



VICE CHIEF JOSEPH TSANNIE

As we reflect on the past year, we have much to be proud of, celebrate and be thankful for. The staff of the Prince Albert Grand Council are the foundation of this organization and continue to work hard to support all our member communities and people. As we move into another year, it is important to remember the unprecedented summer many of our communities faced with regards to the protection against wildfires. While the health and safety of our people was the top priority, there was also an enormous impact to traditional land and destruction of property. To no surprise, our people rallied to support one another. Community leaders and fire fighters demonstrated courage and determination; neighbouring communities and centres provided home comforts, accommodation and food; and there was an outpouring of support from people and organizations across the country who supported our communities through special events, fundraising and donations of their time and goods. To everyone involved, we thank you for your strength, patience and commitment to stand together! The opportunity now exists to learn from the situation and improve on the experienced shortfalls including, the number of trained community members available to work the front lines, community control over support centres, access to adequate funding, and ensuring the necessary equipment is available to prevent such a large scale threat from happening in the future.

Throughout my term I have worked closely with many of our communities. Both the Athabasca and Plains Cree/ Dakota sectors expressed their interest to host Sector Gatherings to better understand the vast array of programs and services available through the Grand Council, as well as, hosting a forum to discuss activities related to the land, treaty rights, mining, industry development, wildlife management, education and training opportunities. This year, the second annual Athabasca Sector Meeting was hosted in Hatchet Lake and the third was held this past summer in Fond

du Lac. The first Plains Cree Dakota Sector Meeting was hosted in Wahpeton.

Much development continues in the far north, including the advocacy for roads. Hatchet Lake and Fond du Lac are at different stages in the process, but both are moving forward on the development of all-weather roads into their communities. Black Lake continues to explore options and partnerships for improvements and maintenance of the existing road into their community.

The Mackenzie River Basin Board (MRBB) works to establish common principles for cooperative management of the aquatic ecosystem of the Mackenzie River Basin. The board addresses inter-jurisdictional water quality, quantity and related issues. As the Saskatchewan Aboriginal member on the Mackenzie River Basin Board, we worked in partnership with the University of Alberta, Government of NWT and other national and international partners to develop and submit a funding proposal to collect traditional and local knowledge in the Mackenzie River Basin. The MRBB anticipates this project will enhance the board's capacity to consider the needs and concerns of our First Nation communities.

In partnership with the Saskatchewan Research Council, we have worked towards ensuring that capacity is being built in the Athabasca Basin through Project CLEANS – for the remediation of abandoned mines in the area. Through this project, the following initiatives have taken place to ensure community involvement and benefit: development of criteria that ensures Athabasca-Basin companies and workers are selected for the work; hiring of Athabasca community members to monitor the work and report back to their communities; and a training initiative agreement with PAGC to assess and develop training programs.

Other highlights and initiatives led by PAGC departments include:

The controversial Bill C-33 and the First Nations Education Act continue to drive our Education Department's position for quality education for our students. While the proposed bill does nothing



more than create ambiguity around the governance of on-reserve education, our goal remains clear - improving achievement of our First Nation students. PAGC will continue to work towards ensuring adequate funding and support for language and culture programs, special education, standards and assessments, infrastructure, administrative support and incentives for improved achievement results. Ultimately, to be on par with our provincially funded counterparts - the gross disparity has gone on for too long and it is our youth who are suffering.

Our Sports, Culture and Recreation staff and board, operating under the Department of Education, have made strategic efforts to support community needs and the success of our youth at the local, provincial and national stage. Highlights include wonderful success at the First Nation Games where Team Woodland placed first overall and Team PAGC achieved a personal best in standings. The first annual PAGC Cultural Gathering consisted of a week of cultural showcasing and was a huge success. Other special events made possible through the dedication of PAGC staff and partners include, the Fine Arts Festival, Northern Spirits, Remembrance Day Ceremony and numerous other events, celebrations, rallies, walks and festivities. All in an effort to build relationships, share our culture and unite our people.

Our Health and Social Development Department are committed to improving the quality of life in our communities. A Community Safety Plan is under development to support community dialogue about suicide and to help create a safety net for people at risk. We hope RADA - Reserves Against Drugs and Alcohol will become a PAGC wide campaign similar to MADD and SADD. Progress towards the establishment of a First Nations Hospital continue. A facility that will incorporate our cultural philosophy, traditions and beliefs in the medical treatment of patients. Best practices are being sought out, including models and potential partnerships for wholesale pharmacy distribution.

In the Justice Department, strides are being made in an anti-bootlegging movement that better engages communities, local businesses, RCMP and the Province. An action plan has been drafted to move forward in a strategic direction and ultimately reduce the negative impact that drugs and alcohol have in our communities.

The Urban Services department continues to provide for our members living in the city - extending them the supports they need while living away from their home community and family. The staff are in the midst of working through a multi-year strategic plan, including the development of an Urban Services Commission.

In highlighting just a few of our organizations initiatives, successes and opportunities that have occurred this past year - it is with great pride that I am able to be a part of this team. We will keep moving forward, opening new doors, doing new things, exploring new paths - and as long as we do it together, success is inevitable!

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Vice Chief Joseph Tsannie