

Mattagami First Nation **DRUM**



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WORDS FROM THE CHIEF



**Chief Chad
Boissoneau
Mattagami
First Nation**

On our way into 2022 I realize how much I have to be grateful for. We have a newly elected Council in place with some familiar returning faces and some new ones. Meegwetch for all those who voted for me once again as your Chief and I will do my best to continue working for all of our members in developing Mattagami First Nation as a progressive, safe, secure and prosperous community.

I find it so satisfying and rewarding to see many of our young people getting their education and coming back

I give thanks to all of our Council members, Elders, staff and members for working together in getting our First Nation through the past two years of this challenging Covid19 pandemic. The challenges were great as we dealt with various waves of this virus and emotions ran high, there were differences of opinion and choice and our leadership, health professionals and staff had to stay strong and united to ensure everyone was safe during these hard times. I am proud to say that all of our efforts contributed to the fact that

Mattagami First Nation has become a prime example of how to deal with such a serious pandemic. Other First Nations have congratulated us on our success in keeping our people safe and provided with the best possible services even in the middle of this crisis.

It looks like we are beginning to move into a return to a more normal life now that so many people are vaccinated and I am confident we will be opening up more and more as a society in the next few months. I am so proud that we were there for each other and that we made sure our Elders, the vulnerable in our population and our children were well cared for and supported at even the darkest hours in dealing with this historic and devastating Covid19 Pandemic.

There are currently many projects being developed and one close to my heart has to do with the Flood Mapping Project. I feel it is important to update our members and get the word out that we've done a flood mapping exercise that determines the exact amount of water being stored on our land base and has provided us with up to date information on the issue of erosion of our lands. We have always understood over the years that our lands were being eroded but we did not have any idea how much until this mapping project was done.

I'm happy to see our education services moving ahead with the initial development of a secondary school right here in our community. At this point we have the Mary Jane Memorial elementary school and now the Keewaytinook Internet High School (KiHS) which provides our young people with the best possible access to education in their home community.

Moving forward I find it so satisfying and rewarding to see many of our young people getting their education and coming back to work in positions here at Mattagami First Nation and employed with one of the many partnerships and businesses we are involved in. It is good

to see our people in positions these days and becoming the managers, administrators and movers and shakers as it has been far too long that we did not have those opportunities in the past. We are fortunate also to still have many of our Elders that we can turn to for guidance and in fact I am surprised sometimes when I pause to realize that many of my family members, friends and neighbours I grew up with are at the point where we are becoming the Elders.

We are reaping the rewards of our investments and we are in a position where we can move ahead with projects

We are making great strides in becoming self sufficient as a community and through our efforts we are now in the position where our members who are looking for employment with the resource developments we are involved in can be gainfully employed. We are reaping the rewards of our investments and we are in a position where we can move ahead with projects and initiatives that serve our members in terms of services and development. We are encouraging our off reserve members to come home and with that in mind we are planning for expansion of the First Nation through the Additions To Reserve (ATR) process over the near future. We will keep the community informed as we progress with this new development.

We are meeting all of the challenges experienced over the last couple of years and we are looking forward to the future.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

We are well underway in this new year and we are all looking forward to moving out of this pandemic with care and caution. I am very proud of all our staff, our health team and educators for meeting the challenges that we have had to deal with as a result of more than two years of this difficult Covid19 pandemic. We can all call ourselves survivors of this historic challenge and know that we have been good to each other, open and understanding and supportive for the most part through all of this.

We have a great leadership team and staff that work well together and provide us with a promise of continued progress

We have had to deal with this pandemic as individuals, with our families, friends and workmates through the ups and downs over the past two years. It has been hard on all of us in terms of keeping ourselves, families and friends and neighbours safe. It has affected our

Front Cover

photo by Devin Naveau

Mattagami First Nation residential school survivors, family, friends and representatives took part in a community walk to commemorate Orange Shirt Day, a statutory national holiday to recognize the legacy of the Indian Residential School system.

mental health and physical health while presenting huge challenges for our children, grandchildren and Elders. One thing for sure is that Mattagami First Nation has done a remarkable job in keeping its members safe, providing care and support and continuing through the efforts of Chief and Council and all staff in maintaining services throughout this difficult time.

All the signs are pointing towards some resolution of this pandemic as we move forward and things are opening up to a more normal life for all of us. Congratulations to our Chief Chad Boissoneau on his re-election and to all Councillors who have been re-elected and those who are new this year. We have a great leadership team and staff that work well together and provide us with a promise of continued progress and prosperity as we move ahead. Spring is just around the corner and better days ahead.

I am excited at the continued progress of our involvement in a governance policy development. We have been working with our leadership and the expertise and guidance of individuals like Nicole Richmond, a recognized Indigenous governance trainer and educator. This initiative will result in an improved means of operation in governance. This will have a positive impact on leadership and in fact all of us in terms of how we function. We will end up with a set of guidelines for our leadership and community that will assist us in dealing with all kinds of challenges heading into the future. The result will hopefully be a better process in terms of how we are connected and work together and should provide a more open, transparent, efficient and responsive form of governance for Mattagami First Nation.

