

Lii Vway di la Tayaen'd Niikinaahk:

Voices of the Homeland



MANITOBA MÉTIS FEDERATION
MICHIF LANGUAGE SUMMIT



WELCOME MESSAGE

Barbara Fleury

Minister: Culture, Heritage, and Michif Language

Taanishi,

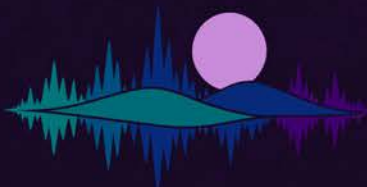
It is my honour to welcome you to **Lii Vway di la Tayaen'd Niikinaahk: Voices of the Homeland**, the Manitoba Métis Federation Michif Language Summit.

Michif is at the heart of Red River Métis culture and identity. It connects us to our families, our communities, our traditional knowledge, and the stories of our Homeland. By creating opportunities to hear, learn, and speak Michif, we strengthen those connections and help ensure our language continues to live in the voices of future generations.

This Summit brings together Elders, Knowledge Keepers, speakers, learners, educators, and community members to share knowledge, build relationships, and explore the many ways Michif can be protected and revitalized. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the people whose dedication has kept our language alive and who continue to carry it forward.

I extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this gathering. Your efforts are helping to build a stronger future for Michif. I encourage you to take part fully, learn from one another, and leave inspired to continue sharing the language within your families and communities.

Welcome, and I hope you enjoy the Summit.



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WELCOME MESSAGE

Marielle Gauthier

Associate Minister: Culture, Heritage, and Michif Language



Alo,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to **Lii Vway di la Tayaen'd Niikinaahk: Voices of the Homeland**, the Manitoba Métis Federation Michif Language Summit.

Growing up in a French-speaking community taught me that language is more than a way of communicating. It creates belonging and connects people to a shared history and identity. It also taught me that a language remains strong when people are encouraged to use it and pass it on.

That is what makes this Summit so important. Over these three days, we are not only speaking about the future of Michif, we are helping shape it. Every conversation, lesson, song, story, resource, and idea can open a path for the language to be heard and learned.

To those who have carried Michif, thank you for the knowledge and patience you share. To those who are learning, I encourage you to speak with courage and take pride in every word you gain.

May this gathering leave you with new connections and renewed determination to bring Michif into your homes, workplaces, schools, and communities.

Maarsii, and welcome to the Summit.



ABOUT THE SUMMIT

The **Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) Michif Language Summit** is a gathering focused on revitalizing Michif and strengthening its place in the future. It brings Red River Métis Citizens and other participants together around a language that carries deep historical and cultural meaning.

Led by the MMF Michif Language Department, the Summit connects those who speak and carry Michif with those who are learning and working to strengthen the future of the language. Through keynote presentations and workshops, participants explore practical ways to keep the language present in daily life and strengthen how it is shared across generations.

The Summit also honours the people whose knowledge has sustained Michif over time. While the Summit celebrates the history and culture of Michif, its purpose is forward-looking. The MMF Michif Language Summit seeks to ensure that Michif remains a living language for generations to come.

#MichifSummit2026

AGENDA

Monday, August 10

12:00PM - 4:30PM

Early Registration - Lobby



5:30PM - 6:30PM

Mocktail Hour - Delta Grand Ballroom



6:30PM - 8:30PM

Welcome Dinner & Cultural Showcase

AGENDA

Tuesday, August 11

7:00AM - 11:00AM	Registration	Lobby
8:00AM - 4:30PM	Métis Artisans & Trade Show	Charleswood A & B
8:00AM - 9:00AM	Breakfast	Delta Grand Ballroom
9:00AM - 9:15AM	Welcome & Opening Remarks	Delta Grand Ballroom
9:15AM - 10:15AM	Keynote Speaker: Peter-Lucas Jones - The Future Speaks Indigenous Languages	Delta Grand Ballroom
10:15AM - 10:30AM	Health Break	Delta Grand Ballroom
10:30AM - 12:00PM	Mentor-Apprentice Program Presentation & Panel	Delta Grand Ballroom
12:00PM - 1:25PM	Lunch	Delta Grand Ballroom



AGENDA

Tuesday, August 11

1:25PM - 2:30PM

Education Stream:

Jennifer Engbrecht - The Power of Music to Teach the Michif Language

Delta Grand Ballroom

Land-Based Learning Stream:

