just upped my yelling. It did seem like we were fated to be a house of yelling and barking until the tide turned. The kitten started lashing out at the dog with her tiny claws. She caught him on the nose a couple times and he backed away, running to my side. "Can you believe what she did and all I did was try to sniff her butt for the last hour?" his sad look seemed to say.

The house is quieter now. I still hear them scuffling at times as Smokey tries to sniff her butt and she tells him off with the business side of a tiny claw. Their battle has evolved from full out war to tiny guerilla skirmishes around the house and I can live with that.



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-  Keep household contacts to a consistent group of family or friends.

July 6, 2020

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- Performing arts
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July 9, 2020

- Casinos
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Breast cancer, single parenting didn't stop student

By **Andrea Ledding**
for *Eagle Feather News*

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT) celebrated an online "on the land" graduation on June 25th via YouTube. Featured were the four recipients of the President Leadership Awards: Carilyn Daniels from Peepeekisis First Nation, Savannah Olson from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, Lynda Ahenakew from Ahtahkakoop First Nation, and Rina Okimawinew from Attawapiskat First Nation.

Lynda Ahenakew completed her two-year Mental Health and Wellness Diploma while raising four kids alone and undergoing treatments for breast cancer.

"It's an amazing accomplishment," said Ahenakew. "I had stage two breast cancer. I was diagnosed after the completion of year one and then I went through chemo and radiation during year two, and a double mastectomy and both my ovaries removed. I managed to not only get through that but graduated with great distinction and 95 per cent attendance as well."

Ahenakew says she has overcome addictions, gone through traumas in childhood, and fled domestic violence just prior to entering the program.

"I have worked for my First Nation as a health and wellness worker and understood my passion was with my people and helping in any way I could, and so when I read up on the program I fell in love with it: the courses, Indigenous models of healing, therapeutic interventions, Indigenous spirituality throughout. That's where I wanted to help with people struggling through intergenerational trauma, something that plagues our communities. If I can help just one person in any way then I've done my part, I think."

Ahenakew moved from Ahtahkakoop to Regina, where her mother and sisters already were, to do the program, along with her 17-year-old son, 15-year-old daughter, 14-year-old son, and 6-year-old daughter. When one of her professors phoned to let her know she had nominated her, she felt honoured just to be thought of, but when she received the award she was in tears.

Regina Treaty Services hired her for a summer position for her practicum, knowing her diagnosis and the fact she was undergoing chemo every Tuesday would mean she sometimes had a three-day work week because she couldn't get out of bed after chemo.

Ahenakew began year two with four rounds of chemo remaining and says the classroom setting of 24 students helped her through it all.

"We had talking circles every Friday to finish off our week. I miss that family we had together. They helped me through a lot of that. You have to stay strong as a mother



Lynda Ahenakew, one of four recipients of the SIIT President's Leadership Awards, with her mother Sandra. Both survived breast cancer at an early age. Photo submitted by Lynda and Sandra Ahenakew.

and provider and role model, you just need to stay positive and focus, so my SIIT family was really that for me, they saw me sick and bald but their love and encouragement and support from them and my mother and sisters really helped."

Her first surgery was in November, just as her second practicum was to start, but she was able to focus on recovery from surgery instead because she had already accumulated enough hours to cover the six weeks by volunteering at the White Pony Lodge street patrol, helping facilitate Crystal Meth Anonymous groups and working as a sponsor for two years.

"I'm so blessed to be supported with, not only this journey through cancer, but education. I really believe in this diploma and tailoring it to meet our community needs. There's no shortage of opportunities and I can work in youth care, in addictions, corrections, family support, it allows you to use the diploma for a variety of things working with our people that are out there that need it, men and women and children," noted Ahenakew. "I've heard it said a lot "ahkameyimok" — perseverance and never giving up and to not be afraid to ask for help, that there's so many people and organizations out there that want to see you succeed in whatever you're doing so just ask, reach out."

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SUNTEP valedictorians ready to take on the future

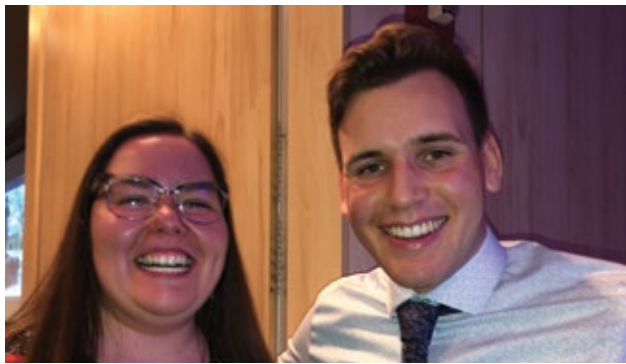
By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Brittany Macnab and Nathan Gaudet are hopeful for the future. The two recent Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program graduates and co-valedictorians of their 2020 class see the current unsettling times as an opportunity to create change. They are quick to credit the SUNTEP and each other for the knowledge and inspiration that propels them forward.

