



# Le Métis

## President's Message



### Introduction

Last week was International Women's Day around the globe. Every March 8 since 1911, International Women's Day has celebrated the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

It wasn't until 1916 that Manitoba led the way for women to get the vote and run for office in Canada. Of course, it was many years before Indigenous women were fully included in Canada's confederation — and it could be argued that they are still fighting for equal footing today.

Shortly after International Women's Day, I was very proud to give greetings at the Annual General Meeting of the Infinity Women Secretariat, which took place on March 13. The Infinity Women Secretariat connects and empowers Métis women across the province through cultural heritage, employment programs, community engagement, leadership and governance development.

This has made me think about the role of women in Métis Nation. From our earliest days, women have been critical to our evolution as a Nation. When men were away on long trading expeditions, women were the teachers, guides and keepers of our culture for our Youth. They also played an important role in our battles, making bullets, hiding their men from the authorities and protecting children and Elders.

Even in my own childhood, there is no greater influencer of my beliefs and character than my mother. A woman who washed clothing to earn a living and care for her children, she was a pillar of strength who taught me to protect my name and remember where I come from. No matter what was going on around us, she was a source of strength and love that I still keep close to my heart.

### The impact of COVID-19 on women

COVID-19 has challenged us all, but it has also highlighted and emphasized existing inequalities in Canada. Women have felt the impacts of the pandemic more sharply than their male counterparts, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledging that the impact has been worse for women — calling it a “she-cession”. Employment among women remains about 5.3 per cent below where it sat in February 2020 — just before the first wave of COVID-19 — compared to a drop of about 3.7 per cent for men.

It has also emphasized the plight of women in unsafe homes. Statistics Canada data shows that police calls to domestic disturbances between March and June of 2020 were up 12 per cent nationally, compared to the same period in 2019. The situation is so serious that some have called gender-based violence the “shadow pandemic” of COVID-19.

Add to these challenges the ongoing issues of access to education and safe, affordable and accessible childcare, and it's clear to see that the pathway forward for women — including Métis women — is one full of challenges and hazards.

### The role of women at the MMF

Women are key participants within your Métis Government, and their voices are strong and respected. More than half of my Cabinet is women, with Mona Buors, Frances Chartrand, Denise Thomas, Marielle Gauthier, Leah LaPlante, Judy Mayer, Joan Ledoux, Julyda Lagimodiere, Mildred Dorian, JoAnne Remillard and Anita Campbell lending their strength and guidance to our governmental decisions.

Along with being the Minister of Finance and Human Resources, Minister Anita Campbell is also the spokeswoman for Infinity Women Secretariat, an affiliate that ensures Métis women are supported and helped in our communities.

Within the different portfolios and departments of the MMF, women are the dominant forces of leadership — the overwhelming majority of departments are run by female directors who show great strength and dedication in their daily work.

Even my own office is primarily run by women — women with knowledge, experience and expertise, who provide their advice and wisdom to me on a daily basis.

Strong men are not afraid of strong women — they know that a woman's strength does not diminish their own, but adds perspective and balance, creating harmony within the Nation.

### How the MMF works to elevate Métis women

Providing a safe place to plan a future is the first step. While I pray that no Métis woman will ever need it, we are in the process of creating that safe space for Métis women and children who need to escape domestic violence. Located here in Winnipeg, we've already identified the site and plan to begin development quickly.

The MMF also recognizes that mothers cannot focus on their own goals when the needs of their children are unmet. From the opening of Little Stars PLAYhouse in Winnipeg, Michif Children's Place in Dauphin and more coming to other locations like St. Eustache and Duck Bay, we are working rapidly to deliver culturally sensitive and appropriate childcare facilities for our children.

When women can think about their own goals, many turn their thoughts to education. Women are well-represented in our Post-Secondary Education Support Program, with women making up more than half of the funding recipients. Going into a number of disciplines from nursing to natural resource management, Youth attending post-secondary education are deepening the expertise and knowledge within our Nation.

Of almost 3,500 Métis people accessing Education and Training supports, 55 per cent are women. Approximately 70 per cent of Métis students in professional post-secondary studies are women. Even in the trades and applied arts at colleges, 53 per cent of students are women. I feel a great sense of pride in seeing Métis women pursue their own professional careers.

Once they've received their education, some Métis women turn their minds to business. We are continuing to see more and more women entrepreneurs, with 58 per cent more women-led businesses since 2018. In the last three years, Louis Riel Capital Corporation has supported 21 businesses with female owners for a total of \$3.9 million in commercial loans and 34 businesses with female owners for a total of \$1.3 million in non-repayable commercial grants. The \$1.3 million in grants have also created and maintained 142 additional jobs in Manitoba.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also delivered over \$4.5 million to 228 businesses with female owners to get through these challenging economic times.

