

WILLOW CREE
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

2023
ANNUAL
REPORT



TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA: CALLS TO ACTION

Call to Action 92

ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

VISION OF THE WCDC

The Development Corporation will create wealth for the Nation through responsible and sustainable business ventures.

MISSION OF THE WCDC

The Development Corporation, honouring the Nation's values, will:

- Create the desired separation between business and politics
- Contribute to the Nation's financial sovereignty through best business practices
 - Develop and conserve resources for future generations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pg 1 Message from the Chief

Pg 8 Blackhawks Travel Centre

Pg 2 Message from CEO/President

Pg 9 Our Current Partners - BHP

Pg 3 Message from Ec. Dev. Officer

Pg 10 Our Current Partners - 2Nations Bird

Pg 4 Meet the Board Members

& GFL Environmental

Pg 5 Brand Identity

Pg 11 Our Current Partners - Various

Pg 6 Origin Story

Pg 12 Financial Information

Pg 7 Committed to our Community

Pg 13 Financial Information

• MESSAGE FROM • THE CHIEF



EDWIN ANANAS

"I am thrilled to announce that one of our biggest accomplishments this past year was the opening of the Blackhawks Gas Station on the highway between Saskatoon and Prince Albert in Duck Lake. I truly believe that it takes a nation to raise a business, and a business to raise a nation. This gas station not only serves our community but also caters to the many travelers who pass through this area every day. Moreover, it has provided meaningful employment opportunities for our community members"

As we reflect on the past year, I am pleased to share with you some exciting news about the growth and progress of the Willow Cree Development Corporation (WCDC).

Over the last decade, WCDC has been on a journey of growth and development. Through hard work, dedication, and careful planning, we have made significant strides in achieving our goals.

I am thrilled to announce that one of our biggest accomplishments this past year was the opening of the Blackhawks Gas Station on the highway between Saskatoon and Prince Albert in Duck Lake. I truly believe that it takes a nation to raise a business, and a business to raise a nation. This gas station not only serves our community but also caters to the many travelers who pass through this area every day. Moreover, it has provided meaningful employment opportunities for our community members.

However, it's important to acknowledge that building the gas station came with its fair share of challenges. We faced obstacles in finding the right partners to turn our dream into reality. Despite these challenges, we persevered and overcame them, thanks to our collective effort and determination.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the WCDC for their dedication to driving economic growth within our band. Their commitment to creating wealth and opportunities for future generations is commendable. By forging strong relationships and working tirelessly, we are setting a positive example for other First Nations communities in our province and across the country.

As we look towards the future, let us continue to work together to build a prosperous and thriving community for all. Together, we can achieve great things.

Sincerely,

Edwin Ananas
Chief of Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation

● MESSAGE FROM ● PRESIDENT & CEO



DENNIS ESPERANCE

“Partnerships established between Willow Cree Development Corporation and industry partners, create economic opportunities for our Nation and employment opportunities for our membership. It also enables us to develop capacity, learn from one another, and grow in tandem. In addition, these types of relationships are critical to advance economic reconciliation, which allows us to mutually develop long term sustainable outcomes.”

As the economic development agency for Beardy's & Okemasis Cree Nation (BOCN), Willow Cree Development Corporation (WCDC) is committed to ensure we are well positioned for the future.

As WCDC President/CEO, I am pleased to publish our first ever annual report on behalf of WCDC Board of Directors, both past and present. The strategy is a pathway to long-term success that will be economically viable for our First Nation.

Our vision is to generate wealth through the creation of responsible and sustainable business ventures and partnerships. Industry partnerships established between Willow Cree Development Corporation and industry partners, create economic opportunities for our Nation and employment opportunities for our membership. In addition, these types of relationships are critical to advance economic reconciliation, which allow us to mutually develop long term sustainable outcomes. Through the retention of traditional values and teachings, it is our plan to strengthen the foundation for future generations.

