



The City of Edmonton Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) provides a bridge between Aboriginal communities and the City, building relationships, helping to ensure City programs and services meet the needs of Aboriginal people and encouraging Aboriginal participation in the City's workforce. The Bridge provides information on the activities in support of these goals.

# THE **Bridge** SPRING 2009

from the Aboriginal Relations Office

## City of Edmonton a Leader in Urban Aboriginal Relations

The City of Edmonton's Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) acts as an ambassador to the world for an increasing number of inquiries about how the City of Edmonton is working with the urban Aboriginal community.

People from Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Austria, Siberia, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania have visited the ARO to learn more.

"They want to know how the City of Edmonton's Aboriginal Relations Office came about, the role of the Mayor and my job description," says ARO Director Leona Carter. "People from around the world are very curious about our collaborative model of working together."

The ARO's primary functions are to help the City of Edmonton:

- build and maintain good relations with Aboriginal people and organizations

- increase Aboriginal participation in the City of Edmonton workforce
- ensure City-mandated services address the needs of Aboriginal people in Edmonton
- link City staff with Aboriginal people and groups and consult on matters of cultural protocol and relationship

"Edmonton is a leader in urban Aboriginal matters. This is the first municipality in Canada to fund an Aboriginal Relations Office," says Lewis Cardinal who was involved in the *Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord* that led to the creation of the ARO.

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Two years ago, Cardinal was invited by the Government of Canada to attend a United Nations Forum on Urban Immigration in Santiago, Chile. When he spoke about the *Edmonton Declaration*, the *Urban Aboriginal Accord Relationship Agreement*, the Aboriginal Relations Office and the Wicahitowin: Circle of Shared Responsibility and Stewardship, people wanted to hear more.

"We had film makers come from Vienna who did a piece for Austrian television on human rights. Edmonton's Aboriginal Relations Office was included in that documentary," says Carter. "A Russian delegation also visited. I made stew

and bannock and shared some teaching about the traditional uses of medicines - how sweet grass and sage are used in ceremony, for example."

When the City of Thunder Bay decided to initiate a similar model we shared our Edmonton experience. They asked if they should start talking to the Aboriginal community right away.

"I encouraged them to first hire someone who is known and respected by their Aboriginal community," Leona responded.

ARO shared with Thunder Bay the Office's mandate, job descriptions, and even the interview questions to hire staff. When

Anna Gibbon was hired as the Aboriginal Liaison for the City of Thunder Bay she came to Edmonton to see firsthand how the ARO works.

After her visit, Anna sent the following sentiments: "Miigwech for sharing your wisdom, knowledge, experiences and most importantly your spirits. My visit with you was truly a gift for me, one that I will share generously with my city. We have a lot of work to do here, but with your examples and guidance, I know we can make positive change for our Anishnawbe brothers and sisters in my community. I wish all of you well and great success in your work and bountiful happiness in your hearts." ■

## Bringing Aboriginal Perspectives to City Projects

ARO brought Aboriginal perspectives to city initiatives in 2008. By being at the table early in the discussions of various projects, the ARO was able to be a bridge between City Administration and the Aboriginal community.

### Boyle Renaissance Action Committee (BRAC)

Ex officio member of BRAC Leona Carter ensured Aboriginal perspectives were included in ongoing discussions about the proposed redevelopment of this area of downtown Edmonton. Affordable housing units and transitional services for Aboriginal people could potentially be included.

### West Rosedale

The ARO worked with Planning and Development and Aboriginal community members on an urban design plan that will be the framework for development and cultural recognition of the Rosedale area. Recent archaeological findings show that this was an Aboriginal meeting and gathering place as far back as 8,000 years ago.

### Whitemud/Fox Farms

The ARO worked with Community Services and Asset Management and Public Works to facilitate the Indigenous Elder's Cultural Resource Circle in finalizing its program statement and public consultation plans on land use at the Whitemud/Fox Farms property for regular ceremonial and cultural events. The Elders Circle will continue offering programs at this site pending Council's review of the area plan in late 2009.



