

BEST BUSINESS COLUMN OR FEATURE

LISA GREGOIRE

Nunatsiaq News

The winning entry cast a light on a very unique topic—the eiderdown industry. Ms. Gregoire skillfully wove facts, figures and faces into this enlightening feature story. I really enjoyed the balance she struck between the business elements and the historical significance of collecting the eiderdown. Very well written and informative. Bravo!

DANIEL J. ROWE

The Eastern Door

A very well-written feature on an important local issue that directly affects businesses. Quotes propel the story and the terrific writing illustrates the issues for businesspeople caught in the middle of a political sword fight. This was a close second.

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EASTERN DOOR

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Chateauguay businesses respond to boycott

DANIEL J. ROWE
THE EASTERN DOOR

If businesses in Chateauguay did not know the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake was intent on putting pressure on their mayor to drop a lawsuit she spearheaded related to the return of lands on Highway 30, they do now.

Businesses in the neighbouring municipality received letters this week from the MCK that read: "the MCK has decided to cease purchases of goods and services from the vendors in Chateauguay," and the blame lies firmly on Nathalie Simon's shoulders, according to the MCK.

"The boycott will be lifted as soon as the lawsuit has been withdrawn," the letter concludes.

The letter is signed by Joe Norton, a month after the Mohawk Council grand chief announced the boycott in mid-July.

Obsession Bakery owner Anne Fradette-Brunet posted the letter on the bakery's Facebook page and it was shared 56 times as of printing.

"You'd be amazed at how many positive comments and private messages from residents of Kahnawake saying, 'no one is going to tell me where I can or cannot shop, and we will continue to support you,'" said Obsession owner Anne Fradette-Brunet.

Fradette-Brunet, like many business owners, prefers to stay away from politics.

"Businesses have to distance themselves from anything political," she said. "You can't do that. You get dragged in like this through no fault of your own, what are you supposed to do?"

Fradette-Brunet sent a message to the city of Chateauguay, who responded that the issue is before the courts.

"In the meantime, we're supposed to be used as pawns



The Mohawk Council of Kahnawake issued a letter to Chateauguay businesses on Wednesday informing them that the MCK will not be doing business with them until the Highway 30 land dispute has been settled.

and targeted like this?" said Fradette-Brunet. "I don't know how fair that is. It's frustrating."

Fradette-Brunet has worked with Kahnawake for years and volunteered her business to host the Chateauguay Angels toy drive that provides toys to underprivileged families in the two communities at Christmas.

"The folks in Kahnawake are so wonderfully supportive and they come back, so I don't see how this is ever going to be a good thing for any kind of relations between the two towns," she said.

Norton said the limited re-

herited the business from his father and felt the letter was a 'slap in the face' to an establishment that's been a friend of Kahnawake for years.

"I've seen it from the worst to when it's really great," said Scrimgeour, who delivered food to Kahnawake with his father in the summer of 1990. "I'll be honest with you, probably 30-40 percent of my clients are on the rez, and I support them for whatever they do, but when a person attacks a business for no apparent reason just because he or she wants to prove a point to another politician, that's not right."

As The Eastern Door arrived at the establishment a Kahnawake resident was getting a vehicle serviced and joked, "oh yeah, I'm not supposed to be here." Scrimgeour looked at the issue with the person's car and did not charge.

Bob's Radiator services many vehicles, including some who work for the council, and wishes someone would have spoken to him directly instead of sending the letter.

"I prefer to be told what the problem is than to be told through the backdoor," he said.

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LYLE STEWART

the Nation

An extremely well-written story with punchy grafts. Mr. Stewart has crafted a memorable feature that thoroughly explains what makes Kong-struction tick as a company.

Honourable Mentions:

BEN BULMER

The Low Down to Hull & Back News

FRED RYAN

Pontiac Journal du Pontiac

1 Tiny Nunavut community reviving eiderdown industry

LISA GREGOIRE

From the time he was an infant in his mother's amauti to age 22, which is what he is now, Alex "Puaq" Ippaq has been going out on the land every summer.

From his home in Sanikiluaq in southern Hudson Bay, his family — grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters — would set off to various destinations on the Belcher, Sleeper and King George islands to camp, hunt and fish.

When he was old enough, he would help collect the down that mother eiders pluck from their skin to line their nests.

Ippaq and his family members would only take a portion of the fluffy eider, he said recently on the phone from Sanikiluaq, so as not to jeopardize the baby ducks.