It is great to see our young people graduating and returning to our community to be employed in positions where they are bringing their



Juanita Luke
Executive Director

energy and knowledge to assist us as we move forward. It is also gratifying to see so many of our people employed in the various resource development initiatives we are involved in.

We have shown all along that we can always resolve the most challenging situations by working together

We have so much to be thankful for as we exit from the past two years of pandemic challenges and we look about us and realize just how lucky we are to have a safe, well run, well serviced community.

We have everything we need to provide a wonderful future for our children and grandchildren and the generations to come. As part of being grateful for all that we have we also must remember that we need to keep being kind and supportive of each other. We have shown all along that we can always resolve the most challenging situations by working together. Our Elders have cleared this path for us and continue to remind us of the importance of working for the greater good of all of us in Mattagami First Nation.

Introducing New Council

Mattagami First Nation held Chief and Council elections on October 9, 2021. The timing of this election had been delayed from

April 2021 caused by restrictions from the Covid19 Pandemic.

Chief Chad Boissoneau was re-elected to leadership position for

another term.

Other candidates for Chief were Jennifer Constant, Deanna Naveau, Walter Naveau and Morris Wheesk.



**Joyce Constant,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Joyce Constant has rejoined Council and brings with her a wealth of knowledge and experience. Since the mid 1990s, she has been elected multiple times on Council and was Chief of the community

for several terms.

She has a deep connection to her home community and she has seen Mattagami First Nation grow and develop from its early beginnings. As a child, she grew up in the newly established Mattagami First Nation which was settled in the early 1950s after it had been moved from their old lands on the other side of Mattagami Lake. It was a time when the community was filled with more traditional activity and life revolved around hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering food from the land.

Councillor Constant has a rich family history of community leadership. Her grandfather Andrew Luke was the first re-

cognized Chief of Mattagami FN during the signing of Treaty 9 in 1906. Her brother Gerald Luke and their father Alec Luke have been Chief of the community in the past and her daughter Jennifer Constant is the longest serving Councillor for their First Nation.

Although she spent part of her life away from her home, in the early 1990s she returned with her partner the late Arthur Constant to raise her children and become involved in various positions and capacities to represent her community over the years including: training and employment programs, education, health care and social services. Her four children include Ron, Chris, Jennifer and Arthur Jr.



**Wendy DeBastos,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Wendy DeBastos was elected to her third term on Council after being elected in 2017 and 2019.

"I'm grateful to everyone that supported me in being on council. It means a lot to me to know that I have the trust of my community to take on this position and I am honoured to represent our First Nation again,"

said Councillor DeBastos.

She has completed several training programs over the years to become better capable of representing her community including the Certified Indigenous Leadership (CIL) program by the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association (AFOA) of Canada. She also attended a training program with the National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association (NATOA). Councillor DeBastos explained that this training will serve her greatly in her participation in the Mattagami First Nation Community Development Trust Committee.

"It's important for me to stay informed and find as much help and resources as I can to represent my community in the best way possible. This training gives me the reassurance that I am on the right track and it gives me a better understanding of my responsibil-

ity in leadership," said Councillor DeBastos.

Language, culture and traditions are also an important part of her life. She is currently enrolled in an Ojibway language class offered by Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN).

She is looking forward to the continued expansion and growth of the community. Presently she is involved with the First Nation working on an Addition To Reserve (ATR) process to expand the land base of the community to accommodate future growth.

She is also involved with her family business at DeBastos and Sons Limited, a large scale logging contracting company based in Timmins. The company has over 30 years of experiences in servicing wood mills across Northern Ontario. She also manages her own separate forestry business known as Amik Logging.



**Devin Naveau,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Devin Naveau has been elected to his second term as Councillor for the community.

Councillor Naveau is the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Mattagami Aki Limited Partnership (Aki LP Inc.), a business entity that is owned and operated by the First Na-

tion to create business opportunities with the IAMGOLD Cote Gold Project, along with other ventures within the Treaty 9 territory. He is also a Director of the Board of governors for Aki General Partnership (Aki GP Inc). He is now the Council representative for the Mattagami First Nation Housing Committee. He is a very creative person and a gifted photographer that has documented much activity in the community.

He is grateful to be working for his community.

"Miigwetch (thank you) to Mattagami FN for the overwhelming support in this year's election. I would like to acknowledge the previous elected council for all their hard work and also for mentoring me. I've learned a lot from our leadership over the

past term and their help has allowed me to grow to become the person I am today. I look forward to working with everyone on this new term of leadership," said Councillor Naveau.

He is an active member of the community who enjoys working with others to develop their First Nation. He is a volunteer firefighter and he is also involved in various other groups to promote or support projects for youth, governance and cultural programs.

