



# Le Métis

## President's Message



COVID-19 continues to rob us all of many things we cherish – seeing our loved ones, gathering in communities and visiting friends in other parts of the province and the country. Yet we have proved – over and over again – how strong we are, keeping our vulnerable Citizens and Elders safe by maintaining social distance. I'm proud of each and every one of our Citizens who have worked hard to protect each other from exposure. I know we are all tired of the restrictions that prevent us from living our lives the way we want to. With the virus variants continuing to appear in our province, we have to stay safe and show how resilient we are as a Nation.

We have been trying to work with the province since last spring, first with sharing data and then with a Métis-specific vaccine rollout strategy. While they have made commitments to work with us, all we hear is that they'll get back to us – over and over again, the same message. We know the importance of protecting our Elders and vulnerable Citizens from the risks of COVID-19, given our elevated risk of poorer health outcomes than the rest of the population. We know this because of our own study, called Profile of Métis Health Status and Health Care Utilization in Manitoba: A Population-Based Study (2010) and also because the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) says vaccine planning should include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

This is a good example of why it's essential to have a distinctions-based approach. Métis Elders are 21 percent more likely to die before the age of 75 compared to the rest of the population of Manitoba. Our Elders are precious to our Nation and we know how few make it past that age.

Data from the Metis Atlas also shows that we have 13% higher rates of hypertension, 22% higher rates of arthritis, 28% higher rates of respiratory disease, 34% percent higher rates of diabetes and 40% higher rates of heart disease, compared to other Manitobans.

The province is now allowing for vaccination in the general population for people over the age of 90. For First Nations, the age is now 70. We applaud the hard work of the First Nations to get their Elders prioritized for vaccination, but we know our Citizens should also be included in this age range. Pallister's approach is not about data, or science, or medicine. It's about politics – politics that hurt the Métis people in Manitoba. The province's own health data on Indigenous communities shows that chronic illness takes our loved ones away.

Despite Manitoba being the birthplace of Métis Nation, we are the only province in Western Canada without a Métis-specific vaccine rollout strategy. We are not sitting idle while we push for Manitoba to catch up with the other provinces in creating a distinctions-based approach for the Métis people. I have sent letters to all the major vaccine manufacturers across the globe, pleading our case and asking them to work directly with us to get vaccines for our people.

Rest assured, your Métis Government will not give up the fight to get your vaccines to you – even in the face of overt political misbehaviour by the provincial government. Federal Minister Dan Vandal has written to the province – twice. Both times, he has pointed out the science and research that supports the need to prioritize vaccination for all Indigenous peoples – Métis Nation, First Nations and Inuit.

We will explore every path available to us to support our Citizens through this pandemic. I will continue to update Citizens when more information comes forth.

In the meantime, if you live in the Winnipeg area and suspect you may have been exposed to COVID-19 and need to get tested, call our Health & Wellness department at **1-833-390-1041** to schedule an appointment at our COVID testing facility in Winnipeg.

### Support for Citizens

Your Métis Government is doing everything we can to support you during this challenging economic time brought on by the pandemic. Remember that there are nets and subsidies available for licensed active fishers who fished last year and plan to fish this year. For more information, contact [jenny.ruml@mmf.mb.ca](mailto:jenny.ruml@mmf.mb.ca), or by phone at **204-586-8474** or toll free to **1-800-665-8474**.

We know that our ranchers and farmers are also facing challenges right now, even without the pandemic. Between the constantly increasing prices to lease Crown land and the changes to the leasing program, it is becoming harder and harder for these small business owners to stay afloat. The province seems to forget that this country was made on the back of small and medium-sized business like our ranchers and farmers.

I encourage any of our farmers or ranchers who are struggling to keep up or feed their families to reach out to your Métis Government to find out what kind of help is available to you. Let's work together to challenge this new leasing process. If you are being affected by the Crown Land leasing changes, call our offices – we will work together to create a province-wide plan to tackle this important work.

Of course, we'll never forget the importance of supporting our youth. We have over 1,700 post-secondary students who have received scholarships and bursaries, along with additional funding to manage the financial hardships brought by the pandemic – this funding amounts to \$1.4 million in emergency funding delivered to help students pay bills and buy food. We expect to be able to deliver more support soon. Thanks to Minister Ledoux for leading her team to support our youth through their post-secondary studies.

### Support for housing

I know that many of our Citizens are challenged with buying houses or the cost of keeping them up after they have bought them. The price of lumber is so high right now, it can be difficult to afford repairs and maintenance. Because of the rising cost of lumber and materials, the Affordable Housing Initiative is taking an approach of building steel frame houses, which creates homes that have features to improve health and safety for homeowners – mould reduction is one example. I commend Minister Goodon and his team for the work they're doing in this area, and for the many programs and plans they've put into place to help Métis Citizens.