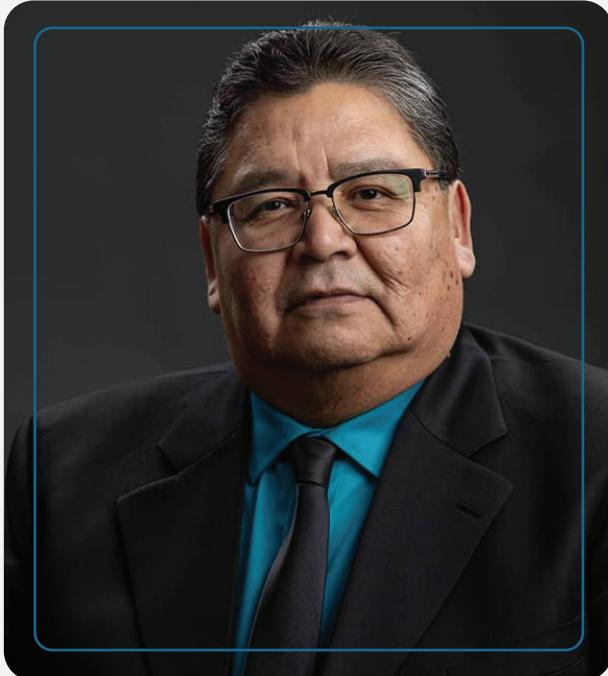
As stewards of our economic strategy, WCDC plays an important role in advancing our economic future. We are proud of where we stand today and excited for what tomorrow brings. We understand there's always more work to be done. We are up for that challenge ahead. Success in 2023 and beyond comes from working collaboratively, by working together, we can accomplish the extraordinary. WCDC could not do this alone, we collaborate with multiple industry stakeholders to achieve these tangible results, one of which is BHP Potash.

Challenges will arise, but WCDC is well-positioned for the road ahead. We look forward to continuing building a strong and prosperous future. On behalf of our past and current Board of Directors, I extend our appreciation to Chief Edwin Ananas and Council for supporting our work to position WCDC for long-term economic success.

Respectfully,

Dennis Esperance
President/CEO

MESSAGE FROM THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR



GARNET EYAHPAISE

It is with great pride that we offer to the Beardy's & Okemasis Cree Nation (BOCN) membership our first ever Annual Report from Willow Cree Development Corporation (WCDC). From now and the future, WCDC will share and update the nation with all of its yearly activities and progress.

From humble beginnings, WCDC has emerged as a key player in forming new partnerships and business collaborations. Our partners have embraced the Truth and Reconciliation movement and are working to include First Nation participation within their companies. We are proud to forge futures together with them.

One major goal of these partnerships is to provide employment opportunities for our Band Members now and in the future. I urge all jobseekers to explore these positions in various sectors of the construction world. Opportunities will be available for the next few years at the Jansen Mine Site, with excellent camp accommodations for employees.

BOCN leadership has recently purchased three properties for economic development ventures. Updates on progress will be provided as we move forward. The Penner Property in Duck Lake is one of these purchases, and feasibility studies will assist WCDC in future plans. Another significant purchase is the 'Camp Tawow' property, approved by the Province of Saskatchewan for purchase and conversion to 'Reserve Status' through the Treaty Land Entitlement process. We will have our own reserve resort at beautiful Candle Lake in a year or so.

In closing, I commend our past leadership, Chief Rick Gamble (Late) and Chief Roy Petit, for believing in and restructuring the Economic Development file. Thanks also to past and present Councils for their support. To our current partners, thank you for believing in us. Together, we have much to gain. To Vern Bachiu of Triall Consulting, thank you for guiding WCDC in governance and planning. To Aaron Bachiu of Moab Media, thank you for logo development and your professional approach to our first Annual Report. To past and current Board Members, your input and professionalism are valued. Thank you for your contributions.

The WCDC Board meets monthly; don't hesitate to reach out to any of us for information. Take care, everyone, and don't forget to check out willowcree.ca. Ekosi pitimah!

Respectfully yours,

Garnet Eyahpaise
Economic Development Coordinator



MEET THE BOARD MEMBERS

The WCDC would not be where it is today if not for the diligent and dedicated people who have served on our board both in the present day, as well as in the past. We are so grateful for the people who believe in our long-term vision to grow and prosper to help provide and build a better future for the people in our community. Past board members we would formally like to recognize in no particular order are *Juliano Tupone* [former president], *Lauralee Sutherland*, *Ian Thomas*, *Peter Gardippi* and *Chanze Gamble* who are all former WCDC Board Members. We would also like to thank former chiefs *Chief Rick Gamble* (Late) and *Chief Roy Petit*.