Marika Schalla & Ruby Bruce - Li Michif di la Terre: Learning Michif French through Land-Based Teachings and Storytelling

Assiniboia A

Technology Stream:

Adam Blanchard - Reconstructing a Historically Informed Voice for Louis Riel Using NLP and AI

Assiniboia B

2:30PM - 3:00PM

Health Break

Delta Grand Ballroom

3:00PM - 4:00PM

Infinity Women Secretariat - Infinity: A Journey of Michif Language Resurgence

Delta Grand Ballroom

4:00PM - 4:30PM

End of Day



AGENDA

Wednesday, August 12

7:00AM - 11:00AM

Registration

Lobby

8:00AM - 4:30PM

Métis Artisans & Trade Show

Charleswood A & B

8:00AM - 9:00AM

Breakfast

Delta Grand Ballroom

9:00AM - 9:15AM

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Delta Grand Ballroom

9:15AM - 10:30AM

Education Stream:

Stories of the Red River Cart: 36
Metis Storybooks in Michif, English
and French, Narrated by Métis Elders
and Speakers

Delta Grand Ballroom

Land-Based Learning Stream:

Heather Lambert - Teaching Michif
French in Schools: Language, Culture,
and Land-Based Learning

Assiniboia A

Education:

Louis Riel Institute - Michif Kahoot

Assiniboia B

10:30AM - 10:45AM

Health Break

Delta Grand Ballroom

AGENDA

Wednesday, August 12

10:45AM - 12:00PM

Education Stream:

John Sobkovich - Southern/Heritage
Michif History and More

Delta Grand Ballroom

Education Stream:

April Waters - Piikishkweetaak aan
Michif/Let's Speak Michif

Assiniboia A

Education Stream:

Morgan Blanco - Early Learning and
Childcare: Michif with Kids

Assiniboia B

12:00PM - 1:25PM

Lunch

Delta Grand Ballroom

1:25PM - 3:00PM

Music-Based Learning Stream:

Lavallee Tradition - The Sound of
Michif: Live Music & Stories of
Language Learning

Delta Grand Ballroom

Education Stream:

Vince Ahenakew and Jimmy Durocher -
Introduction to Northern Michif

Assiniboia A

Technology Stream:

