

*Strengthening Community, Building Opportunity
in a Spirit of Alliance:
Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Saskatchewan*

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Located 26 kilometres south of Saskatoon, the community of Whitecap Dakota First Nation (Whitecap) has approximately 700 members. A major tourism attraction with a million visitors annually, Whitecap offers the best golf course in Saskatchewan, with a 4-star resort and casino. Whitecap has created diversified own source revenue streams from not only business profits, but through its Land Code, which generates land lease and property tax revenue. Exerting its jurisdiction, it also receives revenues from several types of taxation that were previously going to federal and provincial governments. With a healthy record of job creation, Whitecap is a regional economic force in Saskatchewan. Whitecap's business model is shared here for the benefit of both business and government leaders as they work to strengthen Indigenous community health and wellbeing across Canada.

Chief Darcy Bear, Whitecap leader for more than 30 years, stepped into a crisis situation when first elected. The community had no money in the bank and a pile of accounts payable. By putting community at the heart of every move from the due diligence process to strategic planning, Chief Darcy, Council, and his leadership team have moved diligently and consistently forward, building partnerships to the benefit of the community of Whitecap and their partners. An important milestone of note is the recent community endorsement of the Self-Government agreement that was reached between the federal government and Whitecap in a 92% vote of confidence in October 2022. The culmination of extensive community consultation over a 10-year period, Whitecap becomes one of only 78 self-governing Indigenous nations in Canada.

This case study will consider the journey, key foundational decisions and rationale, leadership strategies and wise practices for reference when building healthy, sustainable, and successful communities.

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THE EARLY YEARS — DIGGING OUT FROM UNDER

Chief Darcy Bear was 23 years old when first elected to Council after completing a Business Administrative Certificate from the University of Saskatchewan. He had been raised by his grandparents with a strong work ethic and a healthy respect for his language and culture. Three years later he was elected chief on October 6, 1993, and developed a plan that would address the community's unemployment of 70%, poor financial health, and lack of economic opportunity. "Stick to the plan" encapsulates the driving theme for restoring Whitecap's financial health after consolidating debt with a financial institution.

Chief Darcy recalls those early days: "In 1995, we signed a financial transfer agreement with the federal government, and there are only 11 First Nations in Saskatchewan that have that agreement. I had started lobbying immediately after being elected, so we got our first residential subdivision, our first school, and our first community water treatment plant in 1996." Many of the 34 existing housing units were built on crawl space foundations with substandard materials and replaced with units that meet the national building code. New housing totalling 174 units was built under section 95 of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Affordable Housing program. The next section documents Whitecap's impressive development journey, remembering that it is a relatively small community with few resources.

WHITECAP'S GOLF COURSE, CASINO AND HOTEL PROJECTS

With their financial house in order, Whitecap was set to focus on business development. In order to oversee their development plans, Darrell Balkwill was hired as CEO of their development corporation in 2003 from the Saskatoon Tribal Council, where he had worked

FIGURE 1
Dakota Dunes Golf Links



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Golf Links" by George Bowditch, 2022, SaskGolfer. <https://www.saskgolfer.com/dakota-dunes-golf-links/>

for 17 years. In that year, the leadership resurrected a golf project idea that had been around when Chief Darcy was in high school. The golf course opened two years later, in 2005.

Chief Darcy describes the process:

Our vision was to use our beautiful rolling dunes, which [were] shared by our experienced consultant who had built golf courses in North America and in Europe. We kept our golf course as natural as possible and took advantage of our sandy soil to reduce expensive drainage fees, [resulting in] a savings of \$3.6 million. We got the capital cost down to \$5.2 million, which included irrigation and a temporary clubhouse.

As a small nation, we lacked capital, so we needed partners and approached Chief Harry Cook of Lac La Ronge, as they have the successful Kitsaki Development Corporation with over \$100 million in business, and Chief Harry Lafond of Muskeg Lake, [which] had the first Urban Reserve in Canada with more than 500 employees on their lands. They had [an] economic vision, and we got along. I showed them the business plan, the need for equity with federal grants, and a debt repayment plan in 12 years. We ended up paying it off in six years. We bought out both our partners and were very thankful that they helped kick-start the project. That course opened in 2005.