Sweat lodge at Fox Farms

### Northlands

The Aboriginal events and displays are growing in popularity at Capital Ex. ARO is a member of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee to Northlands for its Aboriginal staging during Capital EX and planning for future events.

### 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

The Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness worked with the Aboriginal Housing Action Circle of Wicahitowin—a community-driven model of an urban governance process that is based on Indigenous traditions and community decision making processes—as part of its consultation with the Aboriginal community. This consultation was one of several providing input to the plan, and ARO played a support role. ■

# Working for Transit:

## An Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI) in Action

*"Working as an ETS Operator has opened many doors for me, it's helped me create a better life for me and my family."*

Program Graduate and employee of Edmonton Transit



The AWPI is a federal-provincial-municipal government partnership committed to increasing participation of Aboriginal peoples in the labour market. It sets the stage for the City to develop programs and partnerships that attract and include Aboriginal people within the City's workforce and value their contributions.

The Pre-employment Transit Operator pilot project commenced April 2008. This partnership saw Edmonton Transit and Human Resources working collaboratively with Oteenow Employment and Training

Society and Métis Nation of Alberta to develop a stepping stone for Aboriginal people interested in pursuing a career as a Transit Operator. Six weeks of intensive classroom training allowed students to develop their knowledge and skills in relation to the core competencies of the occupation. An ETS Training Instructor led sessions every Friday, providing participants with information on a variety of topics such as: Life as an Operator, Customer Relations & Schedules, Violence in the Workplace and Driving Standards,

This initiative has provided the Aboriginal community with a direct link to potential employment opportunities with the City of Edmonton. Upon successful completion of the program, participants enter the standard recruitment process of transit, facing the same screening processes as all other candidates. Several program graduates successfully passed all requirements, entered the five week transit training program and are currently employed with Edmonton Transit. ▣

*Article contributed by Donna Knebush, City of Edmonton Employment Outreach Consultant, Human Resources Branch*



# Helping Protect the Environment

## Glinis Buffalo, City Environmental Planner

City of Edmonton environmental planner Glinis Buffalo first heard about the City's Aboriginal relations initiatives from Leona Carter in Calgary at a Western Municipalities Aboriginal Gathering event. Buffalo just finished working with a Calgary engineering firm at the time doing land use planning and a small amount of environmental work. A 2003 University of Lethbridge graduate in Environmental Science, she had just applied for a job with the City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department.

"I saw how much support there was. So when it was offered to me I took the job," smiles Buffalo. "I love what I do because we get to manage development and make sure that environmental due diligence is done before they build."



Glinis Buffalo

Now almost two years into her career with the City of Edmonton, Buffalo says she appreciates her work, the people she works with and how the City helps ensure that all people feel included.

"The City does a lot to make sure that people are included. I appreciated the orientation about being respectful to all people and how the City said they will not tolerate anyone being excluded. The staff and the people I work with are great. I love them! "

Always a good student, Buffalo says she wanted a university degree from the time she was young. Her first career choice was dentistry. Working in a dental office, however, quickly changed her mind. Looking to challenge herself, she turned to environmental science.

"I knew I had to do my work and study to get ahead," says Buffalo. "I like that we work here to protect the health and safety of people in advance of development. I get to work on big projects, receiving the environmental impact assessments for proposed development."

Buffalo has also been involved with the Edmonton Aboriginal Employees Resource Network (EAERN), the informal network of City of Edmonton Aboriginal employees.

"It's really good. You get to meet other Aboriginals who work for the City and learn what they do. I had no idea there were that many Aboriginal people working for the City."

Working in Edmonton also means Buffalo is closer to her family who live in Samson Cree Nation, Hobbema. She enjoys going home to see her six sisters and two brothers and all of their kids.