Jordan Smith - Revitalizing Our
Language Together with Michif AI

Assiniboia B

AGENDA

Wednesday, August 12

3:00PM - 3:15PM

Health Break

Delta Grand Ballroom

3:15PM - 4:15PM

**Sustaining Michif for Future
Generations Panel:**

Elders, Youth, Educators, and
Technologists

Delta Grand Ballroom

4:15PM - 4:30PM

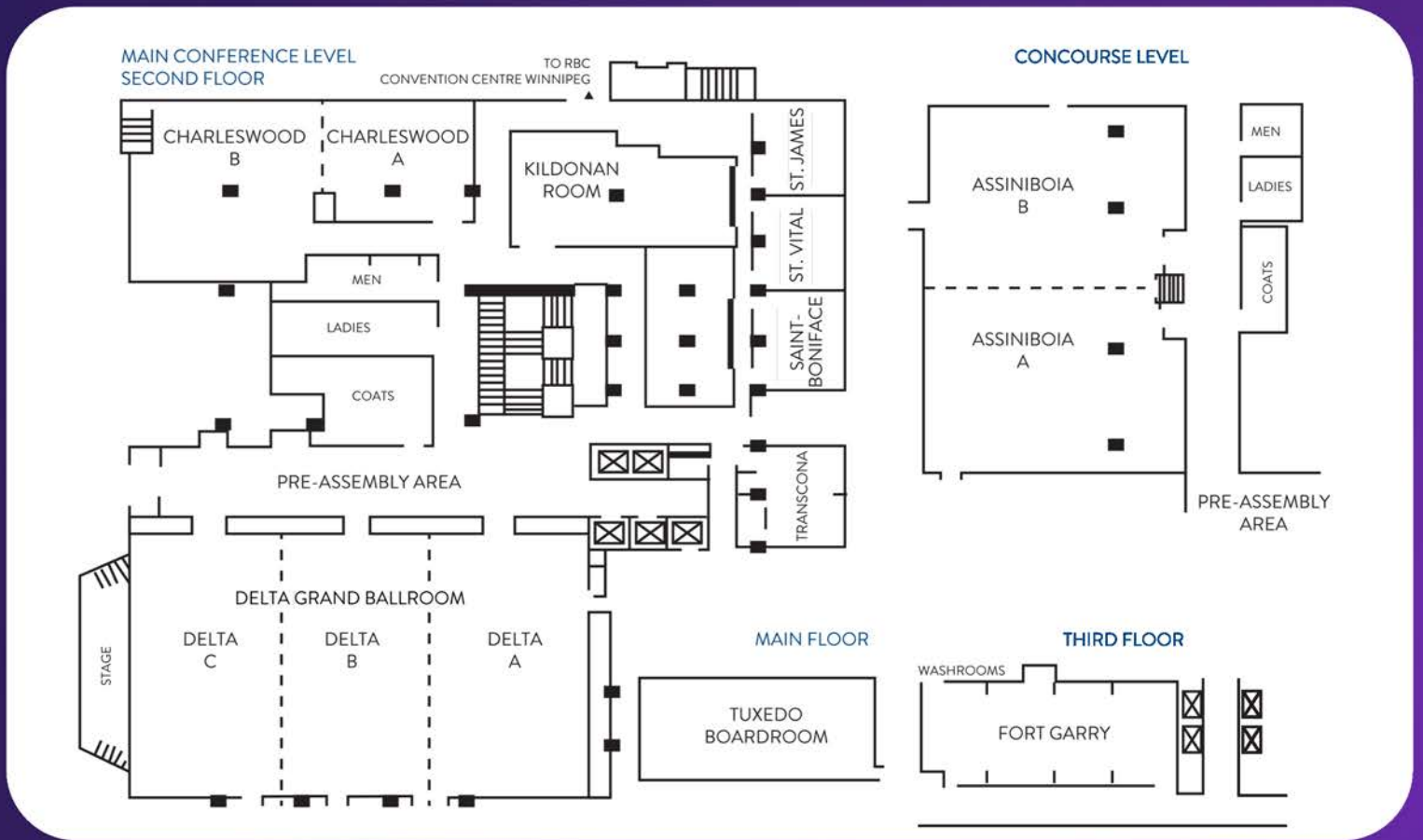
Closing Ceremonies:

Closing Remarks and Prayer

Delta Grand Ballroom



VENUE MAP



Lii Vway di la Tayaen'd Niikinaahk:
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PETER-LUCAS JONES

Chief Executive of Te Hiku Media

Peter-Lucas Jones (Te Aupōuri, Ngāi Takoto, Te Rarawa and Ngāti Kahu) is Chief Executive of Te Hiku Media, where he leads the organisation's work at the intersection of Indigenous language revitalisation, technology and media. Under his leadership, Te Hiku Media has become internationally recognised for developing natural language processing technologies for te reo Māori, including speech recognition, text-to-speech, speech synthesis, and pronunciation modelling that are helping shape the digital future of Indigenous languages. Peter-Lucas is also an award-winning broadcaster and a highly proficient speaker of te reo Māori.

His work focuses on strengthening intergenerational language transmission through technology while advancing Indigenous data sovereignty, ethical AI, and Indigenous-controlled digital infrastructure. Widely recognised for his expertise in Māori language corpora and language technologies, Peter-Lucas was named to TIME Magazine's 2024 list of the world's 100 most influential people in AI. He also received the Te Tihi Award at the 2025 Te Taitokerau Māori Business Awards for his internationally recognised work in AI and language revitalisation.

Alongside his executive leadership, Peter-Lucas serves as Chairman of Te Rūnanga Nui o Te Aupōuri, Chair of Te Whakaruruhau o Ngā Reo Irirangi Māori (The Māori Radio Network), Co-convenor of Ngā Toki Whakarururanga, and Chair of Mahimaru Marae. He is a former Deputy Chair of Māori Television, a former elected member of the Northland Regional Council, and a former Historical Treaty Claims Negotiator.

