

# Students learning practical skills during construction of Montreal Lake greenhouse

By Chelsea Laskowski  
For Eagle Feather News

Christina Waditaka's first time behind the wheel of a skid steer was a game-changer.

Just a few hours earlier, the Montreal Lake Cree Nation Grade 12 student had been so intimidated by the prospect of handling the machine that she nearly backed out of the skid steer training taking place at Senator Allen Bird Memorial School.

rest of the four-season, off-grid greenhouse.

Teacher Christina Lorentz helped initiate the greenhouse project, and said the students transformed over the course of the two-day foundation work. Some showed up late on the first day and were unexcited during classroom safety learning, but by the time they got out to the Camp Hope site they became focused and driven.



The group of Montreal Lake students proudly show their new hoodies and certificates from Almita Piling.

But she stuck it out, and within 24 hours Waditaka was taking charge of the vehicle and drilling deep into the ground to install what's called a helical pile – a steel pipe designed to stay anchored in rough terrain – that will act as the foundation for a greenhouse for the community.

The foundation-laying work Waditaka and around a dozen Grade 10, 11 and 12 classmates did this fall makes up Phase 1 of a two-phase greenhouse build at Camp Hope, about 10 minutes outside Montreal Lake.

For Waditaka, whose family is already quite handy, the confidence she gained over those two days opened her eyes to a whole new career opportunity.

"I want to learn how to drive, not just skid steers, all kinds of trucks. Like, heavy equipment trucks, those would be nice to drive," she said.

Waditaka will get a chance to use heavy equipment this spring, when she and other community members spend two weeks building the

Even when it snowed, the students showed up ready and willing to work.

"Quite often in schools we lose our students because it's all bookwork, we're sitting down and they're forced to just memorize things. And I think this opportunity really allowed our students to get in there and get their hands dirty. They learned skills that they'll take with them for the rest of their lives," Lorentz said.

The entire project was made possible through a partnership with the school, community and the non-profit group Focus Forward for Indigenous Youth (FFIY). Lorentz had been in contact with Evan Veryard, founder of FFIY, who had proposed building a greenhouse, and offered guidance and resources to provide hands-on learning for young people in the community.

From there, construction company Almita Piling's Vice President Bill Baillie volunteered his staff and equipment for Phase 1 to give the teens two days of training and first-hand construction experience.

Almita Saskatchewan's regional



Christina Waditaka had quite the eventful first time driving a skid steer. Her experience though has inspired her to learn to drive all sorts of heavy machinery.

manager Simon Pollard said this was a change of pace for his company, which is usually driven on making money, but their volunteer work was well worth it when they saw the look of pride on the young people's faces.

Pollard said any preconceived notions people may have had about First Nations communities went out the window when they got to Montreal Lake. The community was hospitable, provided a fish feast and moose meat, wrangled up steel-toed boots for the students, and

housed the Almita workers while they were there.

"They looked after us," Pollard said.

He said he'd hire a handful of the most eager students he worked with "in a heartbeat. I don't know what the issue is with people's perspectives on not hiring First Nations people. I just don't."

Principal Simon Bird said he is grateful for Almita's generosity, which included giving the teens free hats, hoodies, and certificates for their hard work.

## The History of Justice in Saskatchewan from an Indigenous Perspective

The Honourable Judge Gerald Morin  
Silas E. Halyk, QC, Visiting Scholar in Advocacy



Judge Morin's appointment to the Saskatchewan provincial court in 2001 hailed the introduction of the Cree language into the province's courtrooms. Join us for this free event - everyone welcome.

Monday, Jan. 22, 2018  
12pm (noon)

MLT AIKINS Lecture  
Theatre (room 150)  
College of Law  
15 Campus Drive  
University of Saskatchewan



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN  
College of Law  
LAW.USASK.CA