



# Office of the Treaty Commissioner

NEWSLETTER

**SPRING 2021**

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The Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) is mandated to advance the Treaty goal of establishing good relations among all people of Saskatchewan. The OTC continues to work with First Nations, school systems, other educational institutions and the rest of Saskatchewan to raise the awareness and understanding of Treaties in Saskatchewan.



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### Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan Mary Culbertson



The past 12 months have been historic, not just in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, but because of the changes we are seeing and the work that still has to be done.

COVID-19 changed how we all live and work, at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner it meant we had to close our doors, so many of you couldn't just drop by, however it meant we could meet with so many more of you through online meetings. We had people engaging with us through Facebook as we celebrated National Indigenous Peoples Day in June, and through our Storytelling events on Zoom.

Whenever it was safe, I travelled to communities to meet with you and listen to what is happening in your territories. I met with reconciliation groups and signed new partnership agreements.

We've refreshed our Teaching Treaties in the Classroom program by taking the training and resources digital to make it more accessible. We're building more curriculum options for teaching Treaties and revitalizing the Treaty Learning Network with the training of Treaty coaches.

Our office launched a library and archives that will make resources on Treaties available to everyone, and we spoke out when we saw injustice happening. I wore a ribbon skirt and spoke in solidarity with a young girl in Saskatchewan who was made to feel that her skirt wasn't good enough for a school event. Through our treaty education and reconciliation programming we are working to help school systems become a safe place to be for all children. I look forward to working together as a community to reach a place where Indigenous people do not have to be afraid of discrimination and look forward to wearing clothing that celebrates resilience, culture, and identity.

And I look forward to meeting you in your communities as we get COVID-19 under control. We're planning a Treaty 6 unity meeting hosted by Enoch Cree Nation as soon as it is safe for all of us, and we're continuing to work on food security issues and Treaty boundary signs.

Until we can meet, please keep you and your loved ones safe. Keep physically distant, but socially close - use Facetime, make phone calls, share videos. Wash your hands, wear a mask, and follow health guidelines. It all makes a difference. We are in this together.



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The Office of the Treaty Commissioner held the grand opening of the OTC Library and Archives on Feb. 10, 2021. Since the foundation of the office in 1989, Treaty Commissioners of Saskatchewan have collected and stored documents, but for the first time this collection has been catalogued and is being made available to the public.

“This is a momentous day for the office. It is important that communities have access to historical materials on Treaties between Crown and Indigenous Nations to help us all move towards full Treaty implementation,” said Mary Culbertson, Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan.

“To begin we will offer the catalogue these resources virtually through the Saskatchewan Archives Information Network and as soon as COVID-19 protocol allows, we look forward to welcoming people to the office to use the resources in our reading room.”

The library contains books, articles, academic theses, and unpublished manuscripts. Historical materials include resources on Treaties Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Eight, and 10, as well as Canada’s pre- and post-confederation Treaties. Significant collections include files relating to Treaty Land Entitlement in Saskatchewan, the development of Treaty Education, and Treaty case law.

“It’s very exciting for us to share these resources with the public, especially the significant collection of Treaty Oral histories from Elders in all Treaty areas. Oral histories and traditions are often forgotten or overlooked, so it was very important for the OTC to ensure their survival,” said Sheldon Krasowski, research and archives coordinator for the OTC.

A team of staff and volunteers took months sorting and preparing the resources.



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### New Partnerships

An important pillar in the work of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner is the creation of partnerships to help extend our work into communities across the province. The office is excited to celebrate new partnerships with the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Polytechnic and Saskatchewan Open Door Society.

With the University of Saskatchewan's Office of the Vice-Provost of Indigenous Engagement, the OTC signed a Memorandum of Understanding MOU to ensure that more Indigenous students graduate through increased work in Treaty education implementation and reconciliation at the university.

Part of the goal of the MOU will be the creation of an evaluation tool that will be used and measured for progress throughout USask. Evaluating the institution will help create measurable paths to follow towards meaningful, respectful and reciprocal reconciliation.



With Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the OTC signed a strategic alliance with the college to further relationships and foster Indigenous inclusive learning environments. The organizations have come together to work on providing Treaty Education and Indigenous Awareness on all Saskatchewan Polytechnic campuses across the province.

"We are pleased to be entering into a partnership with Saskatchewan Polytechnic, to help foster and support an Indigenous inclusive learning environment. Treaty promises have not been fully realized, and we know to get there we have to work to decolonize systems. Working with partners we are able to promote Treaty identity, awareness, and understandings and help us move towards the goal of Truth and Reconciliation through Treaty Implementation," said Culbertson.

The Saskatoon Open Door Society and the OTC have committed through signing a Memorandum of Understanding to an ongoing positive partnership to foster and build strong relationships between children of Indigenous communities and new immigrants. Through this initiative, children and youth from both communities will have opportunities to learn and absorb each other's cultures and form long lasting bonds for a harmonious future in Canada.



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### Youth

Youth continue to be a focus in our work at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have fostered our relationship with our Youth In Service team through weekly online calls, and events through Zoom.

One week, the youth were joined by the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan Russ Mirasty and his wife Donna, to hear about life as the first Indigenous person to hold that role in the province, and to reflect on what it means to be Indigenous.



Also, while following COVID-19 protocols, youth from the OTC and newcomer youth from the Saskatoon Open Door Society, came together to learn more about each other, breakdown cultural stereotypes, and bust myths.

The youth from Canada, China, Somalia, Egypt, India, and Pakistan, got to ask real questions and understand each other's histories and stories.

Indigenous youth talked about intergenerational trauma and the impact of residential schools, Orange Shirt Day, negative treatment by government, and Treaty Rights. They busted myths about the idea that Indigenous people don't pay taxes, or that communities are dangerous.