"I'm very happy to be involved with my community. There has been lots of progress over the years and looking back over the past decade, we have come a long way, a more positive way. There is employment, there are opportunities and there are many possibilities for the future," said Councillor Naveau.

For Mattagami First Nation



**Dereck McKay,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Dereck McKay has been elected to his second term as Council member. He previously held the role for one term in 2007.

"I want to thank the community and everyone that gave me their vote of support," said Councillor McKay.

He is the Education Support Director with the responsibility of overseeing pro-

gramming and services for Mattagami First Nation students in secondary school and post secondary school.

Councillor Dereck has been involved in local education since completing his secondary schooling. After graduating from Timmins High and Vocational School in 2001, he worked at the Mary Jane Memorial school in the community as a tutor for over ten years. He then moved on to the position under the First Nation Student Success program from 2012 to 2019. He then took on his current position starting in 2019.

Councillor McKay is hopeful to see the future growth of the community in the coming years.

"There are many opportunities coming in the next few years so we will need to grow our community and build more in-

frastructure to accommodate that growth. There are many new job openings in resource development and that will allow more of our members to build homes here and that will mean we will need to add new facilities and infrastructure to support everyone and all the activity that will be created," said Councillor McKay.

He added that he is grateful to have the guidance and support of local Elders in the development of their community.

"Our Elders have led our people for a long time and they know and understand our history and where we come from. It is important for us to have their feedback and support in everything we do," said Councillor McKay.

He and his wife Leah have a 14 year old daughter Mariah and an eleven year old son Brody.



**Betty Naveau,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Betty Naveau was elected for the first time to Council.

Since 2017, she has been involved in the community Choose Life Project as well as being a volunteer firefighter for the First Nation. Councillor Naveau is an advocate in the community who has participated in numerous activities on social and environmental issues. She also fol-

lows many local cultural traditions and she has become a knowledge keeper in the community of customs, natural medicines and teachings.

"I'm really grateful to the nominators who asked me to run and for the people who gave me their support. I am looking forward to working for my community and representing everyone in an open and transparent way," said Councillor Naveau.

She is hopeful for continued positive change especially with youth through the development of the Jordan's Principle, a legal requirement that was established in order to ensure proper and equitable services and supports for Indigenous children.

"I've always directed everything I did towards helping others, especially our youth who are our future. It is good to know that we are all working towards

giving more opportunities to our future generations," said Councillor Naveau.

She has a diverse background that has supported much of her work over the years. Naveau has always been involved in assisting Elders in the community. She graduated from a Native Community Healing and Wellness Worker program as well as a Graphic Design and Professional Photography program. Over the years, she has worked in various positions with several Indigenous organizations including Wabun Tribal Council, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and Misiway Health Centre.

"I've gathered lots of experience and knowledge from many areas over the years but nothing brings me more pride and joy than to work and advocate directly for my own home community," said Councillor Naveau.



**Kourtney Baulne,
First Nation
Councillor**

Councillor Kourtney Baulne was elected to her first term as Councillor.

"This is the first time I've been directly involved in our Council and I am learning a lot. I am grateful for the honour to serve our community. I want to help our community and do my best to represent everyone. I was happily sur-

prised to join council after having so much support and encouragement from others," said Councillor Baulne.

She holds the portfolio for language and culture on council and she is looking forward to promoting and advocating for programming and projects in these areas. Currently, she also holds the position of Administrative Assistant Receptionist at the First Nation administration office.

She is a dynamic person who has participated in various areas of training and enjoys staying connected to her traditional culture. She has taken training as a Helicopter Pilot and in mining technology. Her interests have also led her to modelling where she worked with an Indigenous professional photographer and fashion designer from Wikwemikong

First Nation. As a traditional person, she follows the teachings and training of many Indigenous leaders and Elders and in a ceremony received her traditional name of Green Thunderbird Woman.

Councillor Baulne is also passionate about developing programming and services for those coping with trauma, addictions or mental health issues. She explained that it is important to provide after care in the community and create safe spaces for those individuals that require long term care and support.

She and her fiancé Channing Graham have a son Delsin. They enjoy being on the land and in spending time together with family and friends on her late father Ron Jr. Baulne's traditional trapping grounds near the community.

Flood Mapping Project Underway

Mattagami First Nation has developed its own consultancy initiative to create a Flood Mapping project. The community has entered into a contract with the KGS group and created M'hiigan Limited Partnership (MLP). Mattagami First Nation is the majority owner and will oversee the flood mapping project that is being managed by Iulian Radu, a professional engineer with extensive experience in renewable energy projects and partnered in M'hiigan. Radu serves as project manager in working at all levels with experts in this field.

Chief and council are developing this flood mapping as over many years Mattagami Lake, where Mattagami First Nation is located has experienced changes in water levels that have affected the shoreline causing flood and erosion issues that impact land utilization by the community. As a growing community interested in its long-term viability, flood risk planning and mitigation is an important component of overall infrastructure planning. This work is important to establish what the reality is in terms of flood hazard limits and to develop flood mitigation options to plan for the future.