The Saskatchewan Tribal Council was considering opening a casino in downtown Saskatoon, but the bid was vetoed by Saskatoon citizens in a plebiscite. The focus shifted to Whitecap, which was Plan B for location choices. They had their resort/commercial zoning in place already that listed a casino as a possible option, which was a bonus. The project was

FIGURE 2
Dakota Dunes Casino



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Resort & Casino" by Tourism Saskatchewan Canada. <https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/listings/3368/dakota-dunes-resort-casino>

FIGURE 3
Dakota Dunes Resort



Source: From “Dakota Dunes Resort”. <https://www.dakotadunesresort.com/media.php>

taken to the community for support, which was achieved at a community meeting, with the \$70 million casino opening in 2007. Chief and Council worked in partnership with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Association, and the Saskatoon Tribal Council to bring the casino project to fruition (Dakota Dunes Casino, 2021).

Gaming in Saskatchewan is a partnership with the 74 First Nations through SIGA. SIGA manages daily operations. Fifty percent of the profits go into a First Nation trust and is shared among all Saskatchewan’s First Nations; 25% goes to the province; and 25% goes to charities operating within the regions of the First Nation communities and includes Indigenous charities.

As part of Whitecap’s tourism plan, the next project was a hotel. The 155-room hotel, called Dakota Dunes Resort, opened in 2020. Financed completely by Whitecap, this project included a \$13.6 million water and sewer system expansion. Whitecap’s leadership considered approaching Indigenous Services Canada, but their funding cap was \$3 million, which would mean Whitecap had to finance more than \$10 million. The leadership reviewed the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which could only be accessed at that time by non-First Nations communities. The program financed infrastructure projects with each of the local community, federal, and provincial governments contributing a third of the project cost.

Chief Darcy successfully approached Brad Wall, Saskatchewan’s premier at the time, and asked for provincial support to back Whitecap’s bid to access this federal program, as Whitecap was prepared to put in one-third of the infrastructure upgrade cost. Chief Darcy recalls:

I showed the premier the economic benefits through jobs created and an economist’s estimate of the benefits to the province. It was then seen as an investment.

Then we lobbied the federal government. I remember sitting in the Minister’s office and the deputy minister asking if the province was really supporting Whitecap — he asked three times — and the response was ‘yes’ each time. Instead of

paying \$10 million and the feds paying \$3 million, we paid \$4.67 million as our one-third share. In 2018, Minister Goodale came to Whitecap to announce the infrastructure project, and now, for the first time, this program is available to all First Nations across the country.

Chief Darcy states most emphatically that, “We’re still citizens of Saskatchewan, and as Canadians, we should be able to access these programs. There are often turf wars between the province and the federal government as to who has responsibility. We have to get beyond that to the fact that we’re all Canadian citizens. We all have to work together, and we have to make change together.” The next section documents Whitecap’s strategy for diversifying its own source revenues.

DIVERSIFYING REVENUE STREAMS: TAXATION, INDUSTRIAL SERVICES, LAND LEASES, BUSINESS PARK

The Nation’s efforts to diversify its revenue streams besides business profits focus on taxation and industrial services, as well as land leases and attracting businesses to their business park.

Chief Darcy states, “We had our own taxation system before the Europeans came; it was called sharing, which was done voluntarily as opposed to an imposed model of taxation.”

Saskatchewan allows First Nations to capture fuel and tobacco taxes. Whitecap gives 100% of the tobacco tax to its members and only takes a portion of the fuel tax. A real property tax is paid by all their businesses to the Whitecap government. Chief Darcy shares the rationale underlying community support for this tax:

For example, if the casino had been located in Saskatoon, the casino would pay property taxes to the City of Saskatoon because it requires services. If we didn’t have the real property tax, then we would have to subsidize the operations of the casino and take something away from the members in order to finance those services. It made sense to our members, and so they supported it.

Whitecap takes advantage of a federal First Nations GST program to retain GST charged on every purchase in the community, including each slot machine and table in the casino. These revenues of more than \$1 million were going to the federal government and are now collected as the Whitecap Community Improvement Fee (originally named First Nations GST) and are reinvested in improving the quality of life in the community.

The province agreed that the liquor consumption tax of 10% collected from the golf course clubhouse, the hotel restaurant, lounge, and casino could remain in the community so long as it was charged on every purchase made in the community’s licensed establishments. A million tourists visiting Whitecap and community members pay this tax if they choose to drink in those licensed Nation establishments, and the taxes collected go to support Whitecap’s language and culture initiatives.