Newcomer youth talked about leaving home, and the experience of coming to Canada. Muslim youth answered questions about Ramadan, and talked about the difference between religion and culture. They busted myths about being distant from the modern world. The youth want to continue this learning and work together and proposed more activities to follow up in the future.



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### Remembering our Elders

We know the past year has had ups and downs, but one of the hardest parts for us at the Office of the Treaty Commissioner was the loss of strong leaders and knowledge keepers.

Grand Chief Ron Michel, a strong advocate for northern Saskatchewan. He served as chief of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation and went on to serve as chief of the Prince Albert Grand Council for 12 years. He spent most of his life working for his communities in the north. Even after retirement from politics, he gave back becoming a senator for PAGC.

FSIN Senator Theresa Stevenson. She was well known for co-founding the long-running, inner-city hot lunch program in Regina, Chili for Children. Stevenson also was a long-time leader on the Saskatchewan First Nations Women Commission.

Chief Albert Scott, a Saulteaux from Kinistin Saulteaux Nation, was a leader, who was involved in teaching culture and language and keeping his traditions alive. Through the years Chief Albert Scott lifted the Pipe for the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and he supported our work.

Elder Jacob (Jake) Pete of Little Pine First Nation who broke barriers in policing in Canada. When he retired, he contributed to the safety and vision of his community. He believed solutions could be found in Indigenous traditions.

Terry Atimoyoo ensured that the oral history around Big Bear continued living. He told the stories and helped in organizing the descendants of Big Bear Gatherings.

Fred Sasakamoose, a community leader, chief and band council member for 30 years at Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation, a strong residential school survivor, and a trailblazer for Indigenous hockey players. He was one of the first Indigenous hockey players to play for the NHL and played 11 games before returning to serve his communities, including using sports to provide opportunities for Indigenous youth.

Senator Elder Mike Maurice worked on behalf of Métis people, supporting community organizations, schools and the Michif language. He is remembered as a kind man with time to give guidance to anyone who asked and was known for his compassion and storytelling.

We will miss these knowledge keepers, but we know they live on as we share their teachings.



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### Repatriating a Treaty medal

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The Office of the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan was thrilled to celebrate alongside Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation as Treaty 6 medals were presented to the community this summer.

"It was so important to be there today to see a Treaty medal returned home. These medals are opening the door towards reconciliation, and another small step towards seeing full Treaty implementation," said Mary Culbertson, Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan.

The Treaty medals were taken from the communities in 1885 after the chiefs were accused of violence. The Cree Nations were labelled rebellion bands by the Canadian government and treaty annuity payments were discontinued for years.

In 2001 Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation argued that the Canadian government over-stated Cree participation in the resistance to eliminate the tribal governance system. On May 6, 2015 the Specific Claims Tribunal agreed that the Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation was not disloyal, and the Crown breached its lawful obligations by stopping the payments. The Government of Canada was required to pay \$4.5 million to the Cree Nation, but the medals were not returned.

"The ceremony giving back Treaty medals is a step towards righting the historical wrongs. Having a shared understanding Canada's history, knowing these stories, is a vital part of the journey of reconciliation," Culbertson said.

The Treaty 6 medals given to Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation are re-orders of the original Treaty medals commissioned by the Crown in 1872. They are 72 mm across, weigh about 312 grams and made of solid silver.



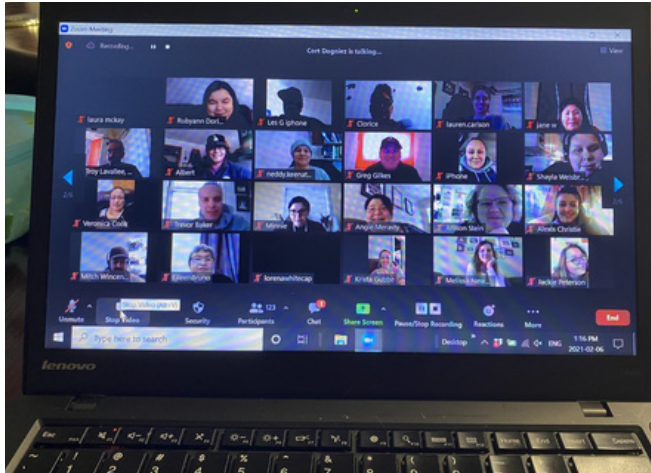


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### Teaching Treaties Training goes Online



The Office of the Treaty Commissioner is running their first online sessions of Teaching Treaties in the Classroom. The popular in-person training came to a stop in early March 2020 because of COVID-19 pandemic regulations.

“We knew that it was imperative for us to continue to provide services to the Treaty people and so we adapted our services to an online format,” said Amy Seesequasis, director of public education for the OTC.

It was more than just have the training instructors move to Zoom, the program underwent a facelift becoming a new, enhanced training program that allows for two phases of session that work towards training to be a Treaty Education Coach.

“We needed a way to keep people engaged and learning about Treaties. Also, our youth are comfortable learning through technology and if we want to make change for generations to come, then we need to adapt to their ways of learning,” said Charmaine Gardiner, Treaty Learning Network coordinator.

During the first session on Feb. 6, there were 125 people logged on to the training, from across Saskatchewan, including the far north, and across Canada, including British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

“It was wonderful to see so many people from Treaty territories across the country joining in on a training that has been exclusive only to our province until recently. The online format has allowed us to reach educators all across Saskatchewan, and outside Saskatchewan,” Seesequasis said.

“I could feel the energy of the people even though we were miles apart, it felt like we were with them in a classroom. It is incredible the amount of interest out there,” Gardiner added.

The training continues through February, and a new series is set up to begin in April.