THE FUTURE SPEAKS INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

A Māori Community Is Developing AI to Strengthen Language Revitalisation and Data Sovereignty

Every two weeks, the world loses a language. With it disappears a unique way of understanding and seeing the world. Languages carry traditional knowledge, values, relationships, and ways of knowing that cannot simply be translated into another tongue because they are shaped by the heritage, landscapes, and lived experiences of the people who speak them. In te reo Māori (the Māori language of Aotearoa New Zealand), words, idioms, and place names preserve deep knowledge of our environment, our tūpuna (ancestors), and the relationships that connect our people to place. When a language is no longer spoken, much of that knowledge becomes harder to access, harder to pass on to future generations, and in some cases may be lost without hope of retrieval. Artificial intelligence is reshaping the future of communication, learning, and knowledge. The question faced by Indigenous communities is whether it will become another force of language loss or a tool for language revitalisation.

This keynote tells the story of how one Māori community chose to answer that question. Faced with the challenge of transcribing decades of recordings from native speakers, Te Hiku Media began building its own speech recognition technology for te reo Māori. The system draws on more than 35 years of community-collected language data and is governed by an Indigenous Data Licence that keeps ownership and decision-making with the tribal communities from which the speakers originate. Today, it achieves an 8% word error rate in speech transcription. More importantly, the project has shown that

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Indigenous peoples do not have to wait for technology companies to build the tools needed to support language revitalisation. We can build them ourselves.

”

Developed within the community and accountable to it. In ways that reflect our Indigenous values, priorities, and aspirations while retaining authority over our language, our data, and our cultural knowledge.

Rather than offering a blueprint, this keynote shares one indigenous data science experience. It shares what has worked, what has been learned, and what remains challenging. Every Indigenous language has its own heritage and culture, its own people, and its own path forward. However, by sharing knowledge, methods, and experience, we can strengthen one another and create pathways for our languages to thrive. My hope is that this conversation leaves people not only with practical ideas, but with confidence that Indigenous communities can shape the technologies of the future without compromising the languages, knowledge, and values that make us who we are. The future can speak Indigenous languages. But it must not be a future designed for Indigenous peoples by others. It must be a future authored, governed, and shaped by the people of the language.



DARIAN KOVACS

Master of Ceremonies

Darian Kovacs is a Métis business leader with 15 years of experience in marketing, communications, and public relations. Through his award-winning company, Jelly Marketing, Darian has worked with various local, national, and global brands building and executing their digital & PR strategy. He co-founded the Canadian Internet Marketing Conference and he's a regular contributor with BCBusiness magazine, Entrepreneur, and Forbes. Being both an educator and practitioner, Darian's mix of stories, practical examples, and takeaways leaves audiences feeling inspired and equipped to implement SEO, digital ad, social media, and PR strategies into their organizations.

Darian Kovacs (Jelly Marketing) has developed an interactive game called Métis Life on the widely used gaming platform Roblox. The game is designed to engage younger audiences in learning and experiencing Red River Métis culture through immersive digital storytelling and language interaction. A key component of the project is the incorporation of Heritage Michif language learning elements, helping users build familiarity with vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural context in an accessible and interactive environment.

Building on this work, Kovacs is currently expanding the platform to include Northern Michif, further supporting efforts to preserve and revitalize Métis languages through modern technology. His approach demonstrates how digital platforms and gaming spaces can be used as innovative tools for Indigenous language education and cultural preservation, particularly for younger generations who are already active in online environments.



LAVALLEE TRADITION

Coming from a family of seventeen kids, Dave Lavallee started singing and playing music at a very early age.

Dave's first solo was singing "Cotton Fields" to a crowd of 200 people at the age of seven, while standing on a wooden Coke box to reach the microphone. He started performing with various bands at the age of 19 and organized Lavallee Tradition Band in 1990. Dave sings lead and plays rhythm guitar while managing the band.

He has composed and recorded his own songs and is well known in the music community for performing his own arrangement, which he named "The Métis Medley." It was recorded and displayed in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

The family band, which includes Dave's two sons, Clint and Jason, often invited other musicians such as fiddle or guitar players.

They have performed for various events and celebrations, travelling to Hull, Quebec; Toronto; Ottawa; Old Crow, Yukon; and many other places in Canada. They have performed at the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall, Festival du Voyageur, The Forks, the Manitoba Legislature, and many other venues in Manitoba.

Dave has also played on various television programs from the National Film Board of Canada, Rhythms of the Land, How the Fiddle Flows, and The Beat Goes On.

Local radio stations have featured their music and performances, including "The Métis Medley," which was the number-one requested song on NCI Radio for many months.

Lavallee Tradition plays a variety of country and traditional music.

With great success, Lavallee Tradition released its first CD in the summer of 2001, with sales to fans from Europe, South America, Africa, Australia, the United States, and all across Canada.



