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Jake Sinclair and his wife Kim successfully overcame numerous challenges during their first two years of owning two Anytime Fitness gyms in Regina.

Anytime Fitness and Jake Sinclair

Cross-country running trained Jake Sinclair and his wife Kim in an important quality needed in an entrepreneur – especially during a pandemic.

When the two met in high school, they would run towards one another, each taking half of the 17-kilometre distance between their houses. She would leave her farm house and he would leave George Gordon First Nation, both on foot, to meet. “We both had a passion for fitness and knew one day we’d want to open a gym,” said Sinclair.

Today, they are moving forward side-by-side in the franchise business they started in 2019 – Anytime Fitness in Regina. There are two locations – one on Woodhams Drive in the southeast and another on Rochdale Boulevard in the northwest.

They have had to find reserves of strength to continue on through a series of difficulties and challenges they encountered during their first two years of business. But it’s not the adversities they focus on.

With each hardship, they find a way to overcome it and the staff at SIEF have been a resource to that end. It started with their business plan, which they critiqued, giving them the feedback they needed to improve it. They got guidance on developing a full picture of all the costs involved with starting the business as well as how they would ensure they were covered. When they were rejected by banks for a loan, the staff at SIEF reassured them that they should keep trying.

“Just because (the bank staff) don’t see your goal doesn’t mean it isn’t worth pursuing,” said Sinclair, who was ultimately successful in securing more than one loan offer which benefited them because they could then negotiate better terms.

When the business was running, they had to find qualified managers and deal with building issues, including a flood and an air conditioner that caused damage to the building when it failed.

“As Indigenous people, we are the original entrepreneurs,” said Sinclair.
“Rather than relying on others, you can be self-sufficient and pursue self-determination.”

Then, the global pandemic hit in 2020. They were forced to close the business on March 18 because of the public health orders implemented by the provincial government. Their gyms stayed closed until June 8 when restrictions for fitness facilities were eased.

The restrictions created limitations for their business that made it difficult to operate. Their gyms operate 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Typically, the managers are on site during peak times, working 40 hours a week. But for a period of time, the public health orders required them to have staff on site at all hours.

They also had to bring in cleaning staff full-time rather than continue having them work part-time. Plus, they had to cancel their group fitness classes, which cut their revenue.

To get through it, he and his wife had to put in very long days. There was a long stretch where they worked from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. because it was all they could afford to do to meet the requirements. It was during that time his wife learned she was pregnant with their daughter, which added to her physical strain at a time when they were getting very little sleep and dedicating all their time awake to their business.

Their experience running cross-country kicked in. Like in cross-country running, Sinclair said they were having to “keep going even though everything in your body tells you to quit.” To cope, he considered moving in to the business to live, but others dissuaded him from that plan. They recognized they needed to persuade government officials to consider their business model when making decisions about public health restrictions, which they were able to achieve.

They also needed some support making a decision about continuing with two locations. Their biggest expense running the gyms was rent. While there was a rent subsidy program to support businesses during the pandemic, his business didn’t qualify for the first iteration of the program because of the square footage of the space he rents. They again relied on SIEF to provide them guidance about how to manage their situation when their finances were so tight.

“Diane and Cree would check in to just see how it was going. They were absolutely amazing,” said Sinclair, who

appreciated their suggestions for how to keep the business moving ahead.

The gyms have gained 150 new members since 2020. They are able to delegate to qualified employees so they can focus on marketing, something Diane and Cree recommended they do with some unused funds. They were also able to use some grant money for some sales training.

They are now in a position where they can focus on developing fundraising promotions. For example, their promotion selling orange T-shirts to benefit a service provider in Regina that aids urban Indigenous people with education, employment and family services. They are also organizing a golf tournament to fundraise for ALS, a disease that has personally impacted their family as well as an employee. These promotions support the community, but also the business by bringing attention to it as well as creating an opportunity to support other Indigenous entrepreneurs.

“The community of Regina has embraced us,” said Sinclair.

In their marketing, they are making it more well-known that their business is Indigenous-owned. Half of their staff are Indigenous. He supports other Indigenous businesses by procuring supplies from them. For example, they purchased the orange T-shirts from a business started by some Cowessess First Nation entrepreneurs. Another company from there provides his cleaning products.

“As Indigenous people, we are the original entrepreneurs,” said Sinclair. “Rather than relying on others, you can be self-sufficient and pursue self-determination.”

While cross-country running is a solo sport, running a business takes a team. Jake is grateful to have been introduced to SIEF through his previous role in workforce development with the provincial Ministry of Economy. Having someone to explore and explain their options helped them ensure the business not just survived, but thrived so they can now direct other Indigenous entrepreneurs to contact SIEF about their needs.