The Industrial Services Division of the Whitecap Development Corporation provides essential services to the “resource, oil and gas, utilities and pipeline sectors” (Whitecap Development Services, 2021). Partnering with respected service providers, Whitecap offers wide-ranging services, including engineering; earthwork and infrastructure building; porta-

ble work spaces; medical, health, safety, security, and training; as well as electrical and instrumentation construction and maintenance, control systems, and integrated modular solutions for Saskatchewan's utility, mining, and oil and gas sectors.

The new business park will produce a revenue stream from land leases will create employment opportunities. With business owners generating profits and carrying the risk, Whitecap is, most importantly, reducing its overall economic risk profile and gaining benefits for the community. CEO Darrell explains:

The first phase of the development of a business park is 30 acres with the infrastructure needed to attract business. The leadership has also developed an extensive package of laws and bylaws that will control what business development looks like in the community, including how land leases work and what property taxes look like. We set similar standards [to] what other jurisdictions are doing. They are easy to understand and are available on our website.

In the next section, the Nation framework that supports continued economic development in Whitecap will be explored.

NATION GOVERNANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

It is important to begin to understand the reality that Indigenous communities have faced in order to appreciate the distance travelled by Whitecap Dakota First Nation, as an example, in the last decades. Chief Darcy recalls:

I remember my grandfather talking about needing a pass to leave the reserve and a permit from the Indian Agent to sell a crop, wood, or livestock. No other Canadian farmer had to do that. The Indian Act was not set up to support indigenous people; it was set up to segregate them from the rest of society. The settlers were able to buy land all around our community and create jobs that offered employment and hope. Those opportunities did not include opportunities for us.

All our development corporations have been started in the last few decades. So, the non-Indigenous corporations have a head start on us, and we have a long way to catch up. They've been able to generate wealth and take those retained earnings and reinvest in other opportunities to grow and grow. That's why the funding caps have to be lifted in the federal Community Opportunity Readiness program, for example.

It's not our fault that we are so far behind because we were contained [in] our reserves. The Government knew [that] if they kept Indians dependent, they would hold power over them. Then the Canadian Government looked to the south and the residential school experience, and they brought that here to take away our culture and our language, our identity, our pride, and [our] ability to parent. How can you learn to parent when you only see your parents [for] maybe two months of the year, if that?

That's one of the things I ponder on: what kind of impact is it when you don't see your parents for 10 months out of the year and you never hear the words "I love you"? You don't know their nurturing. Before the Europeans came, the commu-

nity raised the child, and kinship was really important. Everyone had a role in helping and teaching our children. It was a big loss to our people and our communities. That's why there's so much dysfunction. The non-Indigenous people would be dysfunctional too if their children were taken away for 10 months of the year. Imagine communities with no sounds of children playing, laughing, or crying.

We are resilient, and we endured it; and now we want to be part of the Canadian economy.

Whitecap leadership's policies of accountability and transparency are considered here. Consider their move to self-government, including taking authority over the administration of their lands as well as improving community infrastructure in the areas of health, education, and safety.

1. Accountability and Transparency

Whitecap's leadership focuses on community and is accountable and transparent to its members and partners. A Comprehensive Community Plan was recently updated that sets the priorities for nation-building and is member-driven. Whitecap's economic plans are outlined in a 20-year master plan, complemented by sector-specific strategic plans. At the heart of these plans are the following important guiding principles for economic self-sustainability (Economic Development, 2021):

Economic Mission: To create an economically self-sustaining community with financially independent members through the effective use of economic tools that maximize the available resources, respect the Dakota culture and protect the environment while protecting and enhancing inherent rights.

Economic Goals:

1. To create employment opportunities that will allow all Whitecap members to earn an income at least equal to the provincial average.
2. To provide Whitecap members with the opportunity to access the education, training and work experience necessary to gain employment.
3. To self-generate sufficient sustained revenues to continuously improve the quality of life for Whitecap members and support the investment required for planned community growth.