BATTLE OF THE STRINGS: RYAN SPENCE & RENÉ JOBIN

Ryan Spence is a 23-year-old Red River Métis fiddler who has been playing since he was five years old. He originally learned from his grandfather Ivan, continuing a musical tradition that has been passed down through generations of the Spence family.

Ryan has performed at venues including Canada Life Centre, Princess Auto Stadium and the Burton Cummings Theatre. He maintains a rugged, old-school Métis playing style, with an emphasis on fast-paced reels and forlorn waltzes that bring the music of the old prairie to audiences today.

René Jobin is a Red River Métis musician who grew up surrounded by Métis music. He began learning the fiddle from his uncle at six years old and picked up his first few guitar chords from his grandfather soon afterward. Family gatherings often turned into jam sessions, with relatives taking turns sharing fiddle tunes.

René has since become a singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. Although he now performs many genres of music, his identity and culture remain deeply rooted in the Métis fiddling tradition.



BATTLE OF THE STRINGS: MICHAEL AUDETTE & TROY FLAMAND

Michael Audette and **Troy Flamand** are Red River Métis musicians whose playing is shaped by strong family ties and years spent performing throughout Manitoba.

Michael received his first fiddle from his grandfather at four years old, beginning a lifelong connection to Métis music. A three-time Manitoba Fiddle Champion and three-time Manitoba Country Music Association Specialty Musician of the Year, he is known for a lively style that draws audiences into the rhythm and movement of the music.

Troy first picked up the fiddle at 12 before turning his attention to guitar as a teenager. Raised in Portage la Prairie, he developed his sound while playing in local bands and later became an established presence in Manitoba's country music scene. His work has taken him across Canada, and he has received Manitoba Country Music Association recognition as Guitar Player in the All-Star Band of the Year.

Together, Michael and Troy bring an easy musical chemistry to the stage. With Michael on fiddle and Troy on guitar, their performance becomes a playful exchange that builds as each musician responds to the other.



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DESIGNERS



Meet the Red River Métis designers featured at Lii Vway di la Tayaen'd Niikinaahk: Voices of the Homeland.

Their work reflects the creativity of Red River Métis culture and gives guests a closer look at the people behind the designs being featured throughout the Summit.



AMY MCPHERSON

Amy McPherson is a Red River Métis artist and designer from Dauphin, Manitoba. For 25 years, she has developed skills in beadwork, porcupine quilling, hair tufting, embroidery, birch bark art, and basketry. A graduate of MC College's Fashion Design and Apparel Production program, she also completed the Banff Centre's Indigenous Haute Couture residency. Amy founded Fashion Ikwe Designs in 2017 and now works in theatre costume design while teaching through Connected North.

ANNE MULAIRE

Andréanne "Anne" Mulaire Dandeneau is a Red River Métis designer from Saint-Boniface, Winnipeg. Inspired by her ancestor Catherine Mulaire, an Anishinaabe/Métis teacher and seamstress, Anne began sewing at 14 before studying fashion design at LaSalle College in Montréal. She founded Anne Mulaire in 2005. Her collections reflect her Métis heritage, with original prints created by her father, David. Anne is also a B Corp-certified, award-winning Indigenous entrepreneur.





EVAN DUCHARME

Evan Ducharme is a Métis designer from St. Ambroise, Manitoba, whose work draws on ancestral and contemporary Michif knowledge to explore Métis history, gender, queerness, and relations to place. Their work has appeared in National Geographic, ELLE Canada, Vogue.com, and other publications, and has been exhibited at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Seattle Art Museum, and The Met's Costume Institute, where Ducharme became its first contemporary Métis fashion designer represented.

ROBYN MCLEOD

Robyn McLeod is a Métis and Dene fashion artist from Deh Gáh Got'jê (Fort Providence), Northwest Territories. Through Robyn McLeod Fashion, she combines ancestral knowledge with contemporary design to explore Indigenous futurism, cultural continuity, and matriarchal strength. Her collections have appeared across Canada and internationally. Robyn also founded the Denendeh Fashion and Arts Society, supporting Indigenous artists through mentorship, arts education, and opportunities that strengthen cultural connection in northern communities.