“Brittany is extremely knowledgeable and passionate. She has such a big heart, and would give the shirt off her back to help others. Indigenous matters are very important to her, and in the classroom its very recognizable. She’s a force to be reckoned with,” said Gaudet.

“Nathan is the most genuinely woke dude I met at university. He’s always there to support people but still have a good time. He’s woke, he knows what’s happening and why it’s happening, and he’s there for the fight,” said Macnab.

Like so many of those this year who were chosen to represent their graduating classes, the two SUNTEP valedictorians were unable to actually make their address to their fellow classmates.



SUNTEP 2020 Valedictorians Brittany Macnab and Nathan Gaudet. Photo courtesy of Nathan Gaudet.

Macnab, from Meadow Lake, said her message was going to be one of memory and optimism.

“My message was a reminder that, hey we’d be a statistic. That we’re the people who will be celebrated by our Métis people because we completed our four-year degree,” said Macnab. “I wanted to remind people how far we’ve come. It’s important to celebrate.”

Gaudet, from Bellevue, planned to share his gratitude for the community SUNTEP created.

“I was going to talk about how grateful I was to have an opportunity to be part of a community that I didn’t know I could be part of. And how grateful I am to SUNTEP for preparing us so well in our teaching careers, and (to my classmates), to not be afraid to impart our Métis culture and heritage in the classroom.”

Macnab and Gaudet have both landed in teaching positions since graduating SUNTEP. MacNab will be teaching Native studies, history, law, and psychology at Carpenter High School in Meadow Lake, which she says is her

dream job, and Gaudet will be staying in Saskatoon to teach French Immersion in grade 5-6 class at St Peter’s School.

“I think grade 5-6 is an important age where you can learn a bunch of anti-oppressive education right there in the classroom,” said Gaudet.

“My goal is to have my students think critically about oppressive structures, and then provide them with the tools... to disrupt intersectional oppression.”

With mandatory anti-racist/anti-oppressive classes at SUNTEP, fighting for good seems to be a common sentiment amongst current and former SUNTEP students.

“You begin to understand why people are saying the things they are(...) So I’m pretty confident that everyone who graduated SUNTEP can handle anything that’s going on in the world right now,” said Macnab.

“This is exactly what SUNTEP prepared us for. Exactly this. We were prepared to talk about Black Lives Matter before the George Floyd incident,” added Gaudet. “Now I know I will have the support of the community to start changing minds.”



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Wesmor valedictorian dreams big, works hard

By **Brendan Mayer**
for *Eagle Feather News*

A Cree graduate from the Muskoday First Nation is planning to make animated films with Indigenous-focused plots.

Shanice Beauchene recently graduated from Wesmor Public High School in Prince Albert and says her career choice was inspired by a lack of Indigenous representation in movies.

"I want to create films like Disney movies with Aboriginal stories," Beauchene said. "I want to start my own movie business. I will probably have to move to a big city for my career."

Beauchene will attend the University of Saskatchewan in September and intends to major in computer science. Beauchene was Wesmor's valedictorian this year. Wesmor grads received their diplomas on June 24, and the school held a virtual grad ceremony on June 29 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It means a lot to be a valedictorian," Beauchene said. "It was sometimes difficult, but I'm a hard worker. It's nice to be recognized. I'm grateful for Wesmor and all the supportive people there like the staff and teachers. My school was very welcoming."

"There's not one teacher that would say anything bad about Shanice," guidance counsellor Carol Lemire said. "She was dedicated to her classes. I find that she has the ability to step out of her comfort zone. She was very respectful in the class-

room. Kids would see her giving back to the school. She's very smart. I was fortunate enough to be one of those people who got closer to her. She's a really nice kid."

Beauchene has been running a bag business since 2017 with her friend, Kassandra Bear, who is also from the Muskoday First Nation. Beauchene and Bear were inspired to create RedWaters Bagging after joining the Muskoday Business Club. The pair sells bags that include designs featuring Indigenous women and girls.

"We sell bags to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls," Beauchene said. "I'm a leader with my business."

"Quite a few of the kids knew Shanice was doing RedWaters Bagging," Lemire added. "She's really embraced that and really grown. She's a quiet leader. It gave kids another way to see some possibilities that are outside the school that you can get involved with. It's not always about what's inside the building. She's really pushed herself into different areas to enhance her prospects for the future and to grow as an individual. I'm really proud of her."



Shanice Beauchene is the 2020 valedictorian at Wesmor Public High School in Prince Albert. Photo by Raven Felix

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Photo: Dean Gauthier, Meadow Lake Truck & Trailer

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Cultural pride and hard work a winning combination for Benson

*By Brendan Mayer
for Eagle Feather News*

Morningsong Benson of Red Pheasant Cree Nation spoke Cree at Sakewew High School in North Battleford, loved her Native Studies class best and participated in every feast and pipe ceremony.

That cultural pride and hard work in her classes attracted the attention of awards committees who chose her to receive the \$1,000 William Swimmer Award and several other awards totaling \$2,550. Among them was the Battlefords Tribal Council Perseverance Award for keeping up her studies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I never thought I would get these awards," Benson said. "I was shocked and I'm happy. It means a lot to me. I've always doubted myself. I put my all into my homework and got it done. This year was really tough because of COVID-19. I'm used to the classroom. It really challenged me. I've learned to work hard. You will always have challenges in life. I had encouragement from my parents, siblings and teachers. I've always wanted to graduate. Getting my diploma was a good experience. It's a good feeling."