Buffalo is grateful for what her late Mom taught her.

"My Mom always supported me on everything I've done in my whole life, allowing me to tell her how I feel about things. She'd talk to me and guide me through. Now I have my sisters, and they are always there when I need them." ■

*"The City does a lot to make sure that people are included. I appreciated the orientation about being respectful to all people and how the City said they will not tolerate anyone being excluded."*

# 2008 Civic Rodeo Rookie of the Year

Edmonton Transit System bus driver **Dwayne Nemlander** is not new to the rodeo circuit. When he was driving Red Arrow buses a few years ago, he took top honours in the bus rodeo five times in his division.



Dwayne Nemlander

So when Dwayne heard about the City of Edmonton's annual driving rodeo he was eager to test his skills as an ETS driver.

"The rodeo is an obstacle course. You have to show that you can pull into a bus stop and out of one without touching some obstacles, things like that," explains Dwayne who joined ETS in July 2007.

Nemlander came in sixth place overall and received the Rookie of the Year award.

"I love working for the City. It's a good job. You get to meet new people. There's stability. And when you start here you get great benefits and holidays right away," Nemlander says as he sits in the

coffee room of the Mitchell Garage a few moments before his shift begins. "There's great room for advancement here. And I plan to do that."

A long time professional driver, Nemlander had driven long haul private coach and school buses before coming to the City.

"I've always been a people person. When you drive a bus, there's such diversity and you get to know people and create friendships."

He currently drives the 114, taking passengers from Jasper Place to the West View Trailer Park.

"Driving through the Wal-Mart parking lot at Christmas time is good practice for the rodeo" he chuckles.

Nemlander says he enjoys meeting other Aboriginal City staff through the Edmonton Aboriginal Employees Resource Network (EAERN).

"It's really good. You get to meet other Aboriginal people and we can talk about our heritage and keep informed about events in the City," smiles Nemlander from behind the wheel of the 114. ■

## Aboriginal Employment Outreach 2008

2008 was a busy year for the City's Aboriginal Employment Outreach with career fairs, events and a host of outreach programs. Activities that extended the City of Edmonton career information into the community included:

### Highlights

- Work continued with major Aboriginal employment centres Oteenow Employment and Training Society and Métis Employment Services to link the Aboriginal labour force to employment opportunities. This partnership included summer employment opportunities for Métis, First Nations and Inuit youth.
- Monthly information sessions at Aboriginal employment centres assisted with the City of Edmonton's recruitment process and helped job seekers apply online.
- Relationship building with schools, such as post secondary institutions and Amiskwaciy Academy, helped the City bring information on work experience and career options to students.
- City of Edmonton Summer Hiring Fair was the first of its kind for Community Services. Held at City Hall, the event attracted 400 job seekers. Several Aboriginal community agencies were at the event to support job seekers.

### Aboriginal Internship Program

The City of Edmonton's Corporate Services Department developed and implemented an Aboriginal Internship program designed to provide professional and challenging work experience opportunities for Aboriginal graduates that directly relates to their field of study.

In October 2008, a pilot commenced in Human Resources when an intern was hired on a twelve month term. To date, the Aboriginal graduate has worked on multiple recruitment focused projects, such as the development of Corporate-wide training initiatives, directive creation, management of recall lists and the recruitment process. ■

# Active in the Aboriginal Community

Wellness maps, smudging with elders, sharing stories and participation in career fairs were just some of the ways Community Services was active in the Aboriginal community in 2008.

## The Voices of the Urban Indigenous People

Aboriginal people in Edmonton can find where they can meet their spiritual, creative, physical and emotional needs, all on one placemat-sized map. The Voices of the Urban Indigenous People—a community-led organization supported by the City of Edmonton Community Services department—created the map. It provides an at-a-glance overview of 35 different organizations that provide everything from education and employment to recreation and health care.

