

## RMC hosts first Aboriginal Conference in June

by [Marlene Girouard](#)

The first Aboriginal Conference at the Royal Military College in Kingston will recognize the contributions of First Nations, Metis and Inuit veterans to the Canadian Military. The event takes place on National Aboriginal Day June 21-22.

Victoria Edwards, Department of National Defence, and member of the Defence Aboriginal Advisory Group who will be making a presentation at the conference says, "This event aims to celebrate, raise visibility and increase awareness of Aboriginal contributions to the Canadian forces. It also endeavours to build bridges between these communities and develop ideas that will help strengthen Aboriginal-military relations in the future. It is hoped that this will not only advance the Canadian Forces' efforts to enhance Aboriginal representation and retention, but also assist Aboriginal, public service, military and research communities to find common ground and ways to promote future collaboration and discussion."

The conference honours Aboriginal participation in wars which Canada's Aboriginal people have fought in proportionately higher numbers than that of any other ethnic group.

Edwards adds, "Aboriginal veterans fought in all three wars. While fighting for Canada's freedom there were those who lost their lives, and many were declared heroes. Upon returning home First Nations veterans did not receive the same treatment as non-Aboriginals. The benefits they were entitled to were less and they were not allowed to return to their home communities to live, because they had to extinguish their Aboriginal rights."

There is no cost to attend the conference, which is open to all. Pre-registration is strongly suggested with [online registration](#) encouraged.

According to the website on [Ontario's Aboriginal Veterans](#), "the Government of Canada is working to ensure that the significant wartime contributions of Aboriginal veterans are remembered and recognized and that they receive the services and benefits to which they are entitled. The government declared 2005 the Year of the Veteran and supported an Aboriginal Spiritual Journey in which joined Aboriginal veterans on a trip to Europe to call home the spirits of fallen comrades."

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## The Spirit of a Tree lives at University of Victoria

by [Wendy -Joy Sero](#)

"He took over our lives. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and hear this voice, like a grandparent talking to you. That's the way of the pole, telling you what to do." relates Clarence (Butch) Dick, a Songhees carver.

Dick is speaking of the western red cedar sapling that he carved with the help of 36 University of Victoria students. The cedar's journey began over 18 months ago, its life given into the hands of Dick and the students. Over the long hours of chipping and scraping, the students began to feel a change within themselves. Those involved with the creation began to call the sapling, "Old Man".



Photo from University of Victoria  
Student volunteers help bring in "Old Man"

The totem pole's designer, Fabian Quocksister, a hereditary chief and a Songhees and Laichwiltach carver, said he has come to fervently appreciate the carvers of the past, who worked with stones and shell and beaver tooth tools. He, like many involved with the tree, talked to the sapling,

"I spoke to it," he explained. "I announced my name and my lineage. I said I was going to do the best I could to bring it to life again."

In January 2006, The Old Man came into its resting place in the MacLaurin building at the entrance to the David Lam Auditorium, on the University of Victoria campus, to the sound of a lifting song, sung by the steady beat of a drum and the tears of all those involved.

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## First Nations University: changes expected this summer

by [Jennifer Ashawasegai](#)

This summer could see recommended changes to the way First Nations University of Canada governs itself. More than a year ago, some high profile suspensions and firings created havoc for the university, CBC reports.

The university was established in 1976 through a partnership between the Saskatchewan Indian Federated Nations and the University of Regina. In the summer of 2003, the university made its transition from the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College to the First Nations University of Canada. First Nations University is currently one of the few First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions operating in partnership with a major university. The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Act of the Legislative Assembly of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations specifies the composition and responsibilities of the board of governors. Two board members are directly appointed by the FSIN, with other members appointed by Indian Affairs, Saskatchewan Tribal Councils, Saskatchewan universities, Saskatchewan Learning, First Nations University of Canada and the university's student association.



After the troubles, which also included allegations of financial irregularities at the university, FSIN chiefs appointed a task force to recommend changes to the way First Nations University governs itself. One of the recommended changes include a "smaller board of governors, with fewer politicians involved and greater protection of academic freedom," according to a CBC story.

The task force released its report last December, and CBC reports a group of FNUC faculty members said they didn't want the recommendations swept under the rug, and called for an action plan to be put in place in April.

However, the chiefs have put off making an April decision on the recommended changes until the FSINs summer assembly.

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## Nunavut high schools have seventy-five percent dropout rate

by [Colin French](#)

The Inuit in Nunavut are facing serious unemployment as 75 per cent of students are dropping out of high school. Released by the territory of Nunavut, the final report on the Land Claims Agreement says that the education system is failing to produce literate youth, and has allowed non-Inuit to secure top government jobs.

Among other findings, only 25 per cent of Inuit students are graduating from high school and suicide, smoking, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis, are greater than the national average.

Nunavut Premier, Paul Okalik, has said that the Inuit are in a transition stage from traditional ways of life with thousands of years experience to a modern wage based economy. The report by former B.C. Supreme Court Justice Thomas Berger also bluntly states that the Nunavut wage economy does not exist. One of the report's main recommendations is to end the current practice of teaching students entirely in Inuktitut until grade 4 or 5 at which point the language of instruction switches entirely to English.

Berger writes, "It is a bilingual system in name only, one that produces young adults who, by and large cannot function properly in either English or Inuktitut."