"I am very happy with this development of the flood mapping project as we have taken over the traditional role of the consultant. In fact we have the major ownership in a company called M'hiigan that we formed with a very experienced professional engineer with a lot of experience in this area. Iulian Radu who is the

project manager and the consultancy of KGS will allow us to establish all of the data on flooding and erosion on our lands," explained Chief Chad Boissoneau.

He pointed out that community consultations have been ongoing throughout the process which started in the fall of 2021. Elders and members input has been a key component of this development.

"This is a great project for everyone concerned as it has resulted in Mattagami First Nation owning and overseeing this project through M'hiigan LP. I would like to thank Chief and Council, staff, Elders and members of the community for providing direction and support on this initiative," commented Radu.

Since the construction of the Mattagami Lake Dam in 1921, Mattagami FN has experienced increased flooding in areas of the Reserve Lands around Mattagami Lake. This flooding has had a negative impact on many aspects of the reserve lands and the community's way of life. As a result, it is important to the community that the extent of this flooding is quantified and documented on floodplain maps.

These maps can also be used to support future decision making, including infrastructure planning, land use planning, emergency management, and adapting to any future impacts of climate change.

In addition to the flooding concerns, shoreline erosion is of substantial concern to the community. Over the years, the

shoreline has eroded considerably, resulting in a loss of reserve land, negatively impacting both private residences and public spaces, such as the graveyard and the public beaches. Without mitigation, erosion is expected to continue. As a result, it is paramount that critical infrastructure and sites of importance that are at risk of erosion are identified and protected in order to maintain the livelihood of the community and preserve spiritual / heritage sites.

Other concerns for the community deal with fish spawning as it has been observed that the winter dropping levels of the lake can leave spawning beds potentially dry during early spring, resulting in a reduction of fish spawning. Also a concern is the fish food supply where it has been observed that ongoing erosion around the lake has destroyed food beds for fish, resulting in a decline in fish population. In addition, the mapping project will consider flood risk assessment and mitigation planning to identify and assess flood and erosion hazards and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Radu pointed out that a lot of expertise goes into working with experts to provide a comprehensive flood mapping project result so that the community is best prepared for any future challenges.

Chief Boissoneau gave thanks to the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) for their support in moving the project ahead.



PHOTO BY DEVIN NAVEAU

ENJOYING TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES ON THE LAND AND WATER ARE MATTAGAMI FN YOUTH FROM L-R: WYATT MCKAY, DION BOISSONEAU, BEESYM COUCHIE, BRODY MCKAY, VINCENT BOISSONEAU AND DANE BOISSONEAU

Staff Feature Janet McKay

Janet McKay is the Jordan's Principal Worker for Mattagami First Nation. She started her position, which is part of the Mattagami FN Health Department, in April 2021.

Her main role is in working with families and care givers to support children aged from birth to 18 years of age to assist them in their needs in health care, social development and education. This assistance includes providing supports for families, parents, grandparents and caregivers of children in order to ultimately provide support for First Nation children.

"I am very happy to be in a position to directly help our families and especially the children. I do my best to find the help that they need and at the end of the day, it feels good to advocate for our youth. Our children have a voice and it is our job to make sure that they are heard," said McKay.

According to the Assembly of First Nations - "Jordan's Principle is a legal requirement resulting from the Orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) and is not a policy or program. It is a child-first principle that aims to eliminate service inequities and delays for First Nations children. Jordan's Principle states that any public service ordinarily available to all other children must be made available to First Nations children without delay or denial."

Jordan's Principle is named in honour of Jordan River Anderson, a young First Nations boy from Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. He spent his entire life in hospital while caught in a jurisdictional dispute between the governments of Canada and Manitoba, which both refused to pay for the in-home medical care necessary for Jordan to live in his home and community. Jordan's Principle was put in place by Justin Trudeau's Liberal government.

McKay's role is to act as a representative to identify any youth that is in need in the community and work with families and caregivers to find solutions to provide the required supports and care to ensure the well being of the child. She initiates her advocacy when families are referred to her through the First Nation administration office, the education office, the health office, from community members or directly from the families involved. When it is possible, McKay meets directly with family members and caregivers in meetings to discuss their needs. However, throughout the



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY JANET MCKAY

JANET MCKAY AND HER FAMILY FROM L-R ARE: HER SON DARWYN, JANET, HER HUSBAND DARRYL AND THEIR SONS BRENNAN AND DAMIAN.

COVID19 pandemic, she has had to conduct much of her consultation work remotely and through carefully planned meetings.

"Most community members do not exactly know or understand how the Jordan's Principle works so it is my job to connect with these families and guide them through the available services and help them find the supports they need for their children. These supports can come in many forms and are dependent on the needs of the child in health care, social programs or in education," said McKay.

She explained that part of the process of applying for support is in establishing the principle of substantive equality, which is defined by government of Canada documentation as "giving extra help when it is needed, so that First Nation children have an equal chance to thrive as other children in Canada". This definition also includes the consideration of the cultural, social and economic needs and circumstances of First Nations children.

