

# Meadow Lake First Nation News



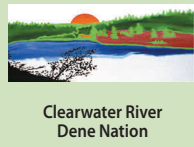
Birch Narrows Dene Nation



Buffalo River Dene Nation



Canoe Narrows Cree First Nation



Clearwater River Dene Nation



English River First Nation



Flying Dust First Nation



Makwa Sahgaiehan First Nation



Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation



Waterhen Lake First Nation

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## Message to Meadow Lake First Nations community



Dear First Nation membership within the MLFN,

We are continuing our cautionary approach toward the COVID-19 virus. Each community is taking steps to ensure their community is safe. Along with the Government of Saskatchewan, we are continuing precautions for our staff and leadership, including restricting all work-related travel to First Nation communities and encouraging a 'stay home and stay safe' policy. We are making the health of our Elders, and the most vulnerable, a top priority. What can you do? We all have a role to play in keeping ourselves and our communities healthy and safe:

1. Support your First Nation leadership in their fight against COVID-19.
2. Assist in a safe and protective manner where possible.
3. Promote the COVID-19 safety initiatives such as washing hands frequently, physical distancing of two metres (six feet), stay at home as much as possible and when it is necessary to leave home for work/groceries or essentials, practice safety.
4. Only people who reside in your home should be allowed into your home.
5. Do not visit in-person, utilize technology (phone, Internet, etc.)

We also encourage you to keep yourself informed. A good source of information: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

As a community, we know we care for each other, and I know we will stay committed to each other.

Thank you, Hiy Hiy, Mahsi-cho, Tribal Chief Richard Ben

### Assisting First Nations during COVID-19

During the past few weeks, all nine Meadow Lake First Nations were provided food as part of a larger FSIN effort to assist urban off-reserve members in need. The food is for the Elders and those identified as having increased needs. Recipients received dry goods, canned fruit, juice, rice, flour and potatoes, among other items.







DJ Patrick D'Jonaire in his CPAT 89.9 FM studio on the English River First Nation.

## Hearing the news in their Dene language

Patrick D'Jonaire is the radio host on the English River First Nation/Patuanak. Every day at 8 a.m. on CPAT 89.9 FM, he starts with a Dene prayer and a Dene drum song. Then a Rosary, and a gospel song: *Lord, I hope this day is good.*

D'Jonaire, aka 'Patrick DJ on Air,' started in the broadcast industry around 1986.

In the '80s, D'Jonaire was offered a month-long radio training with Missinippi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in La Ronge. After that, D'Jonaire returned home and hit the air waves and never looked back.

"We started the Patuanak Communications Society, a non-profit organization to support the development of communications in the English River First Nation," he said.

He remembers the station became an instant tool for announcing community events, church events, English River First Nation recreation events, and public service announcements by chief and council.

D'Jonaire said his morning radio show can be relied upon as a Dene program where listeners can count on knowing what the community has to offer for its membership in their own respective languages.

"From 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., I speak Dene," he said. "Elders in our community really enjoy this time because they're usually the first to wake in the morning," he said.

English River First Nation elder Mary Rose Campbell answered one of his requests for people in the community to call in and offer insight in Dene language about the current global COVID-19 pandemic.

"She encouraged the community to stay safe and follow the English River First Nation bylaws for a safe and healthy community," said D'Jonaire.

With the use of radio air waves, D'Jonaire said it's a rare opportunity to promote the Dene language.

"During this time, the little children who are awake with their elders can learn to communicate in Dene," he said. "It's like the old days when grandparents taught their

grandchildren's identity through the Dene language."

D'Jonaire believes communication is important in all aspects of life. He said people are tuning in to stay informed about what's happening in their First Nations. They get a balanced sense of information offering Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's speeches which are then translated in the Dene language.

"Every First Nation radio station within the MLTC can play such a big part during this pandemic," he said. "There is so much information we can share, but it's more than sharing information, it's sharing of information in our own languages."