Your Métis Government offers a one-time forgivable loan of up to \$15,000 for home repairs for homeowners. The loans can be used for upgrades for accessibility, emergency repairs, renovations, sewer, water and electrical infrastructure, and renovations to improve, adapt, and maintain existing housing stock.

Designed to assist low to moderate income Métis Citizens extend the lifespan of their home, the program also has funding available for larger projects. To date, we have assisted in the repair of 180 homes with support of more than \$2.2 million dollars.

For Citizens who need help buying their first home, we have a program that provides funding for down payments on the purchase of a home to a maximum of 5% of the purchase price up to \$15,000, plus purchase closing costs of 1.5% of the purchase price up to a cap of \$2,500. Today I am proud to say there are 419 homeowners who have received \$7.2 million to help them buy homes and leave a legacy for their children to inherit.

While I'm proud of all our people who are buying their own homes, I know the market is challenging out there, with many buyers ending up in bidding wars or having large mortgages that are beyond their means. Our homebuyer's program is ongoing, so you have the choice to wait and buy a house when the market feels right to you. When you are ready, your Métis Government can connect you with a broker or realtor to help you navigate the home buying process – call us toll free at **1-800-387-6004** or **204-589-0772** or by email at **info@lrcc.mb.ca**.

### Growing as the economic engine of the West

One of the other benefits of all these programs and services is the number of jobs they create for Métis Citizens. I am hearing about how much of a difference this is making in our communities, and I'm grateful that so many of our contractors are taking their tools out of the shed to support these important activities.

We would not be able to offer these resources to our people without the continued partnership of Canada. I thank Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for honouring the promises he made to me even before he was Prime Minister, by focusing his government on developing a distinction-based relationship with Métis Nation and following through on Canada's responsibility to us. This nation-to-nation relationship is so important to repairing the harms done to our people in the past and helping us secure long-term funding agreements. We will continue to work with Canada on these agreements and find new and better ways to support you.

I know we are starting to see the early signs of spring in many parts of Manitoba – the warming sun, the dampness in the air and the sound of birdsong – signaling the beginning of warmer weather. I know Harvesters are starting to watch the sky for the first geese and ducks returning to our province. With people getting outdoors and getting active on

the land, I pray that you will be safe and socially distanced in your Harvesting plans. Sharing our bounty is an important and fundamental part of our tradition, so don't forget the Elders, families and single mothers in your community.

I offer my prayers to all of our Citizens, friends and neighbours, and my deepest condolences to those who have been caused to grieve.

On behalf of the Manitoba Metis Federation, I want to again express our thanks to Elder George Fleury, who recently passed and has now rejoined his wife and family in his new home. We will be announcing a new Provincial Elder soon.

Thank you, the Citizens of our Nation, who believe in your Métis Nation and your Métis Government. Stay safe, look after each other as much as you can from a distance, and be confident we will keep fighting for you.

President David Chartrand, LL.D. hon. D.M. ∞

## Women in the Métis Nation

To celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, *Le Metis* interviewed Métis women involved in the Métis Nation and making a difference in their communities. The interviews have been edited for clarity and brevity.

### Brandi Vezina



A Winnipeg singer-songwriter, educator, and author, Brandi Vezina is on the Infinity Women Secretariat Board of Directors for the Southeast Region, and the Treasurer for the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) Stony Point Local. Brandi is part of a long line of

strong Métis women. Her mother, Holly Vee, wrote a song called "Settler's Granddaughter" about being Métis, and Brandi's grandmother is Elder Marcella Vezina, Elder for Metis Child and Family Services Authority, and Chair of the Stony Point Local. Brandi has written three books: *Raising Your Consciousness*, *Moonlit Path*, and the e-book *Going Inward*. She won an Inspire Educator award in the Role Model category in 2013. Musically, she has four singles available to stream, including the song "Danger." The song is a call to women to recognize warning signs in unhealthy relationships, and includes a traditional drum at the end to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Her album *#dontsettle* will be released in September 2021.

**Q.** What does being Métis mean to you?

**A.** Being Métis means being part of a rich fabric in Canadian history. I come from a long line of Métis matriarchs and men who were middlemen and part of the fur trade. My grandparents both connected me to the land as a child, and I'm thankful to know the ways of my ancestors.

**Q.** Who is your role model?

**A.** I have many role models. However, Louis Riel, my Papa, and Minister Anita Campbell inspire me to represent our Nation in all the things I do and wherever I go.

**Q.** What has been your proudest achievement?

**A.** I am most proud of my sobriety. I am in my ninth year of sobriety, and aside from successfully

completing two university degrees, it's the best gift I've given myself in this lifetime.

