

## **Our Councils, Building Together**

ILC – Aug/Sep 2021 FINAL

“I am Mayor Ron Toyota, representing the Town of Creston. I would like to begin by acknowledging that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Yaqan Nukiy within the Ktunaxa Nations”. This is the statement that I make to open all Town of Creston public meetings (such as Council meetings) and events. I am honoured and humbled every time I say those words for many reasons; not the least of which is because it is a reaffirmation of not just my personal connection and friendship with Chief Jason Louie, but also of the connection and friendship that exists between the Town of Creston and the Yaqan Nukiy (was LKB -- Lower Kootenay Band).

The Town of Creston’s First Nations Traditional Territory Acknowledgement Policy, adopted by Council in March 2021, was an important milestone in our journey towards reconciliation. Chief Louie and I worked on the wording of the policy for several months, and it was so meaningful to have Chief Louie attend our Town Council meeting to support its adoption. When speaking to the importance of land acknowledgements, Chief Louie emphasized that reconciliation needs to truly be felt to be understood. Words are just words unless they are accompanied by action.

The Traditional Territory Acknowledgement policy is one of many steps we have taken with the Yaqan Nukiy Band towards reconciliation, beginning with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and Friendship by our respective Councils in January 2010. The MOU represents a commitment to the development of strong, steadfast and fair working relationships and partnerships, ensuring respectful and open communication in accordance with principles based on mutual respect, recognition and reciprocal consideration of common interests. The MOU is displayed in Town Council Chambers and is also available on our website, [www.creston.ca](http://www.creston.ca) (search for MOU LKB). Although most who signed the MOU are no longer serving on our respective Councils, we remain committed to strengthening relationships between our Councils.

During my 13 years as Mayor, our Councils have participated in 10 “C2C” (Community to Community) Forums. These forums are about opening lines of communication and building relationships between neighbours (local governments and First Nations), discussing common goals and opportunities for joint action. The success of these events were due to a spirit of goodwill and an open exchange of concerns, ideas, and constructive viewpoints. We met at

Aldo's Restaurant, Stavros, Kootenay Thai, Jimmy's and our Council locations at Town Hall and the Lower Kootenay Band facility and the new Roundhouse. A special highlight for me was our Joint Inaugural Council Meeting which was held on December 1, 2014. As Lorne Eckersley wrote, "it might have been a Canadian first. New Councils of the Lower Kootenay Band (LKB) and Town of Creston took their oaths of office in a joint ceremony, a symbol of their commitment to work together". The picture of the joint inauguration ceremony is on the first page of the Town of Creston's Official Community Plan as it represents our dedication to the shared pursuits of reconciliation and collaborative efforts that benefit the Yaqan Nukiy people and citizens of Creston.

As important as the formal work between us is, we have also enjoyed some really fun activities together such as the Team KTUNAXA Canoe Trek in June 2014, arriving at Rykerts, BC on the Kootenay River and then the LKB Youth Canoe Trek in June 2015, arriving and staying overnight at my home on Kootenay Lake. A team of 9 to 12 plus coaches and family members bringing their enthusiasm and messages of friendship and hope is something that I will never forget. Nor will I forget participating in the LKB "winter wellness" challenge which saw a number of us take a "refreshing" dip in the Kootenay River on JANUARY 29, 2016! I put my own spin when participating in the Fry Bread King & Queen Cook Off competition in October 2017 by using chopsticks as my utensil of choice. Although I didn't receive the King crown, I did get a "Frybread Power" t-shirt. It was such a great experience!

A personal highlight was being invited to attend the BC Medal of Good Citizenship Awards held in Vancouver on December 5, 2019 and see Chief Jason Louie accept his well-deserved medal with his family present. This Provincial program was created in 2015 and in 2019, 18 people from throughout B.C. received this recognition for their outstanding service and commitment to helping others in their communities. Chief Louie was specifically recognized for his passion to preserve the Ktunaxa language, traditions and values and his dedication to creating a future where members of the Lower Kootenay Band are equal citizens and First Nations People are recognized as autonomous neighbours within the traditional lands we all call home.

Recent, tragic events have brought forth so many negative and painful emotions for so many. We recognize that more than ever, meaningful and purposeful reconciliation is necessary, and we fully support all activities and conversations advancing this shared goal for our entire community.

*Do not hesitate to contact me by:*

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