There are at least four community meetings held each year where all plans, updates, new community projects and programs, etc., are discussed with members. The leadership also meets with the elders at monthly lunch meetings. Decisions are made when the majority of members agree, and projects go ahead only with community support. Chief Darcy emphasizes the importance of really listening to community members.

2. Self-Government

The Nation has steadily moved towards self-government in phases and was able to remove much of the negative influence of the Indian Act. Chief Darcy outlines this movement:

We've phased in self-government by signing a Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management with Canada in 2003 that replaces 25% of the Indian

Act, a membership code that replaces 5% of the Indian Act, and we have our own election code that replaces a further 5% of the Indian Act.

We're going to keep section 87 of the Indian Act so that we don't pay provincial or federal income taxes while working on reserve. We'll keep section 6 so that we are still recognized as Indians, and section 87 will continue to apply to us. We also want to keep section 2 that relates to lands so that our lands will remain reserve lands.

As was mentioned earlier, Whitecap has successfully taken the major steps required to become fully self-governing through the recent community endorsement of the Self-Government Agreement. The effective date for self-government is September 1, 2023, and full implementation of this agreement will be achieved over the coming years, thus removing many of the legislative obstacles that currently disrupt Whitecap's plans for a healthy and prosperous community.

The replacement of the 44 land administration provisions in the Indian Act began with the Framework Agreement through First Nation Land Management, which was followed by the development of a community-driven Whitecap Dakota Land Code, which placed governance authority with Whitecap. Only about 31 per cent of First Nation communities in Canada are in one of the stages of developing a land code (Signatory First Nations, n.d.).

As a result of the land code process, Whitecap developed a land use plan that sets development standards that protect the environment for the community. It is supported by a zoning strategy that identifies "land set aside for residential, resort/commercial, community services, cultural areas, the business park, natural areas, and agriculture" (Bear, 2022). The comprehensive zoning policy is an essential component of Whitecap's development plans, as seen in Figure 4, and reflects important community priorities for ensuring a quality of life for Whitecap members as development plans unfold.

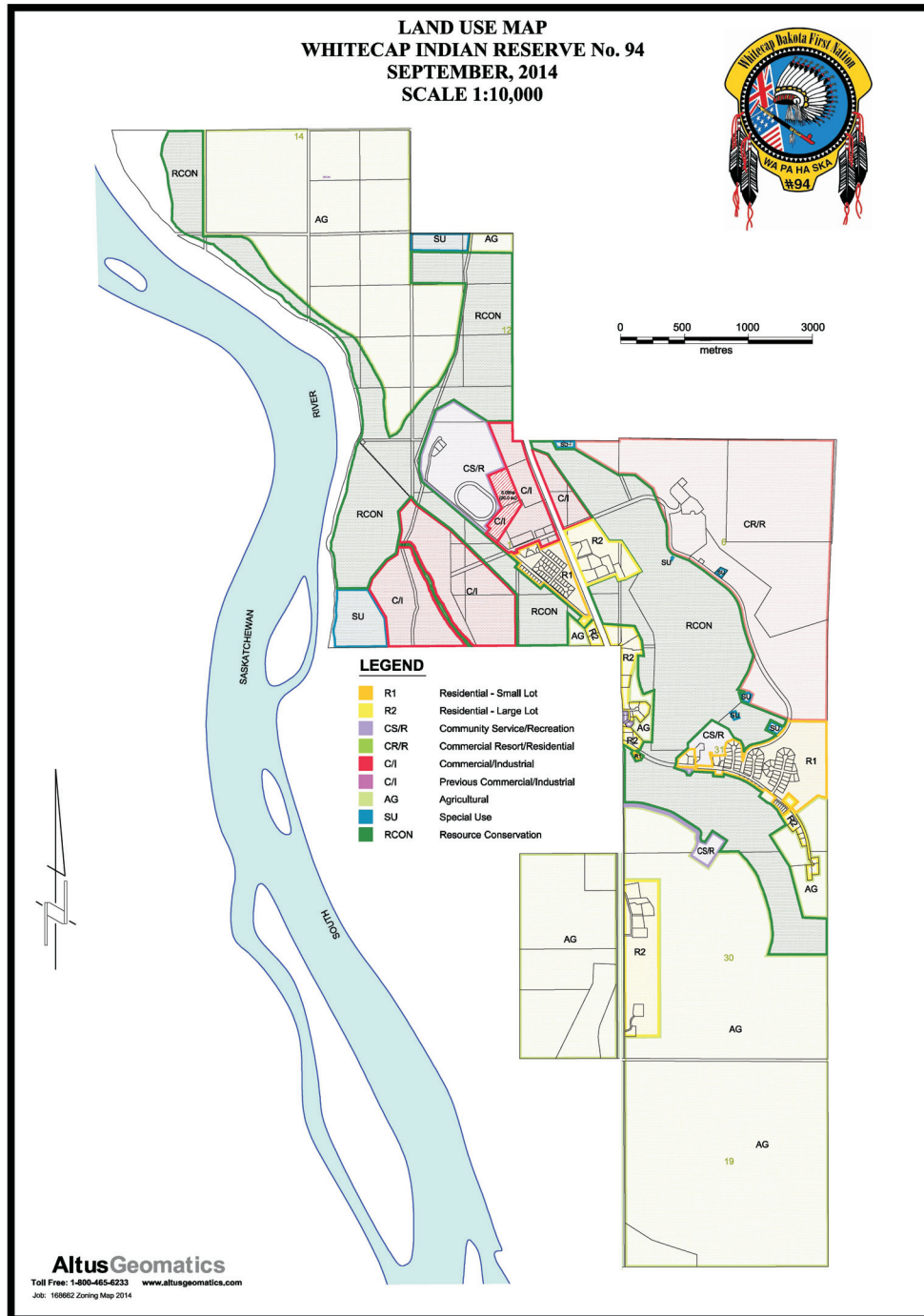
Another benefit of the land code process is that a whole environmental assessment of Whitecap lands was undertaken. Chief Darcy explains:

Some families had their own landfills, but there is a reclamation process paid for by the federal government, so we received a clean bill of health on our land. There are no more landfills on Whitecap Land. All of the garbage goes to a regional landfill. We do have a transfer station for some of the other garbage, like construction debris. We have door-to-door pickup like you see in cities. We have the black bins and the blue bins for recycling. Leadership committees and community members were all involved in [the] discussions.

It also included capping all the wells in the community since we have a water treatment plant. We needed to manage that risk, as there was a possibility that the old wells might potentially contaminate the aquifer.

It is critical to note that a strong leadership team is essential to Whitecap's overall success. In Chief Darcy's experience, the team will put the vision into an action plan. The strategy works to the strengths of the team and supports transparency and accountability, which helps bring the community on board. The community must understand what the leadership is doing through regular meetings and must give direction to the leadership. "You also need to believe it to achieve it. You need a team and community support to implement an action plan to bring the vision to fruition. One of my team members said I was crazy when I said I

FIGURE 4
Whitecap Indian Reserve No. 94 Land Use Map



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Resort", <https://www.dakotadunesresort.com/media.php>

would approach the province regarding the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Fund. We got it done!” (Bear, 2022).

3. Infrastructure

Chief Darcy grew up in a time when the community had no modern infrastructure and still had to chop wood and haul water. Essential infrastructure supports for education, health, and safety have greatly improved under his tenure as leader. Houses are built to code, and every home has high-speed fibre optics that eases access to online education and brings many benefits for members. Importantly, all elders have air conditioning, making them the “coolest elders in Saskatchewan”.

Education

The Nation has a regional education authority in partnership with the Saskatoon public school division. All teaching staff are Saskatchewan public school division employees. The community has a school for pre-kindergarten to grade 4 students, which follows the same provincial curriculum but is enhanced with language and cultural programming.

Grade 5 and older students are bused to a new school located 20 minutes away in Saskatoon and make up 10% of the student population. Whitecap made a strategic investment of \$2.7 million, or 10%, in the \$27 million school project. The students have access to elders every day, supports, and a cultural room that has a wall display of Whitecap’s complete history. Students are encouraged to follow their dreams wherever that may take them, and they are supported through scholarships to continue training and further education. Most importantly, this support is unconditional, placing no burden of any type of repayment on the young people who access the Post-Secondary Education Program.

Health

In 2007, Chief Whitecap was acknowledged as a city founder; it was his suggested location for a new colony in 1882 that became the City of Saskatoon (Chief Whitecap’s Community, 2022). This close relationship with Saskatoon is in the spirit of alliance that is in keeping with their traditions — Dakota translates as “friend” or “ally”. This spirit marks many of Whitecap’s broader partnering relationships to the benefit of the Nation (Our Community — History, 2021).