McKay explained that the work she does in the community also includes developing projects and programs that could benefit a group of children or even all youth in the community depending on the program or service that is needed.

"In order to fill the many needs and gaps in services that our youth need in so many areas, I do my best to find solutions to help those in need while also

helping other youth if we can. Sometimes there are programs that are only available outside the community, so instead of sending youth away we figure out how to bring the service to the Mattagami First Nation. Then when the service or program is brought here, we can include other youth to benefit. This way, we can help children in need while also assisting other youth as well. It's also important for us to find solutions that allow our youth to stay in their home community as much as possible," said McKay.

Originally from Garden River First Nation, McKay is married to Darryl McKay and they have three sons Damian, Darwyn and Brennan.

She previously was employed at Wabun Tribal Council in Timmins in their Wabun Training and Employment Services Program. Over many years she has worked in numerous positions with First Nations organizations like Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) and tribal councils in northern Ontario.

"In all, I've always enjoyed working for our First Nation people to help others in our communities. I've been involved in helping adults in training and employment and now I am working to help youth directly. I'm happy to say that my calling in life is to advocate for others because that has always been the role I have had in most of the work I've done in my life," said McKay.

Governance Training Held

Mattagami First Nation Chief and Council took part in a two day Governance Training program on November 5 and 6, 2021 led by Nicole Richmond, an Anishinaabe lawyer from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg (Pic River) First Nation and recognized academic in Indigenous governance training and education.

The two day program was aimed at providing training for leadership in governance practices specifically for First Nations from an Indigenous perspective. This training also included practical training in the legal responsibilities of elected Chief and Councillors and how their roles and responsibilities can reflect the values, traditions and customs of their traditional culture.

“I really enjoy working with our Anishinaabe people. The Mattagami Chief and Council were very welcoming and it was great to see their mix of enthusiasm from their young Councillors who are full of new ideas and the experience of their older Councillors and Chief who have been there for many years. This was an opportunity for everyone to share their ideas and as a facilitator, my role was to bring the group closer together, to encourage their direction and offer suggestions on how to achieve their goals as leaders in the community,” said Richmond.

Councillor Devin Naveau who was elected to his second term on Council found the governance training was a good way to inform and prepare their newly elected leadership for the next two years.

“The governance training was a way for us to plan for the next two years. Instead of trying to figure out what we should do over the next while, we make plans now and inform everyone on the roles and responsibilities,” said Naveau.

The governance training allowed Chief and Council to develop plans that had already been started on administration policies and procedures.

“I came prepared for the training session with draft documentation that we could follow but it was amazing to see that the community leadership had already done much of the work in this area. They just needed a forum and an event like this to talk through their ideas and

have that bit of guidance to create a plan that was relevant to their needs,” said Richmond.

Chief Chad Boissoneau pointed out that he and his council had been working on governance development for some time and that there is an interest in continuing on this path.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY NICOLE RICHMOND

NICOLE RICHMOND, AN ANISHINABE LAWYER FROM BIIGTIGONG NISHNAABEG (PIC RIVER) FIRST NATION.

“Our council has been involved in governance development with our Executive Director Juanita Luke and the contribution that Nicole made in meeting with us for this training program was very helpful. We hope to proceed with development in this area as it benefits Chief and Council and all of our members,” said Chief Boissoneau.

Chief and Council then created a plan to implement a portfolio system that would divide segments of responsibilities to areas of concern that are important to the community such as youth, economic development, governance and social issues.

“Much of everything leadership required was already there and they just needed a plan of action to make it possible. We were able to create

planning that is measurable, timed and articulated to build a system that can measure their progress on a regular basis for example every three or six months. This will help them move forward in a strategic way. I enjoy supporting our First Nation leaders because much of the time they already have great ideas for what they want to accomplish and they just need an event like this to help get things moving forward and to achieve strategic results,” said Richmond.

First time councillors also found the training very helpful and informative for those without prior experience in First Nation leadership.

“This is my first time elected to Council and everything is new to me. We’ve never had this kind of training before and it was a good experience. This governance training was really great for me because I know now what to expect and what is expected of me,” commented Councillor Kourtney Baulne.

Richmond is a legal professional who also provides services centered on training and empowering First Nation leaders and individuals with an emphasis on traditional teachings and cultural understanding. She has provided training and education as in teaching on Indigenous governance at Ryerson University in Toronto and has assisted many First Nation communities and organizations.

“This type of training will lead to more First Nation government efficiency. Once the participants understand clearly what their roles are, they will know the limits of their decision making powers which will lead to better choices in terms of planning and development. This makes for better interaction, consultation and communication with community members. That provides for more transparency and in the end a better democracy,” explained Richmond.

Sheldon Miles Joins Public Works

Sheldon Miles is the newest Public Works Employee for Mattagami First Nation. He started his new position in November 2021.

