



Le Métis

President's Message



As COVID-19 continues to make it hard to connect with friends, family and community, we are all learning new ways to keep in touch and to share ideas and thoughts. While our first virtual Annual General Assembly was a success by all accounts, it cannot take the place of our in-person AGAs, where 3,000 or more of us gather to discuss and vote on important matters. We still hope to have an in-person Annual General Assembly this fall, if the health orders have changed and enough of us have been vaccinated.

In the meantime, because we can't get together and discuss important matters, and because it's important that we hear from you so we can represent your views and interests, we're going to be conducting surveys of our Citizens over the coming weeks and months. We'll be asking about the things that are on your mind: your worries, your needs and your thoughts on how supported you feel by not only your Métis Government, but our federal and provincial counterparts as well.

Our world has become increasingly digital, accelerated by the spread of COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distance. One of the outcomes of this digital world is an increased dependence on data. While I know that members of the Métis Community of Manitoba communicate regularly with each other and with your elected Métis officials, I also know there's a strong demand on us to show the data and statistics that support our knowledge of your needs and views.

When we are able to back up our knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting Métis farmers, ranchers, Harvesters, students and other segments of our population with data, we are able to prove that we are a strong community with shared purpose and perspective. The stronger we are and the more data we use to show that strength, the more we are able to influence the laws, regulations, and policies that affect our people. In effect, we can show who we are and what we stand for through the data we gather.

To ensure that the data that reflects our community views is well analyzed and presented, we are working with a third-party survey company, Probe Research Inc. Probe is a Manitoba-based company that specializes in public opinion surveys. If you receive a call or an email from Probe, you can be assured that we are actively guiding the survey questions and will ensure your information is kept confidential.

On behalf of your Métis Government, I ask that if you are sent a survey or receive a phone call about a survey, that you take the 10 to 15 minutes required to fill it out. Your answers matter to us and will be part of how we shape and share our Métis agenda in the future.

Being able to share who Métis Nation is and what we stand for has never been more important than it is

today. There are a growing number of people in Ontario and parts east who are self-identifying as Métis. What we know for a fact is that they are not us. Whatever they choose to call themselves due to a single or a small handful of Indigenous ancestors, they can't possibly understand what Métis Nation has been through since our birth as a nation. They don't understand the direct impact of colonialism on our people and the reign of terror that chased us from our land. They can't understand how we still feel those effects today. They don't know our fiddle music, our beadwork, our culture or our families: all the things that connect us together as a Nation. In short, they simply are not us. I often think about how many people there are in Canada who can trace their ancestry back to one or two Indigenous people – those individuals must number in the millions by now. What would happen to Louis Riel's little nation if our voices were drowned out by these millions?

Your Métis Government will never stop working hard to make sure our voice is heard and represented at the provincial, national and international levels. If that means we must adapt to the demands for data to show our united perspective, that's what we will do.

I will share more details about this survey and the results as the summer progresses. In the meantime, I strongly encourage all Citizens to get the vaccine as soon as they're able. If you have any concerns about the safety of the vaccine or your personal circumstances, of course you should speak with your doctor first. Let's all do our part to protect our Elders, our families and our communities and keep each other safe.

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

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

Meet the Métis ranchers caring for the MMF's bison herd



Jason and Erin Boily, owners of Iron Head Bison Ranch.

Growing up on a farm, Jason Boily had always dreamed of owning a bison ranch one day – to have the opportunity to spend more quality time with family, build a family legacy, raise bison, and provide quality meat to the community. That dream became a reality in 2017 when Jason and his wife, Erin, purchased land, some of which was previously owned by Jason's grandfather, in southeastern Manitoba near Richer. It would become Iron Head Bison Ranch.

For Jason and Erin, owning a bison ranch allows them to connect with their Métis roots.

According to Erin, Jason has always been drawn to animals, “especially bison with it being such a large, majestic animal with a rich history in our Métis culture.” As for herself: “I grew up in a community where hunting and fishing was a natural part of (our) lifestyle and Métis cultural roots are strong. The incredible health benefits of bison meat and the ability to utilize the whole animal as our ancestors have was a huge contributing factor to our decision to begin our bison business.”

Iron Head attempts to utilize the entire animal by turning winter pelts into robes or rugs, and summer pelts into leather with gloves, slippers, and gauntlets. They use the skulls and bones for soup or dog bones, and offer the cuts on the animals and organs to the public.

“Our ancestors,” said Jason, “they hunted bison their whole lives. They were pretty much eradicated by the Europeans in the 1800s up until the early 1900s, there was almost none left, so it takes ranchers now to bring them back. And for me to be able to ranch these animals and to be my heritage animal and to be so connected to my ancestors with it is a real gift for me.”

Both Jason and Erin grew up in small Métis communities: Jason, a former professional hockey player, in La Broquerie, a small French Métis community in southeast Manitoba; Erin in western Manitoba in San Clara. The ranch offers the couple the opportunity to teach their three daughters to care for animals and the land.