DENNIS ESPERANCE
PRESIDENT & CEO



TYLER CARON
BOARD MEMBER



HARRIS SUTHERLAND
BOARD MEMBER



CARLA SEESEQUASIS
BOARD MEMBER



SANDRA BIGHEAD
BOARD MEMBER



EXPLANATION OF OUR BRAND IDENTITY



WILLOW CREE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

With careful consideration, WCDC has chosen a symbol that captures the essence of new beginnings and cultural significance. The eagle, symbolizing strength and freedom, aligns well with WCDC's identity. As an organization dedicated to providing opportunities to its community, the eagle serves as a fitting representation.

In conjunction with the eagle, a rising sun has been incorporated into the logo design. This addition symbolizes new beginnings, new possibilities, and the hope of a bright future. The eagle and the sun come together to form an emblem that exudes a sense of positivity, vitality, and resilience, reflecting WCDC's commitment to fostering a hopeful and thriving community.



ORIGIN STORY OF THE WILLOW CREE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



PHOTO FROM THE BLACKHAWKS GRAND OPENING | AUGUST 2023

Some of you might be asking, how did we get to where we are today? How were we able to build a brand new state of the art gas bar in Duck Lake servicing the many travellers between Saskatoon and Prince Albert?

The Willow Cree Development Corporation (WCDC) emerged from a pivotal moment of introspection within the Beardy's Okemasis Cree Nation. In 2014, realizing the bands approach to economic development wasn't working as well as it could, this spurred Jeremy Seeseequasis, Roy Petit, Leanne Gardippi-Bill, and others into action. The absence of structured business plans and the prevalence of arbitrary decisions highlighted the need for change. The council, led by Jeremy, recognized the necessity to streamline processes and protocols, and to try to diminish the interference of politics in economic endeavors.

Thus, the WCDC was born from a collective desire to institutionalize transparency, professionalism, and efficacy in economic development. The establishment of protocols and terms of reference laid the groundwork for a new era of collaboration and growth

with external businesses. The inaugural project, a camp and catering venture at the Jansen mine, exemplified the WCDC's commitment to rigorous standards and prudent decision-making, effectively weeding out unsuitable partnerships.

Although the path was not always clear, the WCDC forged ahead, driven by a clear vision of fostering transparent, accountable business practices. With a focus on education and skill-building, the corporation actively engaged with industry leaders, such as BHP and Bird Construction, immersing themselves in bidding processes and negotiations to enhance their expertise. Relationships with companies like BHP and Bird Construction were absolutely instrumental in helping the WCDC get to where it is today.

However, challenges loomed, yet through steadfast adherence to process and protocol, the WCDC navigated obstacles, illuminating the path forward with logic and foresight.

Central to the WCDC's success have been transformative partnerships, one notably with Fishing Lake, wherein mutual concessions and a commitment to shared processes propelled progress. These collaborations underscored the enduring impact of structured, long-term relationships in fostering community development.

For the Beardy's Okemasis Cree Nation, the WCDC symbolizes empowerment and resilience. By nurturing strong governance and fostering enduring partnerships, the corporation has become a catalyst for socioeconomic advancement, embodying the spirit of progress and collaboration. As the journey continues, the WCDC remains dedicated to learning, evolving, and embracing the collective wisdom of its community, envisioning a future of prosperity and opportunity for all.

INFORMATION IN THIS SECTION SOURCED FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH FORMER BOCN COUNCILOR JEREMY SEESEEQUASIS.



WE ARE COMMITTED TO OUR COMMUNITY



NATASHA SEESEEQUASIS

**Owner/Designer/Seamstress
Stardust Clothing and Accessories**

**Financial Support from the WCDC helped
Natasha focus on building her business and
eased the stress of bills piling up.**

**With Natasha's business success this has
translated into job opportunities for
community members as well as providing a
platform for local artisans to showcase their
work.**

A closer look

The Willow Cree Development Corporation had the pleasure of helping Tasha Seeseequasis financially, a remarkable entrepreneur whose journey into the world of fashion design began with a simple dream. Initially inspired by a passion for clothing design as a teenager, Tasha embarked on her entrepreneurial path in her late twenties, fueled by the desire to be close to her newborn son, Oliver, after the end of maternity leave.