The 28 year old is originally from Jamaica and although he has had to do a lot of adjusting to life in northern Ontario, he is very happy to be living and working in the community.

“I’m just starting out and I’m learning everything I can to do as much as I can to help everyone. It’s a lot of learning at this point but I am enjoying the work with everyone and I enjoy contributing to our community,” said Miles.

His primary duties include assisting the Public Works crew in dealing with day to day maintenance issues in the Mattagami First Nation. Miles is involved in the maintenance and repair of public works vehicles, machinery and equipment. This work also includes the regular maintenance of community buildings including the First Nation administration office, the fire hall, the Odamino Recreation Centre and the Police Station. He is involved in daily monitoring of all public buildings to make them ac-

cessible and ready for the public.

He has been learning a lot in his day to day to work that involves many regular activities as well as emergency events including mechanical break downs and utility services. Recently during the coldest months of the winter when temperatures dropped to minus 20 and 30 degrees, Miles was active in helping with several emergency events due to the cold which mainly involved freezing water pipes in community homes. He was part of the work crew tasked with clearing snow and ice, accessing crawl spaces, and carefully heating and thawing frozen intake and drainage water lines.

“My workplace helped me out with getting proper weather gear and I’ve been learning a lot about working and staying safe in the freezing sub temperatures. On Christmas eve I was under a crawl space with our crew thawing out water lines and it was a big job and at the same time knowing that we are helping a community member having an emergency. It is exciting work and I really like working with our team and I find it very rewarding to be able to directly help people,” said Miles.

He moved to Canada 12 years ago and lived in Toronto in Ajax for eight years where he worked in auto detailing for a car dealership. He left the city to make the move north to be closer to his partner Sydney Constant in Mattagami First Nation.

“It feels good to be here and I find there are many similarities to Jamaican culture. Everyone is focused on family and being together as much as possible and I’ve never felt alone in the community as everyone treats me like family. The help and friendship I’ve received from family, friends and neighbours here in Mattagami First Nation has really made it much easier to adapt to the move from the south to an Indigenous community here in the north,” explained Miles.

He is an avid cook and when he first moved to the community, he



Sheldon Miles,
Public Works
Department

regularly sold specialty Jamaican meals which were popular in the community.

He is grateful to many people in the community especially to Sydney’s family, and most importantly her parents Chris and Joanne who made the adjustments to his new life a wonderful adventure.

“I’m also very thankful to Curtis Fowler, Dorothy Naveau and Juanita Luke at the band office for all the help and professional courtesy they’ve shown me in getting this new position in the community,” said Miles.

On November 20, 2021 Miles received his Canadian citizenship and due to the Covid19 restrictions had to stay in the community instead of attending an official ceremony at a government office.

“We held a small ceremony at Chris and Joanne’s place and it was really one of the greatest feelings for me to receive my citizenship and celebrate this with the original people of this land. They gave me an eagle feather for the occasion and it was a surreal moment to be around such special people during a major event in my life. I am truly grateful,” commented Miles.

His family of brothers and sisters still live in Jamaica including his mother. His father and older brother are in Canada.

“I want to do the best I can in everything I am tasked with to set an example for my brothers and sisters. I am especially grateful to my mother who is the biggest supporter in my life. I miss her so much but I know that she is very proud and happy of my accomplishments here in Canada,” said Miles.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY SHELDON MILES
SHELDON MILES WITH A BIG CATCH WHILE
FISHING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AT
MATTAGAMI LAKE.

Health Director Update

Mattagami First Nation health staff, administrative representatives, community members and leadership at all levels have been working together to keep the First Nation safe, secure and informed of the ongoing developments during the Covid19 pandemic.

Eileen Boissoneau, Health Director for Mattagami First Nation Health explained that the First Nation was well prepared for dealing with emergency situations over the past several years and that during the pandemic, this planning and emergency readiness made it easier for the community to cope with this ongoing health crisis.

There has been screening, testing and contact tracing in the community to manage any new outbreaks or deal with existing infections. Community Health Nurse Christine Dobson heads much of the efforts in managing the health care protocols and processes. Boissoneau explained that it has been a team effort involving the entire health staff in order to deal with the workload involved.

“There is a lot of work involved in managing the health care and identification and tracking of clients as it relates to the Covid19 pandemic. There is a great deal of coordination that has to happen in communicating with people at all levels and in processing documentation and paper work to record all our activities and data to the relevant health services and organizations we are connected to,” said Boissoneau.

At the start of the new year, Mattagami First Nation leadership declared a lockdown of the community on the guidance and support of a Community Control Group (CCG), which consists of individuals representing each sector of the community including leadership, fire department, public works, education, policing, health and administration. The new rise of cases in January was acknowledged by the group and it was decided that a full lock down was the best way to mitigate the outbreak.

“We identified the signs of an outbreak in late December but we didn’t know the extent of it until the first week of January. That was

the time we decided it was best to head to a full lockdown to prevent any further spread in the community,” commented Boissoneau.