I am incredibly proud of the grit, guts and heart of the Métis women who've chosen education and entrepreneurship as their path forward.

## Conclusion

Our Nation has a proud matriarchal history, and by lifting and celebrating that tradition, we can start countering the harsh colonial influence that has caused so many women to be treated as lesser, or created abuse and suffering.

There is no doubt in my mind that Métis Nation would not be what it is today without the many women who have worked tirelessly to advance our cause.

I thank all the women who have guided, supported and taught me throughout my life — my mother, my wife, my granddaughter, my staff, my Cabinet, and female Elders and Citizens.

I would like to take a moment to issue a challenge to Métis women who are active in their communities — you are a greater leader and a stronger voice than you may realize. Don't be afraid to use your influence, engage in politics, or go into business. In doing so, you are joining a proud tradition within our culture — leading families, leading communities and speaking up.

Perhaps, in time, we can teach other cultures about the strength that comes from working together.

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

Meeqwetch,

*President David Chartrand. LL.D. hon. Q.M. ∞*

## Elder Marcella Vezina on the strong women in the Manitoba Métis Community



Elder Marcella Vezina has been involved with the Manitoba Métis Government since the 1960s.

An Elder in the Stony Point area in the Manitoba Metis Federation's (MMF) Southeast Region, Vezina has been the Chairperson for the Stony Point Local for over a decade — a run that she says is her last. Including being the Elder for the Metis Child, Family and Community Services (MCFCS) Board, she is also a member of Infinity Women Secretariat, an MMF affiliate.

She was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, for her significant volunteer work in the province. One of her

other greatest achievements, she said, was graduating with a Grade 12 diploma at the age of 62.

While she's heavily involved with the Manitoba Métis Community, Elder Vezina didn't always know about her Métis identity.

At the age of seven or eight, she heard her grandmother speaking Cree, and asked her mother about it.

"I went home and I asked my mum, 'Are we Indian or what?'" she said. "So she said, 'Oh no, no you're not Indian, you're Scotch. You take after your father.' But that's laughable now to me, because my father was a Métis too! And my mother was a Métis, so, you know, why? They didn't want to be recognized as being any part of First Nations because they were so discriminated against."

The way Elder Vezina viewed her identity changed when she became involved in the formation of the Stony Point Local, the first Local in the Southeast Region, in 1967, the same year the MMF was founded.

"All of a sudden, we belonged, because we belonged to this Manitoba Metis Federation," she said.

Prior to being appointed as an Elder Advisor for the MCFCS Board in 2020, she was the board's treasurer. Elder Vezina reflected on

the creation of the agency, which received the formal mandate from the Province to deliver child and family services in 2003.

"That's a very wonderful thing, that we got to have our own child and family services. That is huge, as far as I'm concerned, because we remember when there was no such thing, and that children were adopted out to different families that were not Aboriginal," she said.

Elder Vezina is proud of all of the services the MMF is offering Citizens, from the First Time Home Purchase Program; to business loans; to the Prescription Drug Program provided by MEDOCare, which pays for Citizens' Pharmacare prescriptions if they are age 65 and older, and their income is \$25,000 or less; as well as the post-secondary scholarships she's seen her grandchildren benefit from.

"There's so much going on," she said. "I never thought I'd ever see this, you know? Like it's really growing (in) leaps and bounds, for the Métis people specifically. And it's all being led by (President) David Chartrand and the wonderful (Cabinet) that he has.

"That's what being Métis is to me: being proud, knowing where I came from, knowing what I know now, and knowing that I am now an Elder looking back at all these things that have changed in my lifetime."



Elder Vezina has had many women role models who helped shape her life. From her grandmother, who spoke Cree and was influential in teaching Elder Vezina about her heritage, to her mother, who cooked traditional Métis food, such as rabbit, muskrat, geese, deer, and moose meat.

Elder Vezina's aunt was Elsie Bear, a Senator for the MMF who received the Manitoba Order of the Buffalo Hunt. Elsie Bear, who passed away in 2002, also has a restaurant named after her: Elsie Bear's Kitchen, located at the MMF Home Office. It was Elsie Bear who got Elder Vezina involved with the MMF.

Elder Vezina said Elsie Bear, along with Senator Edward Head, an MMF founder and former President who passed away in 2009, helped push the MMF forward. "They were from the roots, and they knew that they had to work hard to push this organization into becoming a well-known, well-run government body," she said. "It's thanks to people like those two, for instance, that it is what it is today."

Denise Thomas, Southeast Region Vice-President and an MMF Minister, has also supported Elder Vezina in getting involved with the Métis Government.