Starting with the creation of slouch bags and later venturing into tie-dye, Tasha gradually built her brand, placing products in consignment shops and participating in local markets. Her journey took a significant turn when she joined the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship, followed by success in the SREDA SOAR competition [this is an Aboriginal Entrepreneurship support program]. These achievements laid the groundwork for securing a spot in Centre Mall, Saskatoon.

The WCDC's financial support played a crucial role in easing the financial burden of rent, allowing Tasha to focus on product design and business growth. Before receiving the donation, financial challenges were looming, particularly in meeting the costs of maintaining a retail space. However, with WCDC's assistance, Tasha was able to open additional spaces, support local artists, and host workshops, achieving significant milestones in her business journey. Furthermore, her business success translated into job opportunities for community members and a platform for local artisans to showcase their work.

Reflecting on her experience, Tasha expressed gratitude for the opportunities provided by supportive organizations like WCDC, emphasizing the transformative impact on both individuals and the community at large. She highlighted the importance of believing in local talent and empowering individuals to pursue their dreams, ultimately shaping a brighter future for all involved.



OUR LONG-TERM VISION RESULTED IN THE BLACKHAWKS TRAVEL CENTRE



We are proud of all of our hard work which is what this business symbolizes

From its humble beginnings to its current stature as a beacon of economic independence, Blackhawks Gas Bar stands as a testament to the vision and perseverance of the Willow Cree Development Corporation (WCDC). Established under the auspices of 100% Indigenous ownership, the gas bar serves not only the local community but also the many travelers traversing the route between Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

The journey of Blackhawks Gas Bar embodies resilience and adaptability. Faced with the need to upgrade the old gas bar, WCDC unanimously agreed to change direction and enter an ambitious endeavor to a new build rather than inject enormous capital for upgrades. The decision to embark on this transformation proved pivotal, as the gas bar now stands as a modern and profitable facility poised for sustainable future growth.

In its inaugural year, Blackhawks Gas Bar achieved a remarkable feat by breaking even—a noteworthy accomplishment for any startup enterprise. Despite the burden of a hefty monthly loan payment, the gas bar defied expectations, emerging as a viable business entity within a short span.

In looking for a fuel supplier, WCDC made the strategic decision to form a partnership with Centex Petroleum. Centex is a chain with no affiliation or obligation to one supplier. They're 100% owned and operated in Western Canada. Centex goal was to assist WCDC build a successful gas station from construction to operation of the business, thereby fostering trust and reliability with our customers.

Moreover, the partnership with Centex exemplifies a healthy working relationship with a First Nation business entity. With no affiliation or obligation to one supplier, Centex can shop around for wholesale fuel prices to ensure that we provide our customers with the most competitive prices. In addition, they offer an excellent Loyalty Program for our customers through the Centex Fuel Pass program.

Blackhawks Gas Bar stands as a shining example of Indigenous entrepreneurship, offering not only essential services but also fostering economic empowerment and self-reliance within the Beardy's Okemasis Cree Nation. As one of 15 Indigenous-owned gas bars under the Centex umbrella, it signifies not just a business venture, but a beacon of hope and prosperity for generations to come.



WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT A LIST OF OUR CURRENT PARTNERS

One of our main goals in establishing working relationships with other businesses is to find businesses with unique skill sets. We want to be able to fulfill various industry demands by forging relationships with respected businesses in various sectors. Another one of our main goals is to establish long-term and mutually beneficial working relationships. We want these relationships to benefit all parties involved today and for many years to come.

If you are from the industry and looking to connect please visit our website and fill out our connection form at <https://www.willowcree.ca/for-industry>

BHP

<https://www.bhp.com>

BHP has been instrumental in helping the WCDC get to where it is today

In 2020, BHP Billiton unveiled plans for a potash mine in Jansen, Saskatchewan. Preceding this development, in the mid 90s, the Beardy's & Okemasis Cree Nation (BOCN) strategically utilized Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) funds to secure land near Wynyard, subsequently transitioning it to reserve status. This astute maneuver strategically positioned BOCN within the operational ambit of BHP. Consequently, BOCN, alongside other First Nations such as George Gordon, Fishing Lake, Kawacatoose, Day

Star, and Muskowekwan, engaged in negotiations leading to Opportunities Agreements with BHP.