For example, Whitecap has a provincial primary care health clinic that is available to everyone, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous. While the federal government and Health Canada could only offer a segregated model for Whitecap members, Whitecap’s leadership went to the province and asked for expanded services for tourist visitors and all residents, regardless of ethnicity. The province pays for a full-time nurse practitioner, and further supports are provided by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and through their partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council. Elders receive homecare, and their prescriptions are delivered to their homes by the clinic.

Community Safety

Whitecap’s ability to promote a shared vision for community safety has resulted in a level of safety that is rare for First Nations. Saskatoon’s Fire Department provides top-notch

training for volunteer fire fighters in Whitecap under a partnership agreement, and Whitecap's fire fighters are often able to put out fires before backup comes from Saskatoon.

Another partnership agreement with the province, the federal government, and Whitecap supports two RCMP officers who live in the community. An economic argument was successfully made that rested on the safety of the one million tourists who visit the small community each year. Whitecap has entered into a successful Community Safety Officers pilot project with the province of Saskatchewan and Muskoday First Nation, located near Prince Albert. Under this project, community safety officers provide peacekeeping duties under existing provincial authorities. The project is supported by amendments to the Summary Offences Procedures Act that will respect and enable police and court enforcement of First Nation's laws, using Indigenous justices of the peace. This brings a measure of safety and security that is not enjoyed by many First Nations across Canada, and Whitecap's leadership is looking to make this a permanent service.

This achievement is particularly notable because the RCMP will not enforce Nation bylaws or land codes across Canada since no provincial prosecution service will prosecute as they are not enactments for the purposes of provincial law.

WHITECAP DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Whitecap Development Corporation is an important governance tool and the main means of meeting the community's economic goals. The next section will outline key operational strategies that underpin the success enjoyed by the community.

The Whitecap Development Corporation's board is made up of the Chief and Councillors and two community members, for a total of five board members. The issue of potential conflicts that might arise when mixing politics and business has been carefully considered and actively avoided. As CEO Darrell points out, it has been very effective to have community input from long-standing community members rather than having two separate entities — political and economic. At the same time, the board faces few challenges because its members have a clear understanding of potential conflicts of interest, which is further safeguarded by strong community accountability mechanisms.

Community accountability takes the form of regular community meetings, as previously mentioned. In the Nation, each band councillor represents a number of portfolios, and there is a community committee for each council member with regular reporting to the community. CEO Darrell notes that every economic development and land project goes through the community committees for review, feedback, and communication to the rest of the community. There are men's and women's groups, as well as youth groups and Elders, that are also consulted regularly. The Chief and Council move forward once they have received the mandate from the community to move on an initiative.

This focused community engagement, for example, was critical to community support for the casino project. CEO Darrell recalls that it was a strong due diligence process and transparency upfront regarding risks that helped answer any questions and gain community support in the end. There was extensive education on the downsides of gaming — how it can turn from entertainment to addiction. Programming was put in place to address any negative risks for community members associated with operating a casino.

CEO Darrell comments, "Increasing community security was important, and I believe we've been successful in minimizing the negatives by also getting ideas from the community

for mitigating risks. It's created revenue streams and employment opportunities and allowed us to lever into taxation, more land leases, and more land management that generates other revenue streams for the community.”

Overall, economic strategic plans dovetail with the Comprehensive Community Plan and focus on improving the quality of life for Whitecap citizens. The only times plans have derailed, according to CEO Darrell, are a couple of times when opportunities were identified and pursued that weren't part of the strategic plan. Sticking to a robust strategic plan underpins Whitecap's success, and following effective due diligence procedures is extremely important. Their eight-point Business Selection Criteria focus on profitability, employment creation, location, investment requirements, community impacts, financial risk, management capacity, and partnership potential. An assessment of partnership potential considers the overall viability of working with a potential business, including a review of their vision, goals, and business practices. The stability of Whitecap's leadership and overall vision has had a huge positive impact on community success in building a strong team and a cohesive community.