And anyway, biologists who study eiders say the mothers pluck more if they think there's not enough insulation.

It's that insulating factor — some claim it's the warmest material on the planet — that makes eiderdown desirable and expensive.

A little more than a decade ago, the people of Sanikiluaq got some government money and started making eiderdown parkas for local sale, but the venture petered out after a few years for a variety of reasons.

Now, with some new modern equipment, money from three levels of government, and local people committed to making it work, the community of Sanikiluaq is reviving its commercial down production.

"We were originally planning to have it as a one-year pilot but by the looks of things, we're going to be operating for years to come," said Brandon Clark, Sanikiluaq's economic development officer.

Which is good, he added,

because there aren't many opportunities for local people to find jobs and make money.

The Down Association of Canada, which goes by the name Downmark, says eiderdown is the best of all goose and duck down because it is the fluffiest and because it clings to itself.

Once stuffed inside a coat or blanket, the down traps body heat and provides a barrier to cold, offering one of the best known insulating materials, natural or synthetic, known to humankind.

For generations, Inuit from southeastern Hudson Bay have been eating eider ducks, collecting the down and making parkas with it. Traditionally, they used the actual duck skin as the parka's outer layer, with wind and water resistant feathers attached.

The practice was captured in the award-winning and much-lauded documentary *People of a Feather*, directed by biologist Joel Heath and released in 2012.

Heath is also president of the Arctic Eider Society, a charitable organization that works with Inuit and Cree in East Hudson Bay to marry traditional knowledge and scientific research to address issues of local concern including environmental change and the impacts of development.

People of a Feather helped draw the attention of southern audiences to an ancient and sustainable harvest and to the eiderdown product itself.

"I think it's great. More jobs that are available that are linked to their culture and use their traditional skills, the better," said Heath.

"Obviously our reason for making the film had nothing to do with marketing the eiderdown industry but it's a good economic development spin-off that came out of the film."

Early in March, the federal, territorial and hamlet governments issued a joint news release saying Sanikiluaq would get more than \$175,000 to re-start eider product development: \$107,394 from the Government of Nunavut economic development, \$39,511 from the hamlet and \$28,952 from the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

That money, said Clark, will go toward paying harvesters for the down, upgrading processing equipment and paying local seamstresses to design and make parkas, vests and duvets.

So far, the project has been run out of the hamlet office but soon it will be transferred to the newly-created Sanikiluaq Development Corp.

Clark said the eider operation that ran from 2000 to 2003 concentrated on local sales and relied on government money. "Now we're looking to sell finished products outside the community in a high-end market," he said.

Sanikiluaq's senior administrative officer has already been courted by southern buyers and marketing the products, Clark said. They suspect parkas would sell in southern boutiques for between \$1,500 and \$2,500.

But before they can officially launch the project this summer, they need a Canadian Wildlife Service permit and approval from the Nunavut Impact Review Board. Both of those processes are currently underway.

That's necessary in order to ensure the project doesn't negatively impact the eider population.

Clark said local organizers have been working with the hunters and trappers association to identify popular nesting sites and sustainable collection practices.

Heath said wildlife specialists from Environment Canada are hoping to travel to the Belcher islands in summer 2016 to survey the population and assess its health by gathering baseline data.



Johnnie Ippaq, left, and Maria Kudluorok, right, pose with director Joel Heath wearing traditional eider skin clothing created for recreation scenes from *People of a Feather*. (PHOTO BY JOHNNY KUDLUOROK)

"If people were going back and visiting the same nests over and over again, that would be a problem," Heath said. "But people are conscientious about that so I don't think that will be an issue. They realize it's important to be sustainable."

Clark is confident the project will go ahead so organizers have already spent about \$30,000 on new equipment including a dryer, two cleaners which tumble the down to filter out debris and an oven which sterilizes the down for commercial use.

They are hoping to pay harvesters between \$100 and \$150 per kilogram of down.

It takes about one kilogram to make a queen-sized duvet. The same amount would be enough for two women's parkas.

Clark said he's expecting to purchase about 300 kg of down this summer — and much of that is likely already in town.

Because people traditionally collected down when they're out hunting and camping, there are stockpiles of the fluffy stuff packed into garbage bags in many Sanikiluaq homes.

Arctic eider ducks are unique in several ways. For one thing, they're bigger. Eiders can reach three kilograms in size, compared to the average mallard which weighs one third to one half that.

And Arctic eiders don't migrate like other duck species, Heath explained.