Sakewew principal Shauna Bugler said Benson is very deserving of the award.

"She's a kind, caring and responsible student. All of her teachers have said that she's a hard worker," said Bugler. "She's respectful and gets all her assignments in on time. It was hard keeping kids engaged during this time. She was



Morningsong Benson took home a total of \$2,550 in awards at her graduation ceremony at Sakewew High School in North Battleford on June 19. Photo submitted.

focused and did great."

Benson enjoyed going to the culture room at her school and smudged every morning. She has been dancing at powwows since 2016 and says more Indigenous-focused courses should be taught at Saskatchewan schools.

Benson will start the Continuing Care Assistant program at North West College in North Battleford in September. After finishing the one-year program, she hopes to work at the Red Pheasant Health Clinic.

"I see myself working on the reserve," she said. "I love my reserve."

Bugler said Benson was the first of the grade 12 students this year to get her application in for post secondary education.

"She's a really great role model. Other students respected her. She carries herself well. I think she will do great in college. She's got the drive and knows what she wants to do."

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Grad photo contest winners celebrate their a

By Jeanelle mandes
of Eagle Feather News

... continued from page 1

... and had even played in provincial leagues on all-male teams.

"Holding my lacrosse stick [in the photo] signifies what had helped me through an awkward time in my life and trying to find where I belonged," she said.

Ratt hopes her story will inspire other youth to continue on their paths to finish high school and reach for a higher education.

"Keep striving and know that this is something that you can accomplish and will help you further your life," she said.

Ratt receives \$200 for winning first place in the contest as well as a brand-new pair of Beats headphones that were donated by the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children & Youth. When asked what she plans to do with her prize money, she said it will be going to good use.

"I plan on saving enough money to go towards school [in the fall]," she said. "With the Beats headphones, I'm going to listen to my music more efficiently."

Our second-place winner in the grad photo contest goes to Jasmine Burns from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation where she will receive \$100 and also a pair of Beats headphones.

Burns graduated grade 12 from the Prince Al-

bert Collegiate Institute (PACI) on June 26th where her school had an outside parade for each graduate. It was an unusual way to celebrate a graduation but with COVID-19 restrictions, Burns' school followed protocols to practice safe social distancing.

"I didn't mind it because I had a chance to say goodbye to my teachers," she said. "Even though I didn't get to see most of my classmates, I still liked it. It was more of an emotional time...but had a good conversation with all of them."

Burns has been accepted into the University of Saskatchewan to study nursing in the fall. She hopes to work in different Indigenous communities after she's done her studies.

Another student from PACI is the third place winner. Jared Ermine will receive \$75 and also a pair of Beats headphones. He said he will miss his teachers but he will mostly miss PACI's annual Halloween events that feature costume contests.

"I dressed up every single year since Grade 9," he said. "I won in a lot of the costume contests."

Ermine is featured wearing a Halo Master Chief head mask in his grad photo submission. He said he was inspired to imitate the look from social media.

"I (saw) a Facebook post where a guy was dressed as a Halo character and everyone loved it. So, I decided to copy that," he said.

Now that Ermine is done high school, he plans to work for awhile until he figures out what he wants to pursue in post-secondary.

Congratulations to this year's grad photo winners and big thanks to all that submitted to our annual grad photo contest!



First-place winner Annakah Ratt wanted to combine her love for lacrosse and achieving a monumental milestone in her life. Photos submitted by Annakah Ratt.

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achievement in pictures



Second-place winner Jasmine Burns will be attending University of Saskatchewan in the fall to become a nurse with hopes of working in different Indigenous communities. Photo submitted by Jasmine Burns.



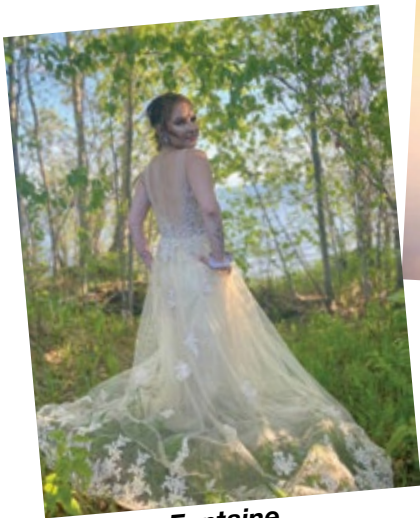
Third-place winner Jared Ermine will not only miss his friends and teachers at PACI but the high school's annual Halloween costume contests. Photo submitted by Jared Ermine.