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WORKSHOP PRESENTERS





JENNIFER ENGBRECHT

Jennifer Engbrecht (she/her) is of settler and Red River Métis heritage, with ancestral ties to St. James and the Selkirk area. A composer, songwriter, and educator for 30 years, she uses music to deepen connections to the land and inspire care for the natural world.

Her work has been presented at the Manitoba Legislative Building, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and conferences across Canada. Jennifer supports teachers through environmental education initiatives and is writing a book about integrating music and the arts into outdoor learning.

HEATHER LAMBERT

Heather Lambert is a Red River Métis educator from St. Laurent, Manitoba, whose roots and experiences on the land and water shape her teaching. As a Michif Support Teacher and Indigenous Way of Life Teacher with the Winnipeg School Division, she works across three schools, sharing Michif language, Métis culture, and land-based learning.

Through hands-on activities, storytelling, and seasonal teachings, Heather helps students connect with Métis identity and the environment. She works with Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and community members to support Michif revitalization and traditional knowledge.



JORDAN SMITH

Jordan Smith is a Red River Métis entrepreneur, born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and now calling Toronto home.

He is the founder of Renterii and TWOROW.AI, using technology to strengthen communities, support local discovery, and create more accessible opportunities for entrepreneurs.



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MARIKA SCHALLA

Marika Schalla (Waabishkaanakwadikwe – White Cloud Woman) is a Red River Métis and Anishinaabe educator, curriculum developer, author, founder of Heartberry Education and mother from Treaty One Territory with family roots in the Métis community of Saint Laurent, Manitoba. Her work is grounded in the belief that language lives through our relationships with the Land, our stories, and one another.

As an Anishinaabemowin and Michif-French language learner and language keeper, Marika is passionate about supporting Indigenous language revitalization through Land-based learning, storytelling, and culturally grounded education. She develops curriculum, facilitates workshops, and creates learning experiences that weave language naturally into everyday life, helping learners build meaningful relationships with Indigenous languages rather than simply memorizing words.

Marika's work centres on reconnecting children, families, educators, and communities with the knowledge carried through language. Whether teaching on the Land, writing children's literature, or speaking with educators across Canada, she is committed to ensuring Indigenous languages continue to be heard, spoken, and celebrated for generations to come.



RUBY BRUCE

Ruby Bruce (Zhaawenoodin – Southern Wind) is a Red River Métis, Cree, and Anishinaabe artist, illustrator, art educator, and Michif-French language carrier from the Métis community of Saint Laurent, Manitoba. Raised in a family where Michif-French has been spoken across generations, she is passionate about carrying the language forward through art, storytelling, education, and community.

Ruby's creative practice reflects the living relationships between language, Land, culture, and identity. Through illustration, public art, workshops, and collaborative community projects, she creates opportunities for people of all ages to reconnect with Michif language and Métis ways of knowing.

Her work honours the stories, humour, and teachings carried within the language while inspiring the next generation to see themselves reflected in their culture. Ruby believes every conversation, story, and work of art is an opportunity to strengthen language, build relationships, and celebrate the beauty and resilience of Métis communities.



ADAM BLANCHARD

Adam Blanchard is the Senior MMF IT Director and a Red River Métis technologist with extensive experience in executive leadership and digital systems. He holds two degrees in computer science, along with an impressive collection of certifications spanning programming languages, technologies, and other corners of the digital world. Before joining the MMF, Adam served as Executive Director of MAFC for 15 years and has now spent 10 years leading the MMF's information technology operations.

His interests extend beyond conventional information technology into physics, mathematics, emerging technologies, and hands-on digital experimentation. He has also embedded a computer chip into his hand, making him, by his own definition, a technically bioengineered cyborg.

Adam brings deep technical knowledge, decades of leadership experience, a distinctive sense of humour, and a creative, curiosity-driven approach to technology.



Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS) supports and empowers Red River Métis women throughout Manitoba. Since its incorporation in 2013, IWS has grown to serve more than 1,300 members through programming and practical supports shaped by the needs of its Citizens. Its work creates opportunities for connection while helping women improve their well-being and quality of life.

Guided by the voices of Red River Métis women, IWS continues to advocate for their interests and respond to the issues affecting their lives. Through this work, the organization helps strengthen families and communities across Manitoba.



SPOKESWOMAN ANITA CAMPBELL

Spokeswoman Anita Campbell currently serves as Spokeswoman and CEO of Infinity Women Secretariat. She is also the Manitoba Métis Federation's Minister of Finance and Human Resources and is responsible for Information Technology and Communications.