**Q.** What are your dreams and goals for the future?

**A.** My dreams and goals are to be a full-time artist and entrepreneur. I plan on touring throughout Turtle Island (North America) and Europe upon the release of my album *#dontsettle* in 2021.

I am currently working with a radio tracker here in Canada and Europe. I will be adding a publicist to my team this year and working with CCMA (Canadian Country Music Association) award-winning producer Murray Pulver and Terence "TEE" Lam, who has worked with the likes of Drake and Alessia Cara.

**Q.** Why do you think it's important to have an International Women's Day?

**A.** I think we as women are really starting to hold our power and we are reclaiming our connections to our Indigenous grandmothers. Our women are being recognized for our amazing contributions to the Métis Nation, and International Women's Day is a great way to showcase our Métis women.

**Q.** What advice do you have for Métis Youth interested in becoming more involved?

**A.** Do it! It's important to feel part of a community. We need powerful young leaders and now is the time to learn from our Métis Elders, local executives, and our Ministers.

For more information, visit [brandivezina.com/](http://brandivezina.com/).

## Debbie Forgie



A wife, mother, and grandmother, Debbie Forgie serves as Vice-Chair of the St. Eustache Métis Local. She sits on the Board for the Cartier Senior Citizens Support Committee, and the Community Futures White Horse Plains Board of Directors as Secretary. A member of the Infinity Women Secretariat, Forgie retired in 2013 after 37 years working at MTS, and now works part time at Wilf's Elie Ford. She also enjoys volunteering and gardening.

**Q.** What do you enjoy about volunteering?

**A.** I enjoy interacting with all the people from the community, young and old. I like to help out when I can. It is a good feeling to be able to give back to the community and have opportunities come up for the people from our community.

**Q.** When did you become connected to your Métis heritage?

**A.** Growing up we were not as involved. As we got older, we were aware of our Métis heritage. Our Local was resurrected back in the late '80s, and this is when I got involved with the Local. I am now very involved with the St. Eustache Métis Local.

**Q.** What other Métis women have played a strong role in your life?

**A.** My grandmother Rose Ross, who taught me how to sew, make hook rugs, and make bannock. She was also an avid storyteller. I liked to listen to the stories of how she grew up and the things they did as a family. My mother Pauline as well played a strong role in my life. She also had a lot of the family history and was a storyteller as well.

## Kyra De La Ronde



Kyra De La Ronde is a 21-year-old Michif woman from Selkirk whose family comes from Duck Bay. A Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) Citizen from the Interlake Region, and a member of the Selkirk Local, De La Ronde has been involved with the Interlake Regional Youth Advisory Committee since 2017. She was selected to be the Infinity Women Secretariat's Youth Representative for the Interlake Region in 2019, and in 2020, she was appointed by MMF President David Chartrand to be the presidential appointee to the Provincial Youth Advisory Committee.

**Q.** When did you first become connected to your Métis heritage, and how do you celebrate Métis culture?

**A.** I always knew I was Métis, and I always knew that my last name holds a lot of history. However, it wasn't until the loss of my grandfather, Clifford De La Ronde, when I realized I was in search of a deeper connection with my Nation. I've now been able to enrich my life with more of our culture and been able to share knowledge and teachings within my own family.

**Q.** What does being Métis mean to you?

**A.** To me, being Métis is so special. Being from the traditional Homeland, there is so much history surrounding us at all times and I feel so connected to the land I am on. I feel that to be a proud Métis woman is to have such strength, and every day I am reminded of these strengths.

**Q.** Who is your role model?

**A.** Growing up, my role models were always my grandmothers. I still am so close with the both of them and I enjoy the times where they share their stories with me. These past few years I have been so passionate about learning more about the strong women who paved the path here for me. While attending post-secondary school, I focused most of my research and studies on the Métis Matriarchs in Manitoba. So many of those women are also role models to me.

**Q.** What are your dreams and goals for the future?

**A.** Currently I am in school at Red River College for Indigenous Community Development and Social Innovation. The future I dream for myself is to be an Indigenous consultant to organizations regarding the TRC Calls to Action, simply creating a business plan or project plan to ensure that organizations are working towards Reconciliation. I hope to work either as an independent consultant, which is remarkable as an Indigenous woman, or working for the Manitoba Metis Federation or the Métis National Council.

**Q.** What would you like the future to look like for women?

**A.** I want a future where our women will have their place set at the table. I personally want to be a champion for our young girls to know that they are allowed to do anything they want, and that they will be supported no matter what they choose.