"This map helps people connect with each other and the community. It's particularly good for people coming to Edmonton from smaller towns, reserves and settlements," says Lise Robinson, of Community Services and co-chair of the organization. The six-year-old organization also works to promote community wellness and health. One of their latest related initiatives was smudging (blessing) with Elders.

"Last year we smudged in the downtown area," explains Robinson. "We had 300 people at the Bissell Centre and we went around the building together with the Elders sending prayers to the Creator to help the people in the streets, those in institutions and for peace and harmony around the world. Then we celebrated National Aboriginal Day with a breakfast and had an Elder speak on the significance of this day," says Robinson.

Another project that the group completed last year was the second edition of *Aboriginal Voices of Survival, Resiliency and Community Wellness*. This web-based text features stories from 29 Aboriginal people



of all ages who answer questions on life lessons, survival, resiliency and teachings. Many share stories of their fondest memories and what or who has had the greatest impact on their lives. The project keeps the tradition of storytelling alive through modern technology.

"Kids love the web, so we intentionally used it to put out stories that show the resiliency of our people," says Robinson. Excerpts from these stories are available at [http://www.edmonton.ca/attractions\\_recreation/documents/VoicesOfUrbanIndigenousPeople2.pdf](http://www.edmonton.ca/attractions_recreation/documents/VoicesOfUrbanIndigenousPeople2.pdf)

## Career Fairs

"If people do well in their homeland, that speaks volumes," says Robinson. That's why it's important to get in front of the younger generation—our future leaders—at career fairs to show them and engage them in opportunities that can dramatically impact them."

Community Services joined the City's HR Branch to take part in several career fairs that targeted the younger generation at Amiskwaciy Academy and at junior and senior high schools. About 300 Aboriginal youth came through and learned what's available.

It was a learning experience for the students as well as for potential employers. The career fair started with prayers from the Elders and the tables utilized were round, reflecting the significance of the circle in the Aboriginal community.

This type of event created awareness and the opportunity to develop relationships that can see new leaders emerge in various industries or educational pathways to success. One student that worked at the career fair is now employed full time with the Red Cross. ■



Lise Robinson, Sherena Desjarlais, Raeanna Whiskeyjack and Donna Seneca at a career fair.

# Pehonan—Waiting or Gathering Place

It is the site of traditional ceremonies, celebrations, meetings, trade and games going back at least 8,000 years.

West Rosedale—the area west of Rosedale Road to 106 Street and south from 97 Ave to the Saskatchewan River—has been home to many cultures and many activities that have shaped what is now known as the City of Edmonton.

City Council has passed a resolution that the West Rosedale area be declared a national historical site. An urban design plan is now being prepared for the area.

"This will be one of the places where we can commemorate our heritage and celebrate Aboriginal culture and art," says Kulbir Singh, manager of the Rosedale project for the City of Edmonton's Planning and Development Department.

An archaeological dig in the area last year investigated nine sites. There were 117 digs in total.

A gourd with origins from one of the Pueblo tribes of what is now the southwest states of New Mexico and Arizona was discovered, showing how far tribes travelled to trade.

Another discovery pre-dates contact with European cultures.

"On one site a discovery was made of cultural features establishing that this was a meeting and camping ground for Aboriginal Peoples dating back thousands of years. There have been discoveries at other sites, but never so close to the City centre showing a civilization has been here for so long," says Singh.

"Over several centuries, this has been a place where Aboriginal, Métis, French Canadian, European and other identifiable groups have lived and worked," says Singh. "Our Urban

Design Plan has been developed and we will hold an open house this summer to gain feedback on that plan."

The proposed plan will recognize the achievements of many cultures that have lived and worked in the West Rosedale area. It was designed with the input from the Edmonton Aboriginal Affairs Committee of City Council, the ARO and workshops that included 52 groups with interests in the area.