"She helped me and my family along the road to attend meetings, and certain people are called on to go because, you know, you can depend on them to go," she said. "If she asks us to go somewhere, we put everything aside (to do it)."

Elder Vezina noted that the MMF has always supported Métis women.

"I'm happy that women are being recognized now for being strong, important, and needed, in the world of business and organizations," she said. "I think there are very few women in big governments, but we (the Manitoba Metis Federation) have never kept women back."



Photo credit: Curling Canada/Andrew Klaver

## MMF-sponsored Team Kerri Einarson wins 2021 Scotties

Gimli's Team Kerri Einarson, representing as Team Canada, beat Team Ontario to win the finals at the 2021 Scotties Tournament of Hearts in Calgary. The annual Canadian Women's Curling Championship, sanctioned by Curling Canada, took place February 19 – 28. The win earned the team the \$100,000 first-place prize, as well as the right to wear the Maple Leaf as Team Canada for the 2022 Scotties in Thunder Bay.

This is the second time in a row Team Kerri Einarson has won the Scotties. Formed in 2018, the Gimli team includes skip, Kerri Einarson; lead, Briane Meilleur; second, Shannon Birchard; and third, Val Sweeting.

Einarson is thrilled about the win. "I've dreamed of winning the Scotties Tournament of Hearts since I was a little girl, but to be honest, I've never dreamt of winning it twice back-to-back, which feels absolutely amazing – really a dream come true."

Einarson got into curling when she was eight years old, starting her career in Petersfield, Manitoba, where she grew up. "My parents got my brother and I into curling. I watched my uncle Greg McAulay win the Brier and Worlds back in 2000. Ever since then, I knew

I wanted to be a champion just like him," she said.

Einarson, who is Métis, said she is grateful for the team's sponsors, which include the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF). "I felt a great connection with the MMF," she said.

"A curling team like ours depends greatly on the generous sponsorship," said Einarson, "in order to support the costs we incur that are associated with training and competing at the highest level of our sport. Without that support we would not be able to chase our dreams; we truly appreciate our sponsors' support."

The team will be back in the Calgary bubble playing mixed doubles on different teams from March 18 – 25, followed by the Champions Cup and the Players' Championship at the Grand Slam of Curling on April 14 – 25, culminating in the World Women's Curling Championship from April 30 – May 9.

"We are very excited to get this opportunity to represent Canada on the World stage," said Einarson. "We will wear that Maple Leaf with pride."

# Girl Power

*Le Metis* interviewed three Manitoba Métis girls on being Métis, their future dreams, and the important women in their lives.

## Sabine, 6 years old



### **What does being Métis mean to you?**

To be nice to everyone and being able to jig. I like being Métis because I get to jig.

### **How do you take part in Métis culture with your family or community?**

Me and my mom like to fish and we do lot of art.

### **Which woman or women do you look up to, in your family or in the public eye?**

My mom because I love her so much and she loves me.

### **What would you like to be when you grow up?**

A vet – so I could help out animals.

### **What does girl power mean to you?**

That there is a girl superhero.

## Belle, 10 years old



### **What does being Métis mean to you?**

It means that I have fishing and hunting rights. (Belle related a story about a time she had a matter-of-fact discussion with her grandpa, in regard to throwing back a fish. She had to inform her grandpa that it is her Métis right to fish and take fish home.)

### **How do you take part in Métis culture with your family or community?**

We always go fishing, hunting, picking berries, and camping. We all like to fish, but I don't eat it, my mom does. My dad does all the hunting; my favourite thing to eat is deer steak and broccoli. Me and my friends pick berries during the summertime.

### **What would you like to be when you grow up?**

Well first I want to be a babysitter, so I could save up money for university, so I could be a doctor.

### **What's your favourite thing about being a girl?**

Women's rights – they have come along way.

### **What are your dreams?**

Be an artist. I like using my art app but drawing and painting too.

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

It is good because back in the day they had a lot taken away. No jeans, just had to wear dresses; no jobs, just had to stay at home.

## Shasta, 12 years old



### **What does being Métis mean to you?**

Being Métis means a lot of things to me. First off I am proud to represent my culture and I love to play my fiddle and I love to square dance.

### **How do you take part in Métis culture with your family or community?**

I take part in being Métis by square dancing for my community and going to fiddle camps and playing the fiddle with some of my friends.

### **Which woman or women do you look up to, in your family or in the public eye?**

My sisters.

### **What would you like to be when you grow up?**

When I grow up I want to be my dad's joy, my sister's laughter, my mom and stepdad's respect, and my brother's security. I want to be a teacher, and I want to teach in Dauphin and accomplish my dreams by being a street racer in Tokyo, Japan.