From starting the ranch from the ground up in 2017, to selling grass-fed bison meat on their website today, the ranch has seen large successes in a short time period – achievements that did not come without trials and tribulations, however.

“First, we had to purchase the land and fence it to prepare for our first herd,” Erin said. “The land we purchased is very rocky, so creating a custom bison fence around the rocks was a struggle, and not to mention our Canadian seasons, which sometimes had vast amounts of water postponing the completion of fencing.”

The start-up also accumulated many expenses, from purchasing the animals, maintenance, unexpected machine breakdowns, and damaged fences, to name a few.

“Overall design and layout of the farm and how animals would be rotating pastures and moving through facilities has been a challenge, but we have managed to learn as we go and make changes as needed,” Erin said.

Another hurdle came as they reached the finishing stage of the animals and were ready to process the meat.

“We struggled with the inability to access a federal abattoir in a low-stress environment for our animals. We found a local provincial abattoir and packaging plant to work with to begin selling bison meat gate to plate. Learning the cuts of the bison and what sizes and weights would be appropriate for sale have been a huge learning curve in the marketing of our product,” Erin said.

“Sometimes when you come up with a dream and you want to build it, when it's in a dream phase, you think everything can kind of just run seamlessly and smooth. But as soon as you start putting it into action, and you make it from a dream into reality, you start running into a lot of different difficulties, whether it's weather, whether you're rained out and you can't fence, or the animals are not ... happy where they are. There's different little things that you pick up on cues that you can't read in a book,” Jason added, “that you just learn by being with them and understanding them better that way.”

Like many other businesses, they also had to pivot during the pandemic. Not only did the price for live animals plummet – dissolving Iron Head's plans to sell live animals – but the cost of feed increased, as did food prices. Additionally, restaurants shut down, leaving one less outlet to sell meat.

“We had to quickly change our business plan during the pandemic from cow calf operation to a finishing herd to sell meat sooner than expected,” Erin said.

Iron Head also received a COVID-19 support grant from the Manitoba Metis Federation, which helped offset those pandemic-related losses.

Jason and Erin's hard work, passion, and determination hasn't stopped. Erin made a career shift last fall, leaving her job in social work to fully commit to the ongoing growth and marketing of the 492-acre ranch, while Jason balances his time between working in the oil and gas industry and managing the ranch.

The ranchers' daily routine to ensure a thriving, healthy herd involves ensuring sufficient quantity and quality of feed.

“This changes day to day depending on ranch needs, priorities, and seasons,” Erin said. “For example, supplementary feeding may be required when calving, rut season, and finishing. Bales need to be hauled to the farm – both hay bales and oat straw bales. Pellets need to be arranged for delivery to ensure that there is supplemental feed available as needed depending on the feeding needs of the herds. Minerals need to be distributed into the feeding troughs and ordered if more stock is needed.”

A typical day also includes ensuring positive herd interaction, fence monitoring and maintenance, facilities maintenance, and ensuring adequate water supply by hauling water to the pastures in the warmer months.

Erin said there have been unfortunate words of discouragement from others in their path to start up a bison ranch, but the Boilys are glad they persevered.

“We have learned to keep focused on our dream and reach out to the people who are encouraging and supportive in our long-term goals.”

Have you herd?

In May 2020, the Manitoba Métis Federation’s (MMF) 12-bison herd – located on a farm in Rosa, Manitoba – moved into the care of Iron Head, which now has over 168 bison. The MMF purchased cows from Iron Head, increasing the herd to 16, but the group is growing, with up to six births expected during the present calving season.

Follow along on the MMF’s social media channels for updates on the MMF’s bison herd, including our colouring contest, with entries due on May 28. Follow Iron Head Bison Ranch on Facebook and Instagram @ironheadbison, and visit their website at <https://ironheadbison.com>.



Métis soccer player commits to Kansas’ Tabor College

When planning for his post-secondary soccer career, especially in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Daniel Nikkel took a proactive approach.

With in-person recruiting limited due to the health crisis, the Métis Citizen compiled a highlight package showing off the skills he’s learned as part of the Winnipeg South End United (WSEU) club to send to colleges and universities across Canada and the United States.

But it turned out that Tabor College in Kansas had been keeping an eye on Nikkel, who recalled that Tabor reached out to him and sought to secure his signature quickly.

“Right off the bat, they offered me a scholarship,” the 17-year-old said. “After talking for months and looking through their website, being impressed with what they had to offer, it seemed like the right route to go.”

In a recent phone interview, Nikkel said that he prides himself on playing a well-rounded game. Though he started out as a scorer, Nikkel’s shift to fullback made him focus on the defensive side of the ball as well.

“I was a little speed demon and I loved to attack, and I loved the satisfaction of dribbling past players,” Nikkel said. “Coming into Grade 7, I found my role of

being a defender, more on the wide side. It allows you to defend and attack at the same time. There’s beauty in scoring goals and being the hero of the team, but it’s definitely a satisfying responsibility of holding the back line and not allowing your opponents to score on you.”