When one works as a communicator in broadcast, D'Jonaire said delivery requires comprehension of their own language and the English language.

English River First Nation members seem to appreciate being away from bustling urban centres and closer to major river systems.

"If things get too crazy, we'll be heading up or down river," he said. "Back to our traditional places where we originally came from – Knee Lake, Dipper Lake, Primeau Lake."

Aside from informing people in multiple languages, D'Jonaire enjoys playing the classics like The Eagles and Dire Straits.

"When I play some of the older rock 'n roll, I have contests for listeners to guess the song," D'Jonaire said. "I think the younger generation uses the Shazam music-discovery app to guess some of the oldies."

Band councillor Katrina Maurice is a regular listener and commends the work of D'Jonaire.

"His daily radio show contributes to the health and well-being of our First Nation," she said.

D'Jonaire notes communication is an everyday thing.

"A DJ needs to know what's going on in the world and you need to know how to translate it. Because, what you say in communications is going to be either make people worried, or feel at ease."

## Making the best of a stressful situation

"Pandemic planning is an exercise First Nations communities have been doing since 2004 – ever since the H1N1 pandemic occurred across Canada in 2009."

Those are the words of Yolanda Ducharme, MLTC's senior environmental officer.

She says it is impossible to predict when a pandemic will occur or how severe it will be, but one certainty is pandemics will continue to occur making it necessary for all communities to be prepared.



Yolanda Ducharme

"One thing I have learned is no matter how much planning you do, you can never be fully prepared for the reality of the situation," Ducharme says. "Every week as we go along, the needs change."

Much of Ducharme's time these days is being spent on the phone with leadership from the nine First Nations, hearing their needs and making sure they have all the PPE they require.

Ducharme notes Indigenous

Services Canada (federal government) is working with the communities on adapting existing structures or bringing in temporary structures to use as self-isolation facilities. Although this may seem like a good solution, Ducharme says it creates a whole new set of questions and concerns as these temporary facilities need equipment, food and staff.

"Every community is different," she adds. "Some are looking at their schools and community halls as potential places to isolate people."

Ducharme is happy to report the on-reserve clinics are not shut down.

"They're open, but their hours are limited and people should phone before stopping in," she says. "Our health clinics in the First Nations communities have enough PPE."

One thing this situation has taught us, says Ducharme, is the virus doesn't move, people do.

"This is why staying home and only limiting contact to members of your own household is so important," she says. "People are realizing how fragile their lifestyles really are and how quickly circumstances can change and that we should not take the little things in life for granted."

Ducharme says people are trying to make the best of a stressful situation.

"I enjoy seeing the news stories and social media posts of people talking about their spring cleaning/organization, homeschooling, puzzle challenges, online talent competitions, exercising, working from home, etc.," she notes.

As far as homemade masks are concerned, Ducharme says they may help reduce the spread of the disease when a person is going somewhere where physical distancing is not easy to maintain.

"Places like a grocery store or pharmacy – people may want to wear a mask as an additional public health measure," she says. "However, if someone is going to use a homemade mask, they should ensure it is washed regularly."

This COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, another emergency event all communities need to work through in partnership with one another.

"There are always lessons to be learned and this better prepares us for the next time. Because there is always going to be a next time," Ducharme states. "Whether it's a flood, a wildfire or a pandemic, our northern communities have a lot of experience working through emergency events."

Although the premier of Saskatchewan suggests re-opening the province, Ducharme said communities should move forward with some hesitancy, especially now that a couple of First Nations are starting to see COVID-19 cases.

"If we remain diligent and continue to practice social distancing and good infection control in our everyday lives, we will get through this with minimal impact," says Ducharme. "We will be stronger together, by staying apart."



# Making masks voluntarily



Brenda Kokan-Janvier samples one of the many masks she made recently to see if it fits properly. With social distancing in mind, the pickup board (at right) has masks inside Ziploc bags attached for community members.



Brenda Kokan-Janvier, a member of the Clearwater River Dene Nation, is a crafter and small business owner.

