

Mikmaw Corporation From Nova Scotia Captures National Business Award at Cando Conference

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Bayside Development
Corporation's Rose Paul

Rose Paul has a lot of perseverance. A year into her position as the economic development officer for the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation, Paul uncovered paperwork that would impact her work responsibilities for years to come. "It was something I actually stumbled on in storage," Paul said. The 'something' Paul discovered were meeting minutes and other documents from the provincial and federal governments about a breached agreement involving her First Nation.

Back in the early 1960s, the construction of Highway 104 divided Paqtnkek in half. As a result, the southern portion of the First Nation was not developed since it was not easily accessible. Paul was keen to change that. "I'd seen their wrongdoing on my community," Paul said of government officials who had initially downplayed the developmental impacts on Paqtnkek but then fought against any construction on the south side. "I wanted to rectify it." Despite numerous obstacles, including funding

problems and layers of bureaucracy, Paul never gave up her hope of seeing businesses thriving on the south side of her First Nation. She kept plugging away to make her dream a reality, even as various chiefs and council members came and went over the years. “It was a very long process, very difficult and a lot of barriers we had to go through,” she said. But it was a necessary process, and ultimately, Paul’s persistence led to the development of a highway interchange and connector roads funded by the federal and provincial governments. The highway interchange opened in 2019, along with the Bayside Development Corporation, which is comprised of the Bayside Travel Centre’s businesses—yet another development credited to Paul.

As a result, people are no longer just driving through Paqtnkek. Ideally located just 20 minutes from the town of Antigonish and 25 minutes from Cape Breton, the Bayside site attracts visitors from around the world for its first-class cultural, historical, and recreational experiences. “It’s known as the destination to be,” Paul said. “The project is a very victorious moment for us.” The site includes By the Bay (a tourism and gift centre) and the first provincially sanctioned Nova Scotia liquor store in a Mi’kmaq community. And that’s not all. The first phase of the 12-acre site’s development also included the construction of a Husky diesel cardlock, an Esso gas station, a convenience store, a Tim Hortons, and a Mary Brown’s restaurant. Having various businesses start welcoming customers at the Bayside Development Corporation was a pleasant sight for Paul and others. “It was a journey to achieve such a milestone for a community,” she said.

Indeed, the Bayside Development Corporation has garnered national recognition. It captured the Indigenous Private Sector Business Award at the 2023 Cando Conference, held in Membertou, Nova Scotia. Cando is the national organization that promotes economic development in Indigenous communities across the country, and Paul was ecstatic when her First Nation garnered this prestigious accolade: “I was very emotional and proud to see how far we have come. It was deeply heartfelt to know we made it.” Paul, however, believes she should not be the only one receiving credit. “I had a strong team,” she explains. “The community trusted me. And the leadership trusted me to lead.” That’s why Paul was pleased to have various Paqtnkek members join her when she accepted the Cando award. “Everything was so moving bringing the team together on stage,” she said. “It gave us more empowerment and more motivation.”

The Bayside Development Corporation was one of the three major award winners at the Cando Conference. The other finalist in its category was IRP Consulting, a Whitehorse-based company owned by Davida Wood and Tosh Southwick, two Indigenous women. Meanwhile, James Stevens of Millbrook First Nation in Nova Scotia was chosen as the Economic Developer of the Year, while Norway House Cree Nation, located in Manitoba, was chosen as the Indigenous Community of the Year. Paul said attending the Cando Conference was a positive experience—and not just because of the accolades for the Bayside Development Corporation. “There [were] a lot of connections made, even between the winners,” she said. Paul said Paqtnkek and Norway House Cree Nation officials are keen to collaborate on ventures in the future. “We’re talking to them to see what we can do together,” she said. “Those connections were made at the Cando Conference.”

Paul continues to lead the Corporation, and she's hoping it won't be long before she can discuss additional new businesses that have opened up in her First Nation. Initiatives currently being explored in her community include battery storage, two rapid EVP charging stations, and a microgrid project to support net-zero initiatives with solar development. Paul has additionally acted as the CEO of Paqtnkek's economic development arm and the CEO of the Bayside Development Corporation since their inception in 2016 and 2019, respectively. "We've been developing a lot of new ways I guess to undo wrongdoings in the past and just getting back into driving our economic development vehicle," Paul said. "So, we've been doing a lot of planning around the Fiscal Management Act and taking our resources and utilizing them."

Part of Paul's task of addressing past wrongdoings involves articulating and applying her Nation's traditional principles to new economic policies and initiatives. Paqtnkek Nation follows eight foundational principles: Creation, Wisdom, Courage, Healing, Commitment to the Seven Generations, Responsibility, The Way We Are, and Sustaining Ourselves. These elements are all considered sacred gifts. As Paul explains,

They teach us about the delicate balance of life, the harmony that must be maintained, and the responsibilities we hold as stewards of these precious resources. In every economic initiative we undertake, we strive to honour these gifts, ensuring that our present actions nurture and preserve their sanctity for the generations yet to grace this world. This philosophy of living in harmony with and nurturing these fundamental elements of life is the bedrock upon which we build our economic future.

Paul also notes that Mi'kmaw customs have "matured through centuries of oral storytelling, a cherished practice where every narrative shared is a strand in the tapestry of our collective identity. They hold the laughter and tears of our ancestors, their trials and triumphs, and through them we celebrate our resilience, our culture, and our connection to this land, long before the first European footprints marked our soils." And when it comes time to implement economic policies and initiatives, her Nation's principles are purposely included: "We are not only revitalizing our own community but also offering a model of development that is holistic, just, and deeply respectful of the intricate web of life. This is the path we walk as Mi'kmaw, as stewards of our land, and as global citizens in an ever-changing world."

Paul also said the past decade has brought widespread awareness to the importance of reconciliation. "For me and my Nation, governance and economic reconciliation are not static concepts, but a reawakening of our traditional laws," Paul said. "Our customs are not simply a set of rules. They are a living testament to the process of reconciliation, evolving from shared examples and models of conduct. Rooted in oral traditions, they reflect our daily life, encapsulating our shared experiences of hardship and joy. They are a celebration of our heritage, expressive in its nature, and deeply performative." But she added economic reconciliation is not something that can be achieved by just one party. "It is a collaborative voyage that beckons all who reside in and cherish this land to join hands in solidarity," she said. "This journey calls for more than mere acknowledgment. It demands active participation, a unification of efforts and aspirations. It is a path that

requires courage to confront past injustices, wisdom to navigate through complexities, and a shared commitment to forge a future rooted in mutual respect and prosperity.”

Finally, Paul notes that it is important to think beyond the present. “The world in which we engage economically is not a series of isolated islands but a vast interconnected ecosystem,” she said. “Every decision we make, every partnership we form, and every project we embark upon is evaluated through the lens of this deep interconnectedness. Our economic practices are not just about ensuring the financial well-being of our people today. They are about maintaining ecological sanctity and ensuring the prosperity of those yet to walk this earth.”