This presented a unique opportunity to secure involvement in the construction of the world's largest potash mine. However, acknowledging our current limitations in expertise and capacity, we recognized the need for strategic partnerships with established entities that share our values. Situated within the BHP catchment area, BHP demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with us. Yet, lacking the capacity to independently pursue large-scale construction projects of BHP's magnitude, we actively pursued partnerships with companies possessing the requisite capabilities and a shared commitment to our values. After meticulous deliberation, we successfully forged alliances with such entities, ensuring our collective ability to undertake significant projects while upholding our core principles.

PARTNERS CONTINUED

GFL ENVIRONMENTAL & 2 NATIONS BIRD CONSTRUCTION



This was taken on June 9, 2023 which was the day the WCDC signed a partnership agreement with GFL at GFL's Saskatoon facility.

GFL Environmental

GFL Environmental is the only major diversified environmental services company in North America offering services in solid waste management, liquid waste management, and soil remediation. With strategically located operations across Canada and the United States, GFL is uniquely equipped to undertake practically any environmental challenge.



2 Nations Bird Construction

Bird has developed and implemented an Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training Program to better educate its management and employees and enable them to deliver on Bird's commitment to its Indigenous Relations Policy, strategies and plans. Bird management is committed to effectively implementing, monitoring, and reporting on the Indigenous Engagement Policy.



This was the day of signing and creation of 2Nations Bird Construction between Fishing Lake First Nation, BOCN and Bird Construction. Feb. 17, 2022.

PARTNERS CONTINUED



<https://www.wirservices.ca>

WIR Services Limited provides corporate services to a number of companies in the industrial construction, turnaround and maintenance markets across Western Canada. As a side note, one of the things that attracted us to forming a partnership is that this is a family run business.



<https://prairiecrane.com/>

Prairie Crane Inc. and the family members of Prairie Crane Inc. have been involved in the crane industry for several decades. With an initial goal to create a crane company that exceeds quality in all aspects of work, the business quickly grew into the most diverse crane fleet in Saskatchewan. Throughout this process, Prairie Crane has fulfilled countless jobs throughout Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba efficiently; while maintaining a high standard of safety.



<https://tlfdirtworx.com>

Over the past year, TLF has done some vac truck services under the umbrella of the Site Services Contract with 2 Nations Bird and KDM at BHP Jansen Mine. TLF is a company that can do almost anything you can think of with dirt and rock. They also have aggregate materials to meet almost any need.