"When this pandemic came about last month I logged on to a crafting site and downloaded a template for a mask," says Kokan-Janvier, adding acquiring the material to make the masks wasn't a problem. "I have a home-based wedding rental business, so I just started repurpose the material I had on hand."

She started her wedding rental business eight years ago, but since COVID-19 arrived, all upcoming weddings have been put on hold.

"But not me. I am here to help," she says. "Masks are in high demand right now in La Loche and CRDN, but mine are not for sale. I did receive some money through an e-transfer, but declined it – I didn't think it was right to be accepting any money for masks right now."

All her material has been washed for shrinkage and for safety.

"After a person wears them, the masks themselves can be run through a washing machine and then worn again," Kokan-Janvier says, adding the first few masks took a bit of time to make until she perfected her system on how to

make them as quickly as possible.

As people in the community heard she was making masks, many requests came forward.

"I only started this to help out," she added. "And I continue to make them and give them out for free. The only thing is the masks' elastic is hard to find now because a lot of other people are also making masks."

Kokan-Janvier's husband, Keith, has built a 'pickup board' and has erected it outside their home for locals who have requested a mask.

"If you have requested a mask, I put the name on a Ziploc bag and

they come and pick it up," she adds. "We also limit to only four masks per household. I'll continue to make the masks as long as I have the material."

The local health centre has also put in a call for masks and Kokan-Janvier has delivered along with matching head bands.

When asked about her thoughts on Premier Scott Moe's announcement last week to re-open Saskatchewan, Kokan-Janvier said it's too soon.

"Especially since our part of Saskatchewan just started getting some cases of COVID-19," she says.

## CRDN chief reminds members to be vigilant



Clearwater River Dene Nation

These last few weeks have seen the Clearwater River Dene Nation swept up with the rest of the country, and the world, in preparing for COVID-19.

"Gatherings have been cancelled or restricted to small numbers, the school is closed and students are being taught at home. Social distancing is the new normal – that is what must be done to fight COVID-19," says CRDN chief Teddy Clark. "The importance of being located close to nature is what a lot of our members are taking advantage of. Many of our members who have cabins have moved out to them."

The last week, Chief Clark was out on the land, beyond cell service.

"We've been blazing trails to cabins so our elders and community members can isolate themselves further," he adds. "What a lot of Clearwater River Dene Nation membership have realized is we can't take anything for granted."

Community members are staying home and spending time with their children. CRDN administration staff have kept the community busy by sponsoring different events through social media.

"This pandemic keeps the community close during this time, and social media allows us to check on each other," says Clark.

Chief and council is consistent with the same message as anywhere – continue being safe, and practice social distancing.

"For some people out there, they might be tired of their self-isolation, but we need to take this serious for our families, our children and our elders," Clark says.

Being in leadership, Clark notes he and his council are deeply concerned for their community.

"We are thinking of our community's best interests," he adds.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a renewed focus between CRDN, the Northern Village of La Loche and the Métis Local.

"We're in close communication and we're all working together to monitor our communities," says Clark.

Chief and council at CRDN, along with senior management, are in constant contact with the local RCMP, local health officials, and several local business owners.

"This new emergency response committee we've set up collectively has a pandemic emergency response package," adds Clark. "We want to be prepared and have as much preparedness as possible."

Currently, the work is very hands-on helping with food and essential needs of band members.

"For example," Clark continues. "We can't all go shopping to the store as a family – only one member should go. And we can't browse shop anymore – we have to go in

for what we want and get out as quickly as possible. When we're in there, we need to stand on those X's, and keep two metres away from others so that we're at a safe distance."

Clark is pleased with how his community is handling the situation and has confidence in everyone's ability.

"There are new heroes today," he says. "The grocery staff, the truck drivers and of course our frontline health care workers. We can't thank them enough. They're smiling through all of this, staying safe through all of this and keeping us safe through all of this. Finally, we're reminding members about what is essential travel and telling them they can't just go around and visit."

Clark said the recent Easter celebration was a good example of that.

