

CREE NATION RISING

Unique partnership leads to prosperity on Alberta First Nation

BUSINESS IS BOOMING, PEOPLE ARE WORKING, AND THE COMMUNITY IS THRIVING.

When an Alberta construction company and a Northern Alberta First Nation struck a business partnership, nobody knew just how profound and widespread the impacts would be.

Four years in, the alliance between Driftpile Enterprises and Tri-Gen Group has exceeded expectations.

"When you have an additional 50 to 100 people going to work the nation itself thrives, and then you have that pride going back into the community."

They are able to afford big fancy vehicles, they are able to afford to feed their families, they can afford to give their kids toys. How do you put a price tag on the pride this creates on the community? It's priceless."

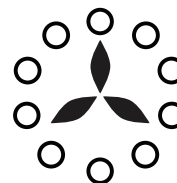
~ Starr Sasakamoose, Driftpile Cree Nation Councillor.



"We've been working very steadily versus the past where we would get one little job and sit. Now my people are employed and we're taking care of families, and that's what it's all about."

~ Chief Dwayne Laboucan, Driftpile Cree Nation.

Driftpile Cree Nation



TRI-GEN
GROUP LTD

Forming the right partnership.

The joint venture between Driftpile and Tri-Gen began in 2017, and it has been unconventional from the start. The agreement was forged through strong relationships and on a foundation of trust. It's designed so both companies are incented to have equal equipment and people on site for projects. Both sides are aligned on clear principles, which are embedded directly in the joint venture structure.

"We both bought into creating something out of the ordinary. From what I can tell, there are no other joint ventures structured the way we are structured. And the benefits it brings back to our community as well."

~ Starr Sasakamoose, Driftpile Cree Nation Councillor.

Building on a strong foundation.

With more steady work and larger projects in the books, Driftpile has added new equipment to its arsenal and built a new maintenance shop, which will lead to even more jobs.

Aspenleaf Energy was the joint venture's first client. The first project went well, and many more have come since.

"We'll probably hire three or four more mechanics, and we will be doing training. We never would have done this without the projects and the funds from the joint venture."

~ Kyle Heroux, Chief Executive Officer of Driftpile First Nation Enterprises.

Communication and transparency are key as the partnership – and the team – continues to grow.

"We meet every quarter; we breakdown jobs and it's all transparent and honest. We see what they make, and they see what Driftpile makes. You can't really ask for anything more. It is working very good right now: transparent and open."

~ Chief Dwayne Laboucan, Driftpile Cree Nation.

That environment of trust is important at the leadership level, and on site. There's a sense of comradery in the field, with employees from both companies working together as one team.

"We are a team. We are a family. I've met a lot of people with Tri-Gen, and I've got along with all of them so well. We work together really well."

~ Steve Giroux, a top hand with Driftpile Enterprises.

"As a crew and as a team, we bonded quickly. Everybody is respectful, it's all about creating a great team atmosphere."

~ Jadon Nakonechny, operator/foreman with Tri-Gen Group.



It is working.

Before the partnership, Driftpile Enterprises had limited capacity and could manage only small projects in the \$100 thousand range. Today, the company is winning and executing \$5 million projects. For Tri-Gen, the partnership has created connections with new clients and generated a new revenue stream it could not access before.

Aspenleaf Energy was the joint venture's first client. The first project went well, and many more have come since.

"The Driftpile/Tri-Gen joint venture is one of our best contractors on site, and one of the best joint ventures I have seen in 40 years. They share our values and expectations for quality safety and efficiency, and we are proud to have supported the joint venture in its formulative stage. We strive to use local contractors, especially indigenous, with the belief that those impacted by our activities should also benefit from our presence."

~ Dave Todd, Vice President of Operations for Aspenleaf

Community building.

The success of the partnership – and the creation of consistent jobs – are fueling growth on the Driftpile Cree Nation on several fronts.

"With that (consistent employment) it takes a lot of strain off the departments in our offices. If they're not working, then they're relying on the social assistance programs on our nation. When they are working, then we can reallocate that money to help children and elder programs."

~ Councillor Sasakamoose.

The benefits go beyond the Driftpile Cree Nation as well.

"It makes us feel good both personally and as a company to be part of this, and it feels like we are on the leading edge of change"

~Kevin Szmyrko, owner of Tri-Gen Group.

Tackling challenges head-on.

As with any major project or partnership, there have been some obstacles along the way. The team acknowledges there were some communication gaps when the joint venture was first formed. It took time for employees of both companies, and the Driftpile community, to understand the benefits of the agreement. Moving forward, the team is committed to communicating more clearly with stakeholders on progress, concerns, and how those concerns will be addressed.

Another ongoing challenge is attracting the younger generation to join the workforce. This is also an opportunity, with many people, in their 20's and 30's, who have trade tickets. Driftpile and Tri-Gen are working on ways to promote careers in the construction industry by showcasing the importance of the work they are doing – on site and in the community.

"Frontline workers are the real heroes of any construction company, battling the elements and time away from home, and because of these sacrifices, they create an economy and jobs back home that everyone benefits from, especially on the nation."

~ Gord Shmyrko VP Strategic Business Development of Tri-Gen Group.

By highlighting a positive work environment, teamwork, and comradery on and off the work site, it's hoped more of the younger generation will give a career in construction a shot.



Setting the bar high.

Driftpile and Tri-Gen have set a high bar for Indigenous joint ventures. The goal is to share the model and help other nations achieve the same success.

"We want all nations to thrive; to all have the same vision for all people to have a good life and provide for their family. Let the industry know that we're here to stay. If you're going to make a livelihood off our lands, we want to make a livelihood too. We're not trying to stop things or have things go in a negative way. If you're coming to our area, respect us and you will get respect back."

~ Chief Dwayne Laboucan, Driftpile Cree Nation.



**BUILDING
PARTNERSHIPS,
BRIDGES, AND A
BETTER FUTURE
FOR EVERYONE.**

☆ **Get in
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