

With Humility, We Should Be Proud

As we, the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, reflect on our achievements, I quickly turn my mind to our land claim and the modern treaty we are negotiating with the governments of Ontario and Canada.

When AOPFN began this journey decades ago now, I don't think we imagined just how many Algonquins with ties to our community were living away from our Reserve. Many Algonquins had been denied their Indian Status under the Indian Act for choosing paths in their lives that led them away from the Reserve. Their choices are the same choices available to other residents of this country without fear of sacrificing their identities: marriage, education, military service, land ownership.

Since the land claim has been in negotiation, and as a result of this process, hundreds of Algonquins have or are receiving Indian Status as affiliates of AOPFN and still hundreds of others are receiving their Indian Status and placed on a General List Algonquins not affiliated with any federally recognized First Nation. Although many AOPFN affiliates may still live in other communities, other towns, and other cities, we are in a way bringing them home to us and ensuring that they see the benefits they lost by not living on the Reserve, while also ensuring that they are able to enjoy and exercise the rights due to every Algonquin person.

We should be and can be proud of this accomplishment. We can be proud that the land claim that we initiated has been so meaningful to all of the Algonquins who had lost their connection to their history, their identity, and their Indigenous rights, and their connection to our community. AOPFN can be proud of our place in history as champions of the rights and interests of our Algonquin Nation. And we can be proud of our legacy as nation builders.

But we must always remember that the Seven Grandfathers taught us Humility.

A vocal minority in our community is labouring under certain misconceptions about the consequences of the treaty negotiations for AOPFN. They fear that we will lose our Reserve if we sign the treaty. They fear the degradation of our rights as Algonquin people. But the reality is that there will only be a treaty if there is still a Reserve. We are negotiating the treaty with the approach that the Reserve must and will remain after we sign, and Canada has begun to understand our position.

Recognition and respect for our AOPFN rights will be stronger than ever with this treaty.

How the Treaty Will Benefit AOPFN

300 years ago, the Algonquin people along with our Nipissing allies were a dominant force in the Ottawa Valley and throughout the Outouais and northern regions of what is now Quebec.

Our "nation" was systematically disbursed and clinically ethnically cleansed over the next two and a half centuries. Our livelihood which was principally founded on the fur trade and harvesting

and economic interaction with other First Nation people was dashed. We gathered on the periphery of our territory and “hung on.”

Today our nation in what is now Ontario has taken concerted steps to regroup and is, as the result of determined and forceful negotiating, on the verge of reasserting our presence in our historic territory west of the Ottawa River.

The offer that successive Pikwakanagan Chiefs and Councils and ANR colleagues have secured gives us the opportunity to meaningfully reassert our presence within our historic territory.

A land base of approximately 130,000 acres would make us the largest landowner in Ontario outside of the Crown.

The over \$800 million offer accompanied by its inflationary rider will generate a capital amount approaching \$1 billion by 2024 when, with genuine effort on our part this agreement could be concluded. That capital sum will conservatively reap returns of 50 - 60 million tax free dollars annually making it exponentially greater in purchasing power.

The land base around Pikwakanagan will increase substantially with the addition of the County Forest and other lands selected.

The Tewin and Carlingview developments are but a taste of the opportunities arising from a strong and united Algonquin people.

These are but a few of the items that present themselves if we are willing to get beyond the anger, the in – fighting the ill – treatment of our fellow Algonquins...behavior that stems from the frustration generated by years of oppression and racism.

If we can do that, we have this real opportunity in our lifetime to rebuild our nation that colonialism and the repressive Indian Act has systematically tried to eradicate. In fact, re-claiming our inherent and independent authority to govern Pikwakanagan is a requirement of the treaty negotiation. Without it, there is no treaty, therefore, we must negotiate a meaningful self - government package that will provide our Community with long – term security and peace including jurisdiction and authority.

We can rebuild and redefine the Algonquin nation into a force for real change not only for Algonquins, but all Indigenous people given our strategic position with Canada’s capital nestled in our territory and sitting on what was our sacred site.

Rather than being the focal point in the news featuring internal rancor and in - fighting, we can become the clear example of positive change in the national conversation about First Nation peoples and an example of the successful economic and cultural achievements that can be realized. Strengthening and Rebuilding the Algonquin Nation in a Healing Path Forward.

The substantial treaty package which is very much in jeopardy if the negotiations dissolve is a very real concern. It contains the basis for significant positive change for our people, including:

- a) Pikwakanagan could be the political, administrative, and cultural heart of the Nation by locating the AOO's political and administrative facilities here in Pikwakanagan, as well as a facility to house and preserve the archaeological artifacts that need to be found and relocated to preserve and celebrate our culture, and could include a museum and cultural foundation;
- b) We could provide for educational and retraining opportunities for our citizens, especially our youth and could include an elementary school;
- c) We could enhance and enrich the lives of our Elders through additional social assistance and health care;
- d) We could actively participate in the economic and political activities of the Territory and build upon the economic bridge building successes that we have achieved so far in such projects as Wateridge, Zibi, Tewin and Carlingview.
- e) These successes enhance and re – establish our presence in the region as a force to be reckoned with...not a people at war with themselves;

These are but a few of the “opportunities” that present themselves to us.

We must decide, is our future to be dictated by the hateful treatment of the past or the opportunities presented to us by the future...is the glass going to be half empty or half full ?

Do we have the courage to take on this challenge and throw off the shackles or are we to remain a cog in the Indian Act regime? The choice is ours.

Celebrating Grand Chief Pinesi

July 1 isn't just Canada Day anymore in the Nation's Capital.

A story perfectly written for the Truth and Reconciliation era: the day celebrated as the one that marks Canadian Confederation can now be celebrated for the life and legacy of a great Algonquin whose past hunting grounds are now Parliament Hill: Grand Chief Constant Pinesi.

Events scheduled for July 1, 2022 are inspired in part by a project undertaken by a group known as Kichi Sibi Trails to map the portage route used by Chief Pinesi when his family had their hunting grounds on the south bank of the Ottawa River in the vicinity of Rideau Falls. The celebration will

include walking tours, portages, and plenty of paddling. It will also mark the inauguration of the Kichi Sibi Trail.

But the day is most importantly a celebration and commemoration of Chief Pinesi, a towering figure in Algonquin history. Chief Pinesi fought alongside the British and other Indigenous allies in the War of 1812, and later fought for recognition of Algonquin ownership of their land as signatory to numerous petitions to colonial governments of both Upper Canada and Lower Canada.

Our land claim is his legacy. Chief Pinesi and other Algonquin leaders of the day really began this journey toward reclaiming our unceded territory. Councillor Mervin Sarazin and I are participating in the ceremonies scheduled for July 1. The presence of Algonquin culture and tradition will be strongly felt throughout the day with the lighting of a sacred fire, prayers, drumming and dancing, and a pipe song ceremony.

The event will also feature a discussion of research into the life of Chief Pinesi. The event underscores the importance of reconciliation with Algonquin people and the value of the land claim initiated by AOPFN, as the land that was previously the heavily forested hunting grounds of Chief Pinesi is now the concrete pavement of downtown Ottawa. The treaty offers an opportunity to ensure that other traditionally significant lands escape that same urbanized fate. We hope this will be an annual event every Jul 1.

As we approach the end of our treaty negotiations, we must start to turn our attention to the work that would follow ratification: Implementation. This includes aspects of implementation specific to AOPFN, opportunities to participate in implementation, inspiring and encouraging youth to get involved so that they might contribute to implementation in the future. As I mentioned earlier, the choice is ours.

Wendy Jocko, Chief