"We couldn't have our big family gatherings for Easter this year, but we somehow made it work," says Clark. "Even if we were shouting Happy Easter to each other from down the road."



# CHILD CARE COORDINATOR

## Program profile: Joanne Derocher



Left to right, MLTC Child Care Coordinator Joanne Derocher with her family – children Vanessa, Whitney, and Dustin and husband Richard (front).

Originally from the Poundmaker First Nation near North Battleford, Joanne Derocher married Richard Derocher and into the Flying Dust First Nation 26 years ago.

She began her association with MLTC first as a student in its Indian Child Care Program which took place from 1990 to 1993. This program was hosted by MLTC in partnership with the University of Victoria's Child & Youth and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT).

"It was a great program that incorporated our cultures and languages," Derocher says. "Elders played a major role of sharing their stories on different topics regarding child rearing. A book was produced during this time, of which I still have a few copies. I'm sad to say most of these Elders are no longer with us."

Derocher recalls during her studies as a being joyful time.

"Our two beautiful daughters were in Grades 1 and 2, and I was expecting our son in August of 1993. And, we were also foster parents to a handsome three-year-old boy."

Since 1996, Derocher has been fully employed with MLTC Health & Social Development.

"This May I will be celebrating 24 years," she adds.

In her first three years Derocher

was employed in the clerical pool as administrative support, then the MLTC Child Care Program coordinator assistant.

"After that I made a lateral transfer – I became the MLTC Child Care Program coordinator," she adds. "This was a challenge I was ready to take and it's been a great learning experience."

During Derocher's employment she has continued her education with on-line classes in early childhood education and obtained a diploma in the field in 2010.

Juggling work, her education, the kids' school and family life, refined Derocher's sense of direction.

"It was a stressful time, but we learned to be economical in our efforts. My family was a great support and I couldn't have done it without them," she says.

Child care services on-reserve have come a long way, Derocher states, adding at one time there wasn't any funding. The First Nations communities had to find existing buildings within their communities to provide child care services. Some communities had community members provide child care services in their homes.

"These were called family day homes," Derocher recalls.

In 2018/2019, the Government announced a 10-year commitment to support on-reserve day care services by providing additional resources. It's called the Indigenous Early Learning & Child Care (IELCC) funding.

"This was great news because child care on-reserve is so important," she adds. "The staff at these locations are very important people in the lives of these young children – they are the caregivers for parents who are unable to be with their child for most of the day."

The priorities for the new funding are outdoor play space and equipment; minor/major repairs and renovations; vans/buses for day care program; wage enhancement; training in early childhood education (ECE) Levels II & III; program enhancement resources such as play materials/equipment; culture and language resources; laptops/computers; cameras; resources and services for children with diverse needs; planning mentorship projects; parent workshops; program management support such as program needs; additional support for administration/program; contractors and consultants.

"Another part of my work as a second-level support, is to provide a licence and monitoring to day care

facilities," Derocher adds.

Currently, the MLTC child care program provides licence and monitoring to eight child care facilities on-reserve throughout the Meadow Lake First Nations.

"Fire, health and safety inspections are completed annually, therefore, coordination with MLTC's environmental health officer and MLTC technical services is completed annually," she adds.

Most of the facilities use their first language (Cree/Dene) when speaking to the children and involve the Elders from within their respective communities.

"We have a great opportunity to bring back our languages in the field of early childhood," Derocher says.

She admits the reason she chose this field was to learn more about her own children.

"I was a young parent once too who didn't have a clue about parenting," she says, adding she would like to continue her education in the future with a goal of receiving a master's in early childhood education.

Derocher has enjoyed working alongside all nine MLFNs.

"It has been very rewarding. It's a fun field and I enjoy working with the staff and learning along with the children," she concludes.

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The Meadow Lake Tribal Council offices are closed to the public. However, all essential staff will continue to work (mostly from home) and be in contact with their supervisor or director.

We wish you and your families  
all safety at this time.