She explained that the CCG and First Nation leadership wanted to guard against a new outbreak to protect the vulnerable group of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated youth under the age of 12. Much of the community adult and youth population has been fully vaccinated and vaccinations for children under the age of 12 has only recently taken place.

She and her team are grateful to everyone involved in the pandemic response.

“We are thankful to the people that make up our Community Control Group, to the Chief and Council and to the people of our community for their continued support. I also want to thank all our health care team for all the work they have been doing since the start of the pandemic on so many issues and on so many fronts,” said Boissoneau.

She added that their team is also grateful for the outside support and assistance they receive from health care organizations including Wabun Health Services, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN), Indigenous Services Canada and Misiway Health Centre. Boissoneau commented that the partnership with Misiway has proven to be instrumental because in order for the community to have a full testing and assessment centre, they needed a physician on board to make it possible. Misiway provided access to a physician through their organization in order to establish the assessment centre.

Mattagami FN administration and its health care department due to past forest fire threats and nearby rail derailments has been well prepared with the development of emergency planning. A community wide Emergency Response plan had been developed and Boissoneau explained that this planning has greatly helped the community in dealing with the current pandemic.

Technology Provided To Youth

In an ongoing commitment to young people the Mattagami First Nation Health Department has provided resources for youth to help them cope with Covid19 pandemic lock downs in the community. Eileen Boissoneau, Health Director for the Mattagami First Nation Health Department explained that their staff worked with the Choose Life Program to provide all local youth in the community with new laptops to help them during their online studies.

“Throughout the pandemic, our youth have had to stay at home away from school due to the lock downs. This has meant that our young people had to take part in their schooling online using a computer or laptop. Most families have just one computer in their home and if there is more than one child, everyone has to use that one system to connect with their teacher and class which causes challenges to learning,” explained Boissoneau.

The new laptops were provided to every youth under the age of 18 and it has greatly helped them in many ways. Although Mattagami First Nation is fortunate in that it has developed local community elementary and secondary schools, students had to deal with the pandemic by learning at home online. The Mary Jane Naveau Memorial Elementary School and the secondary school students experienced lockdowns and that meant they had to stay home and access their classes online. Hence, there was great relief when the health department managed to provide new laptops for this use. The new devices have also provided a source of communication for youth as they spend more time at home.

This has also benefited adults who now have more time to use their single family computer to connect online for education, health care or to stay connected to local news and events. Boissoneau explained that most families are only able to afford a single laptop or computer for their families which affected access to education for households with multiple students. An additional supply of ten laptops were also made available to Tina Minarik, the Community Wellness Worker to loan out to any adults in the community who required them.

The new laptops have helped community members, especially youth, in accessing health care programs and services which have been more frequently made available online due to pandemic restrictions. During the pandemic it became very important to keep in touch with news and family and friends during lockdowns.

“We can’t host in person events with many people or youth like we did before the pandemic. Much of our regular old programming has come to a stand still and our health care team has had to be creative and hosted virtual events to fill that gap. It has been so important for us to stay connected with one another and our staff needs to stay in touch with members in order to establish what the needs are for our members. We need to stay connected in order to ensure the mental, physical and emotional health of our community members. We also have to continue working and maintaining all of the services that the community provides as this is important for the mental health of everyone,” explained Boissoneau.

Online High School For Mattagami FN

Mattagami First Nation is making it easier for local students to complete their secondary education in the community through the Keewatinook Internet High School (KIHS). The First Nation has purchased a new portable building to house the program to make it easier for students to complete their studies. The KIHS program provides students with an online secondary school program that can be attended at a central space in the community and led by a Teacher Mentor.

“This has been a great opportunity for our youth to allow them to complete their secondary school education in the community. We have to ensure that our youth can achieve as much of an education as possible as it will mean more opportunities for work or careers in every field. It is important that they succeed because they are the future of our community,” said Dereck McKay, Education Support Director for Mattagami First Nation.

The new portable building is set to be completed and will be ready for use in the near future. The new space will feature a large common area for students and it will include equipment and supplies such as desks, work areas, computers, internet access, a kitchen for a cooking program and washroom facilities. McKay explained that last minute work was still being conducted to finish installation of utilities and a dedicated internet connection.

Currently students are attending classes at the Mattagami FN Firehall. McKay explained that the setup is acceptable but it is disruptive for the students to be situated in an active busy working space that is not meant for an education setting. Previously, the students had attended classes on the stage of the community recreation centre but that also proved too disruptive for students attending classes.

Students are guided in their daily studies by a student mentor, Ian Vaithilingam, an Ontario certified teacher that assists individuals of all grades towards completing their programs and online education program.

McKay understands the important need to have an opportunity for youth to complete their studies in the community. He is a Mattagami FN member who was raised in the community and had to attend secondary school in Timmins for several years until his graduation in 2001.