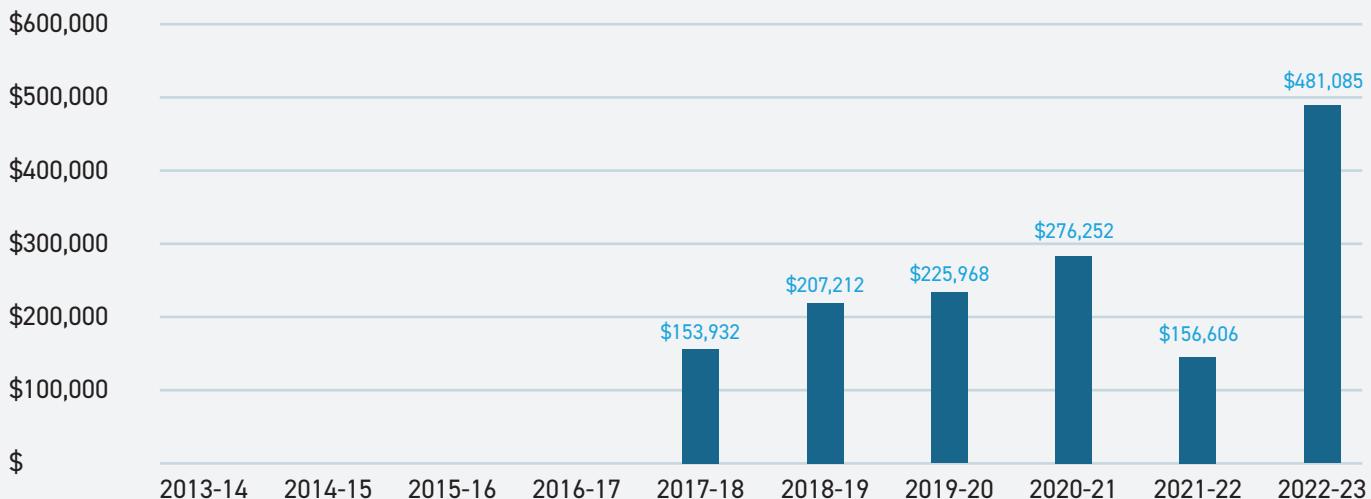


<https://myshakgroup.com>

The Myshak Group of Companies is a family owned and operated service group. They are a supplier of both operated and bare industrial & commercial crane and equipment rentals, along with various transportation & warehousing solutions, and other services to enhance their capabilities.

FINANCIAL SECTION

FINANCIAL RESULTS



*** While the WCDC did not report any revenue in the early years, we wanted to include those years to show this is a long-term process to see results***

START UP 2013-15

- Started in 2014.
- Administered by BOCN
- Main funding sources from government programs.

BUILD UP 2015

- BOCN relationship with BHP started.
- Partnership with FLFN Ventures forming Two Lakes Horizon (camp and catering).
- Partnership with Innergex (renewable energy).

BREAKTHROUGH 2021-?

- Partnerships established with industry partners such as Bird, GFL, Myshak/NexGen Transportation, Prairie Crane, Black & McDonald and TLF Dirtworx to bid on contracts with BHP.
- Developed own administration and own audit.
- Started Blackhawks Travel Centre.

GROWTH ?

- WCDC at a sensitive time. It is benefitting from the construction phase of the BHP mine.
- It needs to develop core businesses such as Blackhawks Travel Centre to establish a stable revenue model.



FINANCIAL SECTION

OBSERVATIONS

WCDC has already started and grown its business, and now it's aiming to become more stable and successful. We've had help from BOCN and are getting closer to being able to run independently. At this stage, businesses like WCDC need a lot of care, attention, and support to keep growing. We're trying to get more construction work from BHP, but it's hard to know how much money they'll make. To make sure we have a steady income, WCDC needs to focus on building up their main services. Meanwhile, Blackhawks Travel Centre is just starting out, but things are going well for them so far.

EMPLOYMENT RESULTS

One of the most important benefits of WCDC's partnership approach is getting their partners commit to hiring Indigenous people generally and BOCN members specifically. **That is the good news.** WCDC's partners are working hard to hire BOCN members but unfortunately it has not been working out very well yet. As examples:

- As of March 31, 2023, Two Lakes Horizon North reported that they had **16 BOCN members employed**.
- As of September 2023, Two Nations Bird reported that they had **6 BOCN members employed** across their contracts in tailings, concrete, and site services.

WCDC has worked hard with its partners to obtain commitments to employ BOCN members. Employment can be life changing for individuals and their families. Employment can provide a steady income and training opportunities leading to careers. Careers change people's lives.

Its partners have made sincere attempts at recruiting and retaining BOCN members. Unfortunately, the employment numbers that we have been reaching aren't in line with our expectations. We need to do better from our end in encouraging and preparing BOCN members to apply. Expect to see WCDC developing a more proactive approach to training and employment.



WE GIVE BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY

WCDC remains dedicated to supporting the community through monetary contributions. Past initiatives include providing new jerseys and socks for all BOCN Minor Hockey Teams, offering startup funds for BOCN entrepreneurs, purchasing advertising for the Willow Cree Chiefs hockey team program, backing BOCN Sports & Rec fundraising efforts, aiding BOCN athletes representing Team SK at the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), and making annual donations to the Pow Wow & Sports Day.



WILLOW CREE
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



*This is a beautiful photo taken at the 2023 Beardy's Okemasis Cree Nation Competition Pow-Wow.
We proudly donated \$10,000 to this event to help support our community.*

Photo courtesy of Shelley Mike Photography

*The Annual Report, Logo Design & Website
for Willow Cree Development Corporation
were all designed by Moab Media*



www.moabmedia.ca