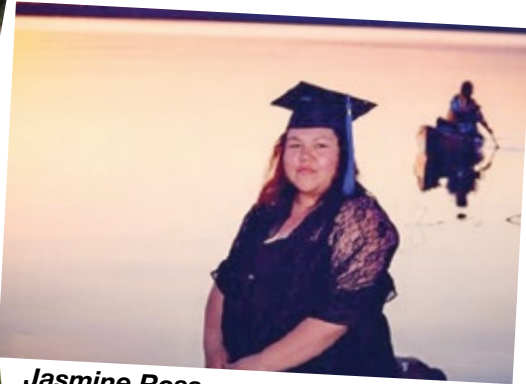
Jacynthia Taypotat



Dana Derksen



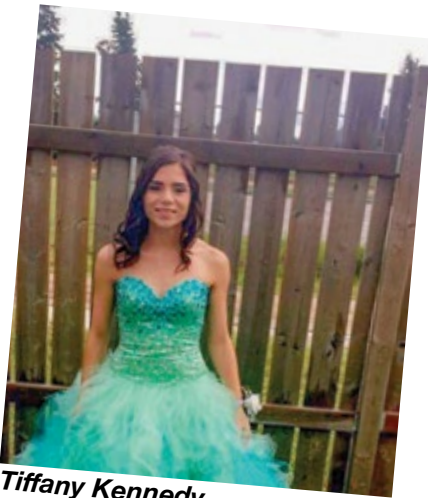
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Peepeekisis recognizes high school grads along main road

By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News

Every time people drive or walk through the main road on the Peepeekisis First Nation, they will see photos of this year's graduates from the Peepeekisis Pesakastew School.

Tessa Desnomie is amongst 11 graduates at her school. Her graduating class won't be joining in on the social distancing graduation celebrations this month but they will celebrate their special day in August. In the meantime, The Peepeekisis Pesakastew School found a unique way to honour and display their pride in this year's graduates.

All the graduate's photos are hung on the community's light posts along the main road. This initiative made Desnomie feel special and recognized amongst her classmates.

"It makes me feel good when I see our grad pictures. It feels good seeing myself up there," said Desnomie. "Our community is giving us our time to shine because we can't have a grad right away so they put our grad pictures up."

Desnomie said she is going to miss seeing her friends every day and playing high school volleyball and basketball. She had a particular interest in learning about physical science in her final years of high school.

"We learned about the body and how the body works," she said. "That's what I want to go into is Kinesiology and learning about that stuff."

Desnomie will be starting a one-year kinesi-

ology program online through Briercrest College in Caronport, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"I am looking forward to getting a degree and to finish college and play sports at a higher level," she said. "I want [to pursue] a career as a sports therapist."

When asked who she looks up to as a role model in her life, Desnomie said her aunty Vera C. Tourangeau, who played softball growing up, was her biggest inspiration and motivator.

Tourangeau hopes that Desnomie continues to reach her full potential as an athlete and to obtain a higher education.

"Tessa is an amazing talented young lady who will go far in regards to accomplishing her dreams!" stated Tourangeau. "She is an all-around all-star on and off the court and ball field. What makes her the cream of the crop is because she works hard, gifted with

talent and excellent team player! Tessa has the talent to play for the elite. My father- her grandfather would be so proud. I personally could not be prouder of her."



Photos of this year's graduates from Peepeekisis Pesakastew School are displayed on light posts along the reserve's main road. Photo submitted by Tessa Desnomie.

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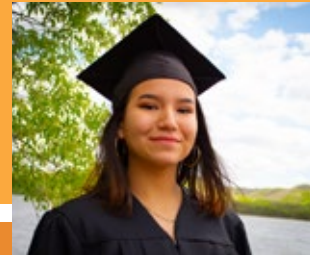
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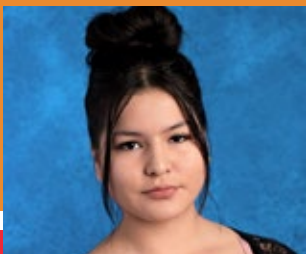
Alexis Bellegarde



Savannah Bellegarde



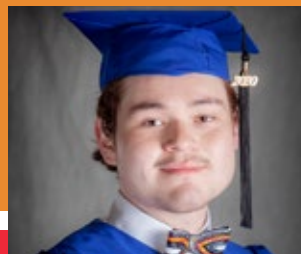
Cheyanne Bird



Tianna Dieter



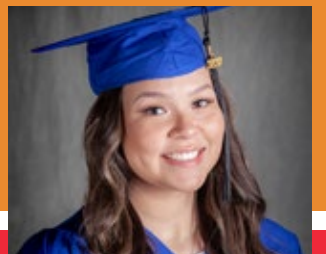
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Valedictorian “felt connected” at FNUUniv, heading south to medical school

By **Andréa Ledding**
for *Eagle Feather News*

The valedictorian for the 2020 First Nations University of Canada graduating class is Waylon DeCoteau, proudly Lakota/Dakota from Standing Rock, and Aniishnaabe from Turtle Mountain. He mostly grew up in Turtle Mountain Reservation, his father’s reservation, after spending his first eight years in Standing Rock.

“I came to FNUC on an athletic scholarship in wrestling,” explained DeCoteau, who didn’t know what to study but knew he wanted to be a physician. “Five years later I’m done my biology degree and start medical school in two weeks.”