Nikkel played soccer for fun during elementary school but was eventually approached by a friend’s brother about trying out for WSEU and taking his game to the next level. Nikkel tried out and made the squad. Though the team struggled in Nikkel’s early years, even suffering through a winless season, the same group of players stuck it out over the years to become a force.

“We got better as the years progressed. We went from losing many games to eventually winning our last indoor season (in 2019-20) and becoming league champions there,” Nikkel said.

With WSEU, Nikkel travelled to tournaments across Canada and the United States, helping the team win its division at the Heartland Midwest Classic in Kansas City in back-to-back years.

As for Nikkel’s education, he plans to major in English to help him realize his lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer.



Métis soccer player Daniel Nikkel of Winnipeg will suit up for the Tabor Bluejays starting with the 2021-21 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics season.

Menzies in touch with Métis roots



Métis Citizen Jayme Menzies, shown with Agoojin Volleyball Club co-founder Tristan Dreilich, recently received two Sport Manitoba honours.

It took Jayme Menzies some time to learn how to embrace her Métis background, but now that she's done it, she's all in.

Menzies, a former University of Winnipeg volleyball star, co-founded Winnipeg-based Agoojin Volleyball Club in 2018 to prepare Indigenous girls for post-secondary sport. For her efforts, Sport Manitoba recently honoured Menzies with a pair of awards: the Peter Williamson Memorial Award for the Train to Win category, and, particularly close to Menzies' heart, the Manitoba Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Council Indigenous Female Coach of the Decade.

"It's pretty meaningful to me on a number of levels, but especially because I know that the Indigenous committee that chooses (the winner), they value a more holistic measure of what a good coach is," said Menzies, who is also head coach of Canadian Mennonite University's women's team. "It's not just about your winning record. It's about the mental, emotional, and cultural elements that you're bringing to the space."

That describes the approach Menzies has taken to the Agoojin club, which she co-founded with fellow Citizen Tristan Dreilich after identifying accessibility gaps and a lack of post-secondary representation for female and two-spirited First Nations and Métis athletes. The club currently has U18 and U16 teams.

Menzies also hopes Agoojin can help introduce Indigenous athletes to non-Indigenous communities and bring them the credit they deserve.

"We can build them up, celebrate them, make role models and leaders out of them," said Menzies, who helmed Team Manitoba at the 2017 North American Indigenous Games. "They can have a platform so people can see them and follow them."

Menzies, who grew up in Dauphin and attended high school in Brandon, appreciated the opportunity to embrace her roots, noting that her grandmother withdrew from Métis culture when raising her children.

"She did that in order to protect her kids, because she'd witnessed the racism and the systemic and relational repercussions of what being Métis in Manitoba can look like," Menzies said. "My mom was not raised in her Métis culture or language, or in the Métis community."

Menzies said she was aware of her Métis roots growing up, but was unsure of what to make of them. When she, her siblings, and cousins grew up and moved to Winnipeg, they took the opportunity to learn more and start to immerse themselves in the culture, which subsequently worked its way back up to the older generations.

"Not only is my generation fully embracing it and expressing it in different ways, but now I'm pretty happy to see that our parents are wearing their Métis-ness as a badge of honour again, and even my 94-year-old *mémère*, my grandmother, she's living to see a time when Métis people can be proud about it," she said. "I hope it's freeing for her that it's no longer something to be ashamed of and we can just be ourselves."

Menzies said she understands why her grandmother did not embrace her Métis background, especially in rural Manitoba, where she feels that people are pressured to identify as fully Indigenous or not at all in an area where racism is prevalent, whereas there is more nuance to identity in Winnipeg.

"There's a spectrum of all that in between, people accessing each other's cultures," she said. "There's more of an open-mindedness about cultures and experiencing it and expressing it."

In addition to accessing the greater variety of cultural offerings in Winnipeg, Menzies also tapped into Indigenous sport and its unique models.

"That opened a world of way healthier sport for me. It just became about connection to people and expressing identity and making space for the whole person: emotions and mental and spiritual self can be in the gym," she said.

During the pandemic, Menzies hasn't had much opportunity to coach athletes, but has instead shifted to coaching coaches with an eye toward solidifying Agoojin's foundation.

In addition to creating building blocks such as developing a website during the slowdown, Menzies also started a mentorship program for 10 young women between the ages of 18 and 22 who aspire to coach.

"My hope is that every spring and summer, Agoojin can run a young coaches mentorship initiative. This is the trial run," Menzies said. "The idea is that they'll shadow me or other experienced coaches for a month or two and then they will go on to deliver July and August camps once they're ready or feeling confident and comfortable."

"Their knowledge of the sport is incredible, but now they'll be able to get comfortable with the coaching side of it."

Once programming gets up and running again, Menzies said the club will start a shift towards serving younger age groups, starting at the U14 level.

"They need to have those positive outlets earlier in life because by 17, 18, you either access programming or not," she said.

For more on the club, check out [@agoojin_vball](#) on Instagram.

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 and you may see it in print!



They see me rollin', they grazin'