While they do travel around in winter in search of open water, their movement is currently not considered by wildlife biologists to be full migration. But that could change.

As Heath so vividly showed in his film, the more frequent releases of freshwater into James Bay from massive hydroelectric dams controlled by Hydro Quebec can cause entrainments, change currents and cause quicker freeze-ups, preventing the eiders from accessing marine shellfish, their main source of food.

It's possible — though at this point, it's speculation, Heath says — that Arctic eiders may one day migrate in winter to find food or else suffer population decline.

"The eiderdown industry is not going to directly affect the population but the population will affect the eiderdown industry," Heath said.

So the Arctic Eider Society, in conjunction with Environment Canada scientists and local people, will continue to monitor the population as best they can, he said.

2 New StatsCan study shows widespread hunger in Nunavut

NUNATSIAQ NEWS

A new report from Statistics Canada confirms what most Nunavummiut already know: that the territory has the highest rate of food insecurity in the country.

The report, Food Insecurity in Canada, released March 25, found more than one-third of Nunavut households don't get enough to eat.

In 2011-12, an estimated 36.7 per cent of Nunavummiut struggled with food insecurity, the StatsCan report said — more than four times the Canadian average of 8.3 per cent.

The report defines food insecurity as when one or more members of the same household do not have access to a variety or quantity of food that they need, due to lack of money.

It found that households that relied on government benefits as their main source of income were over three times more likely to experience food insecurity than households where members received salaries or wages.

About four in 10 residents of Nunavut are on social assistance, the highest proportion in the country.

The report also found that food insecurity was more common among households with children, then in those without.

Further to that, single parent households reported the highest rate of food insecurity.

Research has found that people who experience food insecurity also tend to report poor health, long-term physical or mental disabilities, multiple chronic conditions and major depression.

The federal New Democrats used the new figures to point blame at the Conservative government for its failure to "fix" Nutrition North Canada, the federal program that subsidizes food in northern and isolated communities.

"These statistics demonstrate the Conservatives' utter failure to ensure that northerners have secure access to nutritious and affordable food," said NDP MP Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories) in a March 29 release.

"Even as eiders are rooting through garbage to find food, the Conservatives have refused to acknowledge how intellectual the Nutrition North program has been."

The NDP cited the 2014 report of the Auditor General, which found that the Nutrition North was not effectively passing on its air freight subsidy to consumers.

But the office of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development minister Bernard Valcourt shot back March 26, saying the program has been successful in increasing the volume of perishable nutritious food shipped to northern communities by about 25 per cent since it was implemented.

"To continue progress, our government committed significant funds in 2014-2015 to increase pro-

3 Moving heaven and earth

Inuit construction company "Kong-struction" is ready to start beating its chest
by Lyle Stewart



The annual Kuujuaq Mining Workshop this year will be a coming-out of sorts for a fledgling construction company based in Kangirsuk, a tiny Inuit community (population 300) on the Bay of Ungava.

Kong-struction is less than two years old, but the largely Inuk-operated firm has made huge strides toward becoming a player in the booming construction industry in northern Quebec. When company representatives appear at the Kuujuaq conference April 28-30, they'll tell a seemingly unlikely story of building a thriving business out of scrapped vehicles, determination, a philosophy of mutual support and a lot of elbow grease.

It's the brainchild of Robert Jr. Drapeau, a 30-year construction industry veteran who is familiar to many Cree who worked with him and the company, Construction Val-d'Or, founded by his late father, Robert Sr.

"It started coming together when I was working in Kangirsuk in the summer of 2012," Drapeau recounts. "I went up there and started teaching construction to local people. It worked well. People who had never worked on heavy machin-

ery were showing up on time every morning. They really wanted to accomplish something."

Drapeau noticed a collection of broken-down equipment rusting away in the local dumpsite. He negotiated with the community to purchase four pieces of discarded equipment and put people to work putting the pieces back together. The first truck had to be dug out of deep snow bank.

"It was all torn to shreds," Drapeau laughs. "But I saw a great opportunity to take them apart and teach mechanics; how to rebuild and properly maintain them."

They brought an abandoned engine back to life, ordered replacement brakes and a windshield, then painted and modified the hood of a school bus to fit the first company truck. It took months of hard work and hundreds of hours of labour to make it professionally operational.

Drapeau credits Alexis Bado, a program officer with the Sustainable Employment Department of the Kativik Regional Government, with providing training subsidies to sustain the project until it could get on its feet.

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