He will be studying medicine at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. As a very young person he wanted to get into healthcare like his mother, who is a nurse practitioner, to help his people. In the USA, Indigenous members fall under treaty health care with the Department of Defense in Indian Health Services.

“They are federally managed and there are clinics all over but they don’t have community members in them, there are usually a lot of people from very far away,” said DeCoteau.

As a community member he has more context. “For example, understanding alcoholism as a symptom of historical trauma and that’s why I decided to chase this pursuit.”

In wrestling, he placed second nationally twice in three years. He enjoyed his time on the northern side of the border.

“Before, I didn’t know anything about Cana-

da besides going to Brandon and Winnipeg a few times,” DeCoteau said, noting that he has relatives in Manitoba. “I came up for a visit in my grade 12 year and saw FNUUniv and thought wow, this is a place I want to learn.”

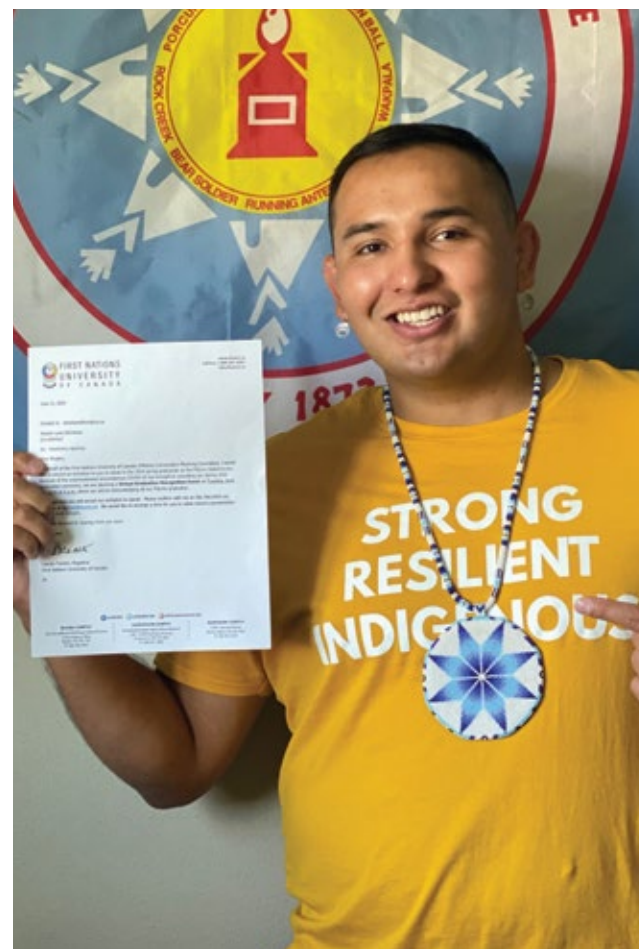
He has peers all over the USA going to Ivy League and big-name schools, but he had opportunities to hear Elders speak in labs and classes and was exposed to traditional knowledge, which was unique to FNUUniv.

“It was something I enjoyed and it meant a lot to me and helped me to feel connected rather than just showing up and learning,” he said, adding that the employees and professors also made campus a welcoming place. “I didn’t know anyone, I was away from my community, and the professors really helped me feel comfortable and not miss my family so much.”

He was surprised and honoured when he found out a week before convocation that he was going to be the valedictorian.

“I was doing pretty good with school, the coursework, and I had a lot of fun,” he said, adding that it feels good to be recognized for all the hours spent studying. “This is something my parents and family can be proud of. As I’m getting ready for medical school, getting this awesome news is something I’ll be proud of for the rest of my life.”

DeCoteau says the thought of helping those who need it is what got him through school, and he wishes good luck to his classmates, those still studying and still in high school, as he continues on his post-secondary path.



Waylon DeCoteau, proudly Lakota/Dakota and Aniishnaabe from Standing Rock and Turtle Mountain, is FNUC’s 2020 valedictorian. A champion wrestler, he has been accepted into medical school in North Dakota. Photo provided.

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Future social worker wants to help others “do great things”

By Michelle Lerat
of Eagle Feather News

Regina high school graduate Sophia Obrigewitsch of Cowessess First Nation is headed to First Nations University to study Indigenous social work.

“I’m excited because I wanted to go to university my whole life,” she said.

Obrigewitsch maintained honour roll during all four years at Miller Comprehensive Catholic High School. She graduated with silver recognition on her diploma for her extracurricular activities and won the Indigenous student award for her grades and post-secondary plans. She says her favorite class was Native Studies.

“I was in student representative’s council. (We) helped with everything around the school and planned events,” said Obrigewitsch. “I was in Unity in Diversity group, beading and sewing, drumming and singing, I did band, I did book club, I did a lot.”

Obrigewitsch is excited to be the first generation of her family to attend university. She said she always enjoyed school and schoolwork is something that comes naturally to her.

Her 91 per cent average won her a \$1,000 scholarship.

“My goals have always been to help those who don’t have a voice,” said Obrigewitsch. “By going into Indigenous social work my hope is to impact people’s lives and improve the lives of the next generation of our children and to give children opportunities that they would not have been given before ... I could give them their chance to

do great things.”