"We envision that throughout this area we will have places where we can celebrate and commemorate how this important area, of what is now the City of Edmonton, was at different time important to so many other people as well." ■



## Helping Edmonton's Homeless

Community Service staff member Larisa Kreider knows the statistics all too well:

"Forty per cent of Edmonton's homeless population is Aboriginal and 74% of the absolute homeless are Aboriginal," says the Community Development social worker who works with the inner city population. "The absolute homeless are those without shelter of any sort, not even emergency shelter."

Last year, Kreider worked with Edmonton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC), the community and Homeward Trust to present Homeless Connect, an

event at the Shaw Conference centre that offered the homeless and the at-risk population the opportunity to connect with free services such as haircuts, health care and meals.

"The event drew in about 1800 people. The idea was to provide a one stop resource to homeless people and those at risk of being homeless," says Kreider, "By opening the doors to the homeless, we want to break down barriers. Homelessness isn't just about shelter. It's also about other things in people's lives. Helping them get connected to the right services is very important."

Kreider is passionate about helping people get homes.

"Housing is a basic need and right. With urban Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal people in general, their homes were taken away from them. Then there were the residential schools—kids were taken away from parents and community. Our people have never regained that sense of home. That's why I'm passionate about housing."

Kreider is working on the 2009 Homeless Connect event, is involved in discussions about an Aboriginal Welcoming Centre and sits on several housing committees including the Wicahitowin Housing Action Circle.

"Homelessness is an issue that affects all of us, and all of us have a responsibility to address it." ■

# National Aboriginal Day 2008

It was a first for the City of Edmonton! On June 18, 2008 National Aboriginal Day was celebrated with prayers, singing and dancing in the City Room of City Hall.

"This was the first time there had been a National Aboriginal Day celebration in City Hall. It was organized by the City of Edmonton Aboriginal Employee Resource Network (EAERN) and it was wonderful" says Leona Carter.

The EAERN is an affinity group that meets to greet new Aboriginal employees and to provide a connection between Aboriginal people working for the City.

"We have Aboriginal people working in the City from many different tribes and Métis communities. People come from southern Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. The EAERN helps people feel more connected to cultural events in and around the city," says Carter.

Mayor Stephen Mandel and Councillor Ron Hayter took part in the official ceremonies, while other Councillors came and observed performances of our Aboriginal Peoples. ■



## Did you know?

**Cree was the official spoken language by all people inside and outside Fort Edmonton up until the 1900's.**

In the first half of the 1800s Fort Edmonton was home to a confusing babble of languages. Most of the HBC servants spoke Gaelic while the officers spoke English. Many of the boatmen, hunters and fishermen were Métis descendants of the original Quebecois voyageurs and spoke French. There were a large number of First Nations dialects as well. One could never be sure of being understood.

The answer? All spoken language inside and outside Fort Edmonton was Cree while records and official business were done in English.

Silversides, Brock, (2005). *Fort de Prairies - The Story of Fort Edmonton*, Heritage House Publishing Ltd.

**The first Métis was elected to the Edmonton School Board of Trustees in 1881.**

William Rowland II was born in 1827 and landed his first job, at the age of 15, as an interpreter for Reverend Rundle. He married at the age of 31, lived in Fort Edmonton, and then took up residence on four lots at what is now the area along 99th Avenue, between 104th and 105th Streets.

Along with his work as a school trustee, William also served as a trustee for the first cemetery in Rosedale and later pioneered in the Beaverhill Lake District. He is buried in Rosedale. ■

*Contributed by Gary Gagnon, a descendent of William.*

## Guide to Aboriginal Edmonton

Produced by the ARO, the *Guide to Aboriginal Edmonton* helps newcomers and citizens alike navigate the diverse and friendly Edmonton community.

Download a copy of the Guide at: [edmonton.ca/GuideToAboriginalEdmonton](http://edmonton.ca/GuideToAboriginalEdmonton) or contact ARO to order a printed copy. The next guide will be published in 2010.



**THE Bridge**

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