**Q.** What advice do you have for Métis Youth interested in becoming more involved?

**A.** Do it. The best thing I ever did was mention that I was interested in becoming involved. The easiest way to become involved is call your Local or Regional MMF office and ask them to get in contact with the Regional Youth Coordinator. There are so many ways to become involved within our community, we will always have a space for Youth who are reaching out. In saying that, we cannot tell if someone is interested or thinking about it until you reach out. I make sure to have my social medias open so anyone who sees my profile and sees that I post about MMF events can reach out to me and I can help connect them.

**Q.** Is there anything else we should know about you?

**A.** I currently am a full-time student during the COVID-19 pandemic and would like to thank the MMF for their financial support for students during these times to ensure I can put my whole focus on my studies and ensure my own personal success.

# Métis Veterans Legacy Commemorative Program to fund commemoration projects

On February 22, the Métis Nation announced the Métis Veterans Legacy Commemorative Program, which will promote awareness and appreciation of the achievements, contributions, and sacrifices made by Métis Veterans. With support from Veterans Affairs Canada, the program will invite Métis Citizens to create public displays of homage to Métis Veterans.

“Over the years, Métis have stepped forward to serve in uniform both here at home and around the world, and I’m very pleased to see the launch of a program that will promote awareness and appreciation of the countless sacrifices and contributions that Métis Veterans have made,” said the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, federal Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence. “Our government is committed to working with the Métis community to support the Veterans Legacy Commemorative Program, and to increase awareness of our programs and services among Métis Veterans. I’m forever grateful to Métis Veterans and their families for the sacrifices they have made in service of our country.”



The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay,  
federal Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate  
Minister of National Defence

David Chartrand, Minister of Veterans Affairs for the Métis National Council and President of the Manitoba Metis Federation, said the announcement is a milestone. “This signals the end of a 75-year battle for recognition of the sacrifices made by Métis men and women, who answered the call to protect democracy on foreign soil,” said President Chartrand. “It gives us an opportunity to ensure that any living Veterans, their spouses, and their children will see that their loved one’s memory is being honoured.”

Up to \$200,000 in funding will be available to eligible Métis Nation Veterans and Citizens; recognized

Métis Nation governments, organizations, and institutes; the National Métis Veterans Association; and recognized Canadian organizations and institutes. Funding will support projects that help commemorate WWII Métis Veterans, including the creation of public monuments, hosting of events, and undertaking of education initiatives.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for Métis people and Canadians in general to spend some time thinking about our Veterans and their sacrifices, and to find new ways to recognize them,” said President Chartrand. “We hope to see some innovative ideas for educational opportunities, ceremonies, and monuments to recognize our Veterans. I know our Métis Citizens have strong voices, and I know they will use this opportunity to come together and create meaningful tributes to our heroes.”



David Chartrand, Minister of Veterans Affairs for the  
Métis National Council and President of the Manitoba  
Metis Federation

“We’ve seen a very positive grassroots response to this announcement already, with relatives of Veterans and community groups approaching us to explore options. We already have our first application being processed, and we expect to see many more as the program unfolds. I’m personally excited about the responses we’ve had – it makes me proud that this funding is available for our Métis Veterans after such a long wait.”

The commemorative program is the third and final phase of an implementation strategy by the Métis Veterans Legacy Program (MVLV), which recognizes and honours the forgotten Métis Veterans who served Canada in WWII, and who returned home without acknowledgment or financial support. The MVLV came after 20 years of advocacy by President Chartrand, which led to the signing of the Métis Veterans Recognition Payment Contribution

## Community Photo

*Le Metis'* new Community Photo section invites Métis Citizens to send in photos to be featured in our newsletter. If you have a photo that celebrates the Métis Nation, send it to [communications@mmf.mb.ca](mailto:communications@mmf.mb.ca) and you may see it in print!



Getting into Michif!

Agreement in June 2019 between the Métis National Council and the Government of Canada, as well as a public apology in September 2019 from federal Minister MacAulay.

The first phase involved a campaign to identify living Métis Veterans and present them with \$20,000 Recognition Payments, and the second phase saw the compensation of spouses and children of deceased WWII Métis Veterans. Over the past year, Recognition Payments were given to 30 living WWII Métis Veterans, along with 30 spouses and 10 children of deceased WWII Métis Veterans. President Chartrand continues to search for Métis Veterans of WWII.

The Métis Veterans Legacy Commemorative Program team will begin reaching out to Métis communities and individuals across the Homeland about the program, and hope to begin announcing projects by June 2021.

For more information on the Métis Veterans Legacy Commemorative Program and to apply for funding, please visit [metisveterans.ca](http://metisveterans.ca), email [veteran.info@metisnation.ca](mailto:veteran.info@metisnation.ca), or call **1-800-532-1993**.