Under her leadership, IWS has expanded its programs, services, and supports for more than 1,300 members while continuing to uphold its mandate of empowering Red River Métis women, strengthening their well-being, and improving quality of life across families and communities.



SERGE CARRIÈRE

Serge Carrière is a proud citizen of the Red River Métis Nation from St. Laurent, Manitoba. He supports educational programming within the Franco-Manitoban School Division, working with school teams to integrate Indigenous education, strengthen identity, and promote inclusive learning.

Serge is committed to preserving, revitalizing, and reclaiming Michif. He believes language is essential to reconciliation and to teaching the truth of our shared history. Through his work, he helps create culturally responsive environments where students feel safe, valued, and connected to their identity, heritage, and community.

DÉE-ANNE VERMETTE

Dée-Anne Vermette has been a member of the UNMSJM board of directors for 14 years. She has participated in the development of Métis arts projects on several occasions. Dée-Anne has worked as an educator in French schools as well as at the Bureau de l'éducation française for more than 30 years.

"I am passionate about the transmission of cultural knowledge and I am proud to have participated since May 2022 in Stories of the Red River Cart. My greatest wish is that this valuable resource promoting Métis culture will be welcomed with open arms by our schools and communities."



RICHARD TURENNE

Richard Turenne is a proud citizen of the Red River Métis Nation from La Broquerie (Marchand local), Manitoba. As Executive Director of l'Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba, he strengthens pride and kinship through cultural events, educational resources, and traditional workshops.

His background includes a Bachelor of Education, work as a hunting and fishing guide, training with Dene Cree Elders, economic development, and non-profit management. Richard is also revitalizing his Michif French through the MMF Michif Language Mentor Apprenticeship Program, with hopes of learning and teaching the language.



CYNTHIA SIGURDSON

Cynthia Sigurdson grew up in an Icelandic community north of Winnipeg, proud of her Icelandic and Ukrainian roots. Later discovering her Métis heritage, she developed the same deep pride in her Red River Métis history.

A retired psychiatric nurse, Cynthia spent many years leading public education on mental health and brain injury. She now works as a Red River Métis Cultural Programmer at the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg, sharing cultural knowledge, history, beadwork, leatherwork, and pointillism while helping others connect with their heritage.

JOHN SOBKOVIK

John Sobkovich is a Michif Language Support Teacher for the Winnipeg School Division for Southern Michif. John is a language keeper for Manitoba Métis Federation's Michif Language Mentorship Program. John speaks and writes in Southern and Northern Michif dialects as well as Ininimowin.

John teaches these Michif dialects with the Winnipeg School Division in the community, providing free in-person workshops for all to learn. John creates his own language resources from his experience in the graphic communications industry and previous experience being a vocational educator.



MORGAN BLANCO

Morgan Blanco is the Community Outreach Manager with the Manitoba Métis Federation's Early Learning & Child Care Department. With a background in international teaching, she leads a dedicated team that delivers engaging, culturally grounded programming for Red River Métis children and families in communities across the Homeland.

Her team's work includes initiatives such as Summer Métis Mobile, Little Métis Literacy, Stay, Play & Bead, My Little Métis Box and a host of other family programs that promote early Michif language learning through play, culture, and community connection.





APRIL WATERS

April Waters is a Red River Métis educator from Manitoba's Interlake, currently living and working in Winnipeg. She has carried a number of roles in the public education system for over twenty years, as a classroom teacher, an Indigenous Education Support Teacher, and a school-based administrator.

She is currently the Divisional Administrator of Indigenous Education & Community Support for St. James-Assiniboia School Division where she provides strategic direction, instructional support, and professional learning for twenty-six schools. She also serves on a number of provincial advisory councils, working to support the growth of Indigenous education across the province.

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CORA-LEIGH FAST

Cora-Leigh Fast is a Red River Métis educator with over twenty years of teaching experience. For seventeen years she taught in multi-age, multi-grade classrooms on Hutterite colonies throughout Manitoba's Interlake, where language development was naturally woven into daily routines and learning across Kindergarten to Grade 12.

She later served as an Indigenous Inclusion Specialist and is now a Michif language teacher with St. James-Assiniboia School Division. As a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation Michif Language Cohort, she is committed to the revitalization of the Michif language.



