

Samson Cree celebrate entrepreneurial project

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PONOKA NEWS

It was a time for feeling and showing pride for the Maskwacis First Nations communities, particularly the Samson Cree Nation as members and guests celebrated both the entrepreneurial spirit of and the excellence in education within the community while marking the inaugural dinner gala of the Nipsis Café on

Thursday, March 17.

The restaurant was totally created by the resources generated from within the Samson nation as part of linkages between previously federally-funded Classroom Connections program and the "Change it up Entrepreneur" program aimed at producing more business-minded individuals from among the community through hands-on training.

Leiha Crier, a young First Nations entrepreneur who owns three businesses, has

a Bachelor of Arts degree and is currently studying to get her Bachelor of Education degree, took a total of around 50 trainees in groups of 20 and led them to think and act as business people and in three months the Nipsis Café was born.

The trainees of the program did everything by themselves under her leadership according to Crier, from renovating the basement of the Samson Cree Nation's band office, to designing and actually making the furniture of the restaurant, including the chairs, tables and even teepee-designed lanterns to producing a business plan. The café also has one corner turned to a gift shop, an outlet for authentic First Nations handcraft and art products, again works of the trainees, to be displayed and marketed.

The result is a multifaceted success: Nipsis (literally meaning willow) Café will not only produce funding for more business-oriented projects, but also function as a training ground for new recruits.

"It is the work of the trainees from start to finish," said Crier with a visible sense of pride. "They did everything with their own hands," she added showing the restaurant furniture.

Heather Mac Taggart of Classroom

Connections was ecstatic to see the outcome. "Miraculous is the word" she said as she described how the renovation of the basement was completed within just a week by the trainees.

She praised the Samson band leadership for coming up with the funds to keep the Classroom Connections program going after the funding from the federal government was exhausted. She said they still needed funding but that the restaurant would provide some support for their operations.

During the gala, several First Nations academicians who had acquired their PhDs in various fields were also recognized.

One of the academicians, Shauna Bruno said it was important for her to give back to the community after having attained her achievements. She said in order to be able to do her part, she was acting as a trustee in a public school board representing Maskwacis community as well as functioning as a board member in a child welfare institution alongside being an instructor at Northern Lake College.

She said she had high expectations of the Nipsis Café project because "it has created a space for people to come together."



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Samson Nation Councillor Pat Buffalo addresses the participants at the gala opening on March 17 of the Nipsis Café which was all designed and created, from tables to chairs to teepee-styled lanterns, by the trainees of the project in only three months.

Photo by Mustafa Eric

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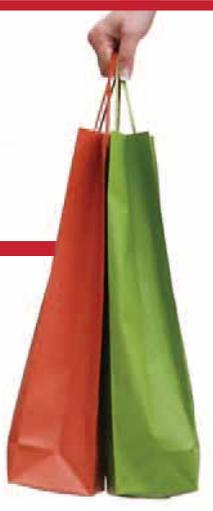
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