Obrigewitsch said she faced challenges during high school because of how she felt people viewed her as an Indigenous person. At times she felt she was treated differently by being dress coded more than others or for being in the hallway.

“I know who I am and I know I’m doing a lot of great things,” said Obrigewitsch. “I know that not a lot of people would see that when they first look at me. Some people still have those negative stereotypes in their minds.”

When classes were canceled due to the pandemic, it was weird to lose time with friends and making memories during their last year of high school, Obrigewitsch said.

She was grateful for the graduation held at her school.

“They had a red carpet set up, they had balloons, they had a mini stage you can walk across.

All the teachers were cheering for you, even teachers I never had were cheering me on. They were amazing ... They went all out for us.”

When school closed students could opt-in or opt-out of online classes. She chose to opt-out so she could work and save for university and a computer, which she said she needed for her first semester of university.

“I went and worked at the hospital ... I don’t own a computer so I knew if I had to do online classes I would have to work really hard to get a computer,” she said.

Obrigewitsch is working as a unit support worker at the Regina General Hospital until classes begin in the Fall.



Sophia Obrigewitsch maintained honour roll throughout high school. She graduated with silver recognition on her diploma and the Indigenous Student Award. Photo by Sophia Obrigewitsch

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—Verna St Denis, Professor of Critical Race Studies, University of Saskatchewan

Heartfelt Congratulations!

While there has never been a Convocation quite like this one in the history of the University of Regina, the current circumstances should not take away from the accomplishments and achievements of our 2020 graduates.

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Law school beckons for soccer-loving Saskatoon graduate

By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News

After learning she will receive an award from the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS), Kayla Gardiner is more pumped than ever to pursue her educational path towards a law degree.

Gardiner, originally from the Cumberland House Cree Nation, received the SPS Community Justice Award at the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre (SIMFC) graduation ceremony scheduled for July 6.

"The Saskatoon Police Service has chosen me for their award because they liked what I wrote in my application," said the Bethlehem Catholic High School grad. "I talked about how I wanted to become a lawyer because of what injustices that are being done to Indigenous peoples [such as] the Starlight Tours."

Gardiner remembers hearing her mother talk to her and her friends about the Starlight Tours, a term used to describe police dropping off intoxicated Indigenous men on the outskirts of town, often in winter. Gardiner read *Starlight Tour: The Last, Lonely Night of Neil Stonechild* by Rob Renaud and Suzanne Reber. She felt motivated and compelled after learning Indigenous lawyer Donald Worme represented Neil Stonechild's family in the inquiry into his death.

"I want to become a lawyer to help Indigenous people...to fight for justice," she said.

Gardiner is has enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts

program at the University of Saskatchewan, majoring in history with a minor in political studies. Once she completes that degree, she plans on applying to law school.

Gardiner said what she's going to miss the most about high school are her friends.

"I won't see them as much because some of them are going away," she said. "Before every final [exam], we would always go to McDonald's. That was our little tradition that we did."

Gardiner will also miss playing soccer, a sport that she excelled in high school. She owes her passion for the sport and to keep pushing herself further to her role model and soccer coach, Tara Tait from the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation.

"I have always pushed [Kayla] to believe she can, no matter the challenge or the circumstances," said Tait. "I am honored that she sees me in that light...she's like one of my own kids. I wish her all the best in all her future endeavors. I strongly believe that Kayla will be successful in all that she takes on in her life, whether in sports or education. Her commitment is commendable and inspiring to her peers."

Each year the SPS takes part in an event that recognizes young and talented individuals who have worked hard to achieve success. This year's recipients are Gardiner and Skylar Bobryk.

"We want to congratulate them and wish them continued success," said Const. Mikhaila Bird of SPS.



SIMFC graduate Kayla Gardiner received the SPS Community Justice Award which was presented to her at the graduation ceremony on July 6. Photo submitted by Kayla Gardiner.



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Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, **SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN EQUITY FOUNDATION INC.** through assistance provided by the Government of Canada, is taking action to ensure that Indigenous business owners impacted by Covid-19 have access to support. The emergency loan program is a component of the Indigenous Business Stabilization program.