“It’s tough to be a high school student in the community because it means an hour long trip to Timmins and an hour back again at the end of the day. The school day is a lot longer for youth and



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY KIHS

STUDYING TOGETHER AS PART OF THE KEEWAYTINOOK INTERNET HIGH SCHOOL ARE FROM L-R: KALEB NAVEAU, KEVIN HARNACK AND THEIR TEACHER MENTOR IAN VAITHILINGAM.

that can take its toll on them,” said McKay.

Students still have the option of attending high school in Timmins and continuing to use daily hour long bus services to and from the city.

McKay commented that the online high school program and the dedicated space for students to study also had several side benefits for the community. During the community lock downs for the Covid19 Pandemic that have occurred, all high school students have had to stay in the community. However, their studies were not interrupted in the First Nation. In addition, the KIHS program is also offered to mature students who want to complete their secondary education. Several older community members have taken advantage of the opportunity and have achieved their secondary school diplomas.

The new high school program in partnership with KIHS was initiated by previous Education Director Cathy Naveau in 2018 and the program has been running every year since.

The KIHS program is a well established Indigenous program that was developed over 20 years ago by the Keewatinook Okimakanak (Northern Chiefs Tribal Council) in northwestern Ontario.

Keewatinook Okimakanak is also within the representative area of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) which represents 52 First Nations in northern Ontario including Mattagami FN.

The KIHS program was created as a response to their members needs of wanting their children and youth to attend and complete their post secondary education inside their home communities. Since it’s establishment in 1999, the program provides course offerings for students from Grades 9 to 12 and it has grown to include 16 communities in northern and northwestern Ontario with Mattagami FN being the most easternmost community.

McKay commented that they are grateful for the help of Angela Batsford, Principal of KIHS who keeps him and their education staff informed and in constant communication regarding the program and its delivery.

“We are grateful of the support of many organizations including the Keewatinook Okimakanak and our own First Nation leadership for supporting this program. This also wouldn’t be possible without the participation of our youth who attend this program and the adults and community members who take part to upgrade their education,” said McKay.

Madison McKay-Nicolas Featured



Madison McKay-Nicolas
Public Works and Housing Administrative Assistant

Madison McKay-Nicolas is the new Public Works and Housing Administrative Assistant at the Mattagami First Nation administration office.

“I really enjoy working for my community and to be around so many good people at the office. It feels great to be involved in a department that is helping with the growth and expansion of our community. More homes are being built and more families are coming back and it is exciting and hopeful to directly witness so many positive changes happening in our community,” explained McKay-Nicolas.

Her role in the housing and public works department involves maintaining constant and regular communications with tenants and community members. This is a familiar role for her as she has been involved in the housing and public works department for the past two years in various temporary positions.

She assists the Public Works and Housing Administrator Dorothy Naveau and the Public Works and Housing Director Gerald Luke. Both sections of this department have seen significant growth over the past few years as the community develops and expands with new partnerships, business opportunities and employment in mining and resource development. The prospect of continued and sustained job creation has meant an increase in community members living on reserve and the possibility of more families wanting to move to their

home community from outside cities and towns. Over the past few years, as the community builds and expands with new business and economic partnerships in resource development, the First Nation has had the opportunity to develop infrastructure projects, administrative buildings, new housing developments and in renovating and expanding existing infrastructure. One of the largest growing departments for the First Nation has become its public works department which handles the community's infrastructure, maintenance and the management of utility services.

McKay-Nicolas, who graduated from Timmins High and Vocational Secondary School in 2018 is also continuing her education through her enrolment in a program with the First Nation Housing Professionals Association (FNHPA). She has also attended Cambrian College in Sudbury.

“It's important for me to keep expanding my knowledge in the work that I am doing. The FNHPA program is a great resource because it allows me to learn about housing issues from an Indigenous perspective and with First Nations in mind. It's helping me to understand the history of First Nation housing issues which in turn help me to communicate our needs to leadership and assist our people as best as I can,” said McKay-Nicolas.

The FNHPA supports housing professionals in serving their communities by providing national standards, delivering education and certification programs and facilitating communication and knowledge-sharing.

“Housing is important for any community but it is becoming very significant for our First Nation. I hope to see more of our members moving back to our community and making their homes here,” commented McKay-Nicolas.

She and her family often take part in traditional ceremonies and practices to stay connected to their culture and

heritage. Her late father Michael Nicolas, who was a good friend to many in the community, was on hand to assist in the community's annual Pow Wows. Her mother Brenda McKay-Nicolas also works alongside her brother Michael McKay-Nicolas, who is employed with the finance department of the Mattagami First Nation administration office. She also has two other siblings Sarah and Mackenzie.

“I'm thankful to everyone in the community for everything they've done for my family and I am also grateful to the Mattagami First Nation administration staff for giving me this opportunity to help our people,” said McKay-Nicolas.

At 21 years of age, McKay-Nicolas is happy to be working in her home community where she enjoys spending time with her family and friends and in keeping active in many events and gatherings held in Mattagami First Nation.



Mattagami FN Drum

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