TIPI Fuel and Convenience Store

The grand opening of TIPI Fuel and Convenience Store in Prince Albert marks a first for Sturgeon Lake First Nation and Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL).

It is the first location opened under a new brand developed by FCL — the Western Nations gas bar brand.

The Western Nations brand supplies and supports independent gas bars in Indigenous communities across the West. Communities own the gas bars and make their own decisions. The Western Nations brand offers them financial incentives, operational support, reliable local supplies, trusted fuel and the Community Building Assistance Program.

The brand can be applied to existing locations or new ones, such as the TIPI Fuel and Convenience Store.

The work to open the TIPI Fuel and Convenience Store was undertaken by the Sturgeon Lake Development Corporation on behalf of Sturgeon Lake First Nation.

Urban land had been acquired by the First Nation near 10th Avenue East and 15th Street East in Prince Albert. A building was already there.

“It was easier to refurbish that building rather than open a different business,” said April Roberts-Poitras, CEO of the Sturgeon Lake Development Corporation.

“Plus, looking at the market, we saw that there was room for another station on an urban reserve in Prince Albert.”

That led to discussions with Lake Country Co-operative Association, which is a member-owned co-operative with several locations in North Central Saskatchewan communities, including Prince Albert.

“They were helping us navigate the waters of the fuel



A grand opening event for TIPI Fuel and Convenience Store was held in Prince Albert on Aug. 23.

industry,” said Roberts-Poitras. This is the first urban gas bar owned by Sturgeon Lake First Nation. It has reserve status to serve status customers tax-exempt fuel and tobacco.

As those conversations to build a partnership were underway, so too was work by FCL to develop the Western Nations gas bar brand.

Roberts-Poitras was already pleased with the relationship being built, so she warmly welcomed this new brand.

“FCL and Lake Country Co-op have been some of the easiest partners to work with. They accommodate the community and assist in any way they can so you are successful,” she said.

“Their success is your success.”

One of the main reasons Lake Country Co-op was approached is because of the co-operative’s values, which Roberts-Poitras says align with First Nations’.

“They are about building community and helping members advance themselves,” said Roberts-Poitras.

“They value integrity and honesty. There are quite a few parallels between co-operatives and First Nations.”

It was all possible because of the work done to establish the business, including a sound business plan. Getting a bank loan was challenging, but possible, Roberts-Poitras said, because of the support bank employees were willing to offer.

“A lot of people out there will try to provide guidance, but it’s not what the bank wanted,” she said.

“ You can work closely with the bank to create a budget. Don't be scared to work with the bank. They'll help. ”



A second piece of advice from Roberts-Poitras is to “keep your financials in check, always. You will need that at the end of the day for funding or working with the bank.”

Finally, she would recommend talking to SIEF about funding. She appreciates the work of SIEF employees to keep her funding application on track.

“I always enjoyed working with them. Diane was always very helpful with guiding us through the process and explaining the documentation needed for the funding application,” said Roberts-Poitras.

“She was very beneficial. I'm not sure we would have qualified without her help.”

Starting this business has resulted in 30 new jobs in Prince Albert, all of which are filled by First Nations, with 90 per cent being members of Sturgeon Lake First Nation. Three-quarters work at the fuel station while the rest are employees of the Chester Fried Chicken on site.

It's also the inaugural relationship in a system FCL is building. Through the Western Nations brand, FCL wants to grow a network of independent, locally-owned Indigenous gas bars that are relevant to all customers while respecting Indigenous culture.

To learn more about it, contact the administration office of the local co-operative association nearest you or e-mail westernnations@fcl.crs

Top: TIPI Fuel and Gas Bar is owned by Sturgeon Lake First Nation and is supplied by the Western Nations brand of Federated Co-operatives Ltd.

Below: Starting this business has resulted in 30 new jobs in Prince Albert, all of which are filled by First Nations, with 90 per cent being members of Sturgeon Lake First Nation.



Years of Service Awards



Barb Tawpisin

Office/Human
Resource Manager

Barb Tawpisin is a member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation. Twenty-five years ago, she joined the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation as an Administrative Assistant. Since then, Barb has gained more education as well as valuable experience through her positions in lending, financial management and human resource management.

Barb currently holds the position of Office/Human Resource Manager, and her responsibilities include staff training and development, recruitment, employee engagement; pension and benefits and general office administration.

In the fall of 2021, Barb will have completed her Certified Indigenous Human Resources Professional (CIHRP) designation from AFOA Canada, to go along with her Diplomas in Business Accountancy and Certificate of Business.

SIEF's success is due in no small part to Barb's contributions. She uses her positive attitude and tireless energy to encourage and support her colleagues and SIEF clients to strive for success. In her free time, Barb likes to read, travel, live a healthy lifestyle and most of all, spend time with family. She is a mother of two and a grandmother to three. Congratulations Barb on 25 