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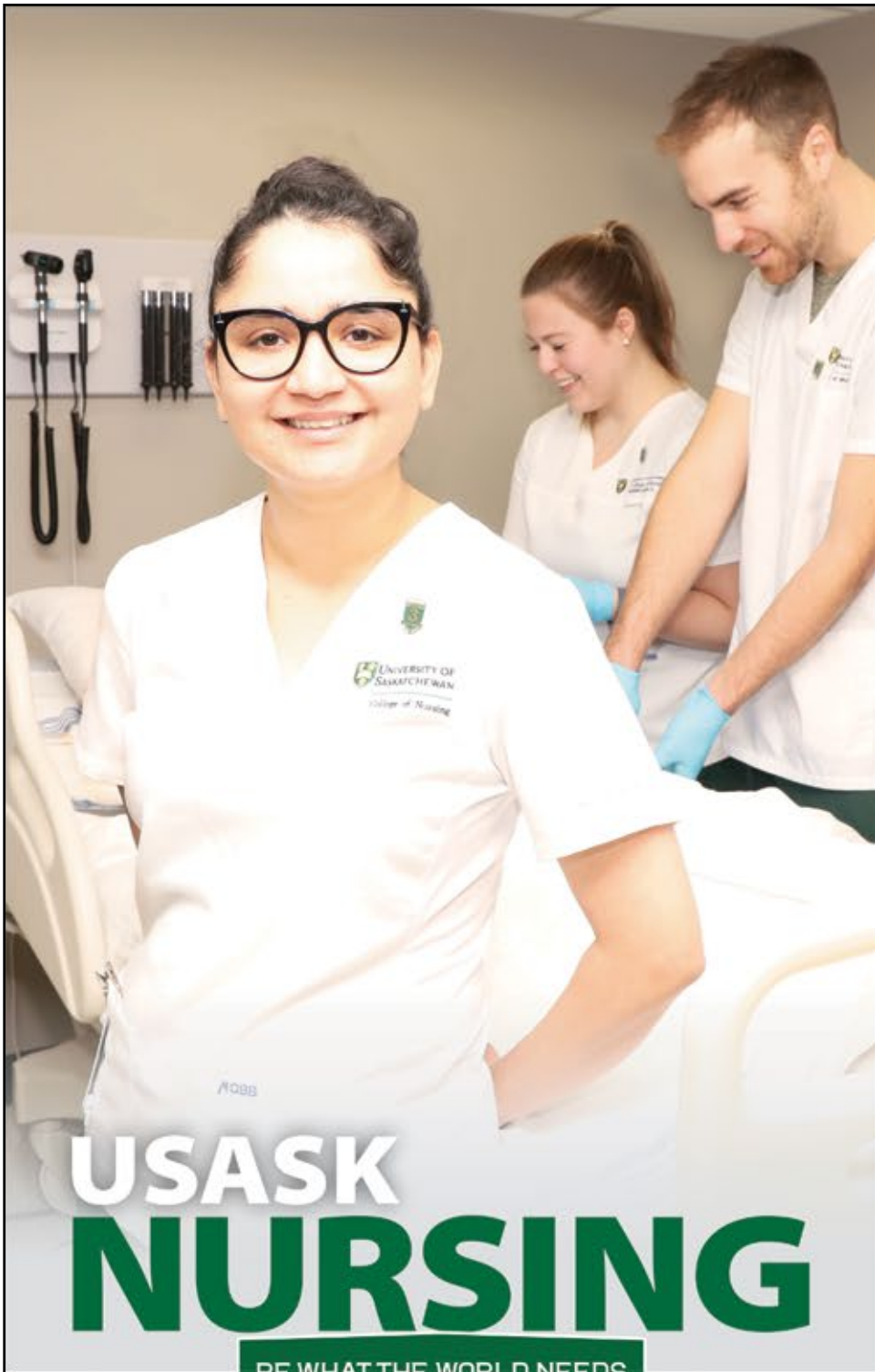


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Power of knowledge through education is moving our people forward

The children are the future. Therefore, paving a better path forward is dependent on us and to continue the hard work of those who have come before us. The odds are stacked against us in many ways, but we continue to break barriers despite the ongoing systemic oppression. We deserve the truth and education is a part of discovering that truth. The truth will set us free and arm us with the tools to take back our space and assert the truth in those spaces. There is power in discovering the truth of history and who we are and we have a duty to pass that down to the future generations.

We are taking back that power by becoming educated in a system that was not built for us. We are taking back that power by reclaiming our ceremonies and traditions. Colonialism and its institutions and laws have taken its toll on dismantling Indigenous Nations and families, but we are putting those pieces back together by finding who we truly are and what we are capable of. We are dismantling stereotypes and helping pave the way for more to come as those who have come before us have done.

As someone who was supposed to walk the stage this year to convocate and obtain my Juris Doctorate degree from the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan it has been heartbreaking to not be



able to celebrate this milestone as we normally would. I wish for all 2020 grads to feel pride in their hard work and achievements. I had a hard last term, full of doubt and exhaustion but I was told, "you get that degree because it will open up many doors for you to walk through and carry that knowledge you have into spaces that might not be open for everyone." I very much feel that now.

There is a lesson in everything. I find this lesson to be a very hum-



Comment

Alyson Bear

bling experience. Humility is one of the seven sacred teachings, along with love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom and truth. Humility allows us to acknowledge how far we have come, but in a way that we do not need the recognition that we may desire. We do things out of love instead and to better our families, our Nations and wider community. It is about the work we do selflessly, our hard work and dedication speaks for itself and is something no one can take away. To accept what is and continue to keep moving forward whether or not we receive the acknowledgement we sometimes long for. We know in our hearts and the Creator knows how much we put into breaking cycles and barriers for the betterment of ourselves and those around us.

Therefore, surrounding ourselves and being reflective of the true few who have helped us get to where we are and being thankful for who and what it is that keeps you going when you thought you would not make it is perhaps the greatest lesson. We can take something more away from this experience than the loss of not having what is considered a normal celebration.