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LAVALLEE FAMILY MICHIF TEACHINGS

Lavallee Family Michif Teachings brings together Dave and Marj Lavallee, their daughter Rebecca, and their granddaughter Anik. Together, they are working to help promote Indigenous languages and support the efforts of Indigenous peoples through music, storytelling, workshops, and the sharing of Michif language and Métis traditions.

David Lavallee is a proud Métis Elder and Language-Knowledge Keeper of the Manitoba Métis Federation - National Government of the Red River Métis, ambassador of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages (OCIL) and Grandfather of the Winnipeg School Division. He speaks Michif French fluently as it is his first language. He is also a singer, songwriter and musician and has been entertaining people for over 55 years with his music.

Dave engages students with a lively mix of Michif French and English songs, captivating them with personal life stories while teaching the Michif language. He takes pleasure in sharing the Métis way of life—including traditions such as trapping, fishing, and flicker hunting. As a special treat, he often bakes bannock to share, adding a warm, authentic touch to the cultural experience.

Marj Lavallee has been married to Dave for nearly 54 years. Having met at a very young age, Marj grew up closely connected to Métis community life and traditions, which allowed her to learn and understand much of Dave's Michif language over the years. Together, they raised four children and are now proud grandparents to six grandchildren, all of whom they are actively teaching Michif French to as part of their family's commitment to language revitalization.

Marj plays a central role in the Lavallee Tradition Workshops. She develops worksheets, song sheets, and program materials, and supports Dave with translations, scheduling, and administrative work. Her dedication ensures that each workshop is organized, welcoming, and culturally grounded.



VINCE AHENAKEW

Vince Ahenakew is a retired teacher, principal, and Northern Michif language keeper from Île-à-la-Crosse. A graduate of NORTEP, he later completed a master's degree at the University of Saskatchewan and continues to serve as a sessional lecturer and instructor with NSITEP in La Ronge.

He currently serves on the CCDF and SMEDCO boards and has contributed to many community organizations, including the Gabriel Dumont Institute Board of Governors, Île-à-la-Crosse Town Council, and the Île-à-la-Crosse Friendship Centre Board. He has also held leadership roles with the Sâkitawâk Development Corporation and the Île-à-la-Crosse Teachers' Association.

His language work includes translating and transcribing documents, supporting individuals who request help through social media, and presenting at conferences and language camps. Vince helped plan a Northern Michif conference and has written or contributed to a Northern Michif/Cree dictionary, related workbooks, and the Northern Michif To Go app. His work is guided by a commitment to preserving and promoting Northern Michif.



JIMMY DUROCHER

Jimmy Durocher was born and raised in the Métis village of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, where he learned from his grandmother, whose strength and resilience continue to guide him. A Veteran of the Royal Canadian Air Force, he has spent decades serving Métis communities through leadership, language sharing, and advocacy.

Jimmy is a former president of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and has also served his home community as president of the local Métis organization. He has also served as a board member of the Gabriel Dumont Institute. Jimmy chaired the Île-à-la-Crosse Residential School Committee, advocating for recognition of Survivors' experiences.

Fluent in Northern Michif and Cree, he now shares his knowledge through the Manitoba Métis Federation's Michif Language Mentor Apprenticeship Program. His patient teaching helps learners strengthen their confidence and connection to the language, ensuring Northern Michif continues to be heard, learned, and carried forward within his home community and among Métis learners for years to come.

MENTOR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM



LEARNING TOGETHER. SPEAKING FORWARD.

The Manitoba Métis Federation's Michif Language Mentor Apprenticeship Program is a two-year initiative that brings Michif speakers and committed learners together through mentorship and group learning. Participants meet regularly to strengthen their understanding of the language and become more confident using it. The program's goal is to develop new Michif speakers and support the continued revitalization of the language among Red River Métis Citizens.





Mentor Apprenticeship Program 2026

REVITALIZING MICHIF. TOGETHER.

Each mentor brings their own knowledge of Michif and a way of teaching shaped by years of speaking the language. Apprentices listen closely and ask questions, using more Michif as they become ready.

The relationship between mentors and apprentices is an important part of the experience. Over time, they find approaches that work for their group and build on what has already been learned. What participants take from the program extends beyond individual lessons. It can help Michif become a more lasting part of their lives and shape how they continue learning after the program ends.





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MICHIF LANGUAGE SUMMIT**

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