Economic Partnerships

In the spirit of alliance, Whitecap's leadership consistently focuses on forging strong partnerships, as can be seen by the numerous examples already listed in this paper, with First Nations communities, neighbouring communities, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Before working with a partner, the due diligence process must conclude that there is an alignment with Whitecap goals and values. In determining their negotiating position, the leadership team identifies how outcomes can be achieved so that all parties end up in a win-win position. The question “what do you need to see out of this?” is often asked in preliminary discussions.

Just before the casino project was going to open, there was a problem. Chief Darcy recalls,

We had a secondary road from Saskatoon to Whitecap with no shoulders and lots of curves, but we knew that if we went to the provincial government to ask for [a] highway, we wouldn't get it. I told the team that we had to look at the bigger picture and talk about a tourism corridor going from Saskatoon to Lake Diefenbaker. We got the city of Saskatoon on board, with four rural municipalities, two towns, and our First Nation signing an MOU for a tourism corridor. It was hard for the province to say no to such a collaboration.

The first phase of the new highway from Saskatoon to Whitecap cost \$10 million, but the province said that they couldn't provide the funds until April 1. I offered bridge financing until April 1. Within three weeks, I had three letters from financial institutions, and lo and behold, the province found the money. The five phases cost around \$43 million, and Whitecap managed three of those phases. It was the first time in the history of the province that a First Nation actually managed a highway project. All our partners wanted to brand the tourism corridor “Chief Whitecap Trail”. This was the first time in [the] history of the province that a highway was named after a chief.

CEO Darrell adds that politicians want to see benefits for the community and the region or a reduction in dependency on government funding. In any event, whether it is politicians, corporate partners, or banks, it is important to identify the creative thinker and champion who can see a way forward beyond existing rules or policies.

Employment opportunities have exploded, with 700 jobs created so far in a community of 600 with 300 to 350 members who are seeking work. The unemployment rate hovers around 5–8%. As Don Redbear, a Whitecap member, proudly notes,

Every member has an equal opportunity for employment. We are a tight-knit community and want the same things for our kids. I had worked on pipelines and in construction outside of Whitecap. I was hired for the construction of the resort, and then I applied for “Manager of Maintenance” and got the job four years ago. It is great to work in the community and not miss out on family gatherings. My kids see me going to work each day, and that work ethic is being passed on.

The future looks bright for further Whitecap Dakota First Nation partnerships. They have recently entered into an MOU with two First Nations in Alberta. Chief Darcy shares, “We have made an economic alliance with T’suu Tina Nation and Enoch First Nation in Alberta. We all have casinos on our lands, conference centres and hotels, spas, and golf courses. We have lots in common, so we want to build some synergies and capitalize on our strengths — like our purchasing power.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Whitecap has not let its small size, lack of resources, history, or the common restrictive legislative barriers facing Indigenous leadership restrict its plans to prosper its members and achieve self-governing authority over their affairs. Their high level of engagement with community members in all areas that affect the community is part of the solid foundation that has been a major catalyst underlying their extraordinary success story. A strong, stable leadership team, a clear vision, and goals documented and honoured in comprehensive strategic plans are also essential to their achievements. Whitecap has acted as a trailblazer in numerous situations, benefitting all those they interact with because of their win-win negotiating strategy and the creative abilities of the leadership to forge new paths where others might stop at seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Whitecap’s adverse conditions that Chief Darcy faced at the beginning of his career as a leader might have posed an enduring handicap. However, the community achieved financial stability and leveraged limited resources through highly effective partnerships. These partnerships included collaborating with other First Nations on the golf course and casino projects; forming an alliance with the provincial government to access federal infrastructure funding previously unavailable to First Nations for the hotel project, which led to a policy change granting other First Nations access to the same funding; and building relationships with surrounding communities in lobbying the provincial government for an improved highway corridor catering to tourists. The list of firsts achieved by Whitecap is long.

Their citizens enjoy a standard and quality of living that is noteworthy amongst Indigenous communities in Canada. Employment opportunities abound, which is reflected in the dramatic drop from 70% unemployment in 1993 to 5–8% in 2022. Many services, including

education, health, and safety, are but a few of the benefits enjoyed by the whole community, from youngsters to elders.

At a time when the conversation is focused on the many challenges, it is most encouraging to showcase Whitecap's achievements in surmounting those challenges. They host many visitors from Indigenous communities wanting to learn more about their story and hope that can help make a difference.

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