Stand in your power, stand with pride and keep moving forward onto the next chapter, knowing that you have everything you need within you. You have come this far not only to come this far but to continue being a beacon of hope for the future generations. Our relatives are watching, our children are watching, and the Creator is watching and at the end of the day the ones who matter most are with you whether they are in the spirit world or with us now.

My dad once told me, "you are new warriors armed with books." I share this because that is what you are. This one is for all of you graduating in the class of 2020. I might not know you personally, but I am so very proud of you. This law degree I just achieved is very much my daughters' as it is mine, it has been the three of us on this journey day and night and together we rise. Let us celebrate our lives and take back our power together.

Shannon Avison Reconciliation Ally

By Betty Ann Adam
of Eagle Feather News

Shannon Avison has enthusiastically pointed hundreds of Indigenous students toward journalism in the 31 years she has headed the Indigenous Communications Arts program (INCA) at First Nations University (FNUUniv).

"INCA has become one of the principle institutions to turn out Indigenous journalists," said veteran Cree journalist and filmmaker Doug Cuthand. "To get a real First Nations perspective, I'd venture to say probably the best place in Canada right now is INCA. It's showing itself, as some of our graduates go across the country and get high profile jobs."

"It's Shannon's commitment, there's no doubt about it. She's dedicated her life's work to this project, the INCA program," Cuthand said.



Shannon Avison in Whitehorse, Yukon, in 2017 with INCA alumnus Mervin Brass, Managing Editor of CBC North. Photo submitted by Shannon Avison.

Avison loves her job and credits the university with supporting the INCA program and her work.

Avison was a northerner before she came to FNUUniv. She

lived with her family in Whitehorse for five years through her teens and had classmates from around the north.

Her family returned to Regina, where she took a degree in Philosophy and became friends with students she tutored from Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, as FNUUniv was then called.

In 1985, an SIFC friend told her about INCA, which was then only in its third year. She completed the two-year certificate program and then, as a freelancer, found there was a demand for journalists who could knowledgeably cover Indigenous issues. She decided in 1989 to take a degree in Indian studies to improve her reporting. That brought her to the attention of department head Blair Stonechild and SIFC President Oliver Brass, who were looking for someone to teach INCA courses. She was hired as a lecturer while working on her Indian Studies program at SIFC, where many classmates were mature students.

"I wasn't learning from white scholars, I was learning from First Nations people, living and socializing and dating and partying within the community," Avison says. "I was really getting (my knowledge) from a First Nations perspective and... hearing about how policies were effecting my colleagues, my students, on the ground."

The 1989 federal cap on post-secondary funding led to student demonstrations and a sit-in at the Indian Affairs office. Avison was a stalwart supporter, ferrying students downtown from campus in her orange Volkswagen van, helping make signs and advising students on media communications.

Avison took a two-year break when her son, Liam, was born and moved to Montreal to do a Masters degree in Media Studies, focusing on the role of Aboriginal newspapers in Canada. Through that, she became involved with the National Aboriginal Communications Society, where she met Indigenous journalists from across the country.

Back at INCA, in the early 1990s Avison helped make changes that established the two-year INCA certificate program as a prerequisite to the University of Regina School of Journalism.

She then led creation of the INCA Summer Institute, a seven-week crash course in journalism that touches on print, photojournalism, radio, television and, more recently, blogging and social media. This year students had an introduction

to virtual reality video production.

When ever possible, courses are taught by Indigenous professionals, who now are often INCA alumni. This year's instructors included Kerry Benjoe, Mervin Brass, Nelson Bird, Creeson Agecutay, Connie Walker and Jeanelle Mandes.

In its early years, the summer institute was held in the journalism school's facilities and engaged its professors as instructors, "so the students got to know some of the professors and it made the place seem more accessible," Avison said. "I think that's why we had so much success over there."

Another important addition to INCA was an internship that gave students professional experience where they got to know people in the media.

"When they got to first year journalism they were miles ahead... they were leaders in the school," she said.

In 2005, Avison introduced a strategic communications course, which has evolved into two senior courses. Many INCA alumni have gone into public relations work.

Because many of Avison's first students were mature students, their children and sometimes their grandchildren have shown up in her classroom, saying their parent or kokum told them to take her course. Others look askance when they see a white woman teaching at FNUUniv and are surprised when they discover she knows their relations and often many people from their communities.

Mainstream news organizations are aware of Avison's wide network. Besides taking her recommendations for promising interns, they often call her seeking suggestions for sources on Indigenous issues.

"I'm nosy. I'm interested. I'm a good resource," she says, with her signature good humour. "I'm not smart. I just know a lot of people who are smart," she says.

Cuthand says Avison cares about her students.

"She wants them to graduate with a good education, a good experience and also the ability to work... Her enthusiasm is infectious. She speaks from strength. She can prove she's got the alumni out there that are holding down good jobs at CBC and CTV and other stations all across the country.

"It ain't bragging if you done it. That's the way it is with her. She's done it and she doesn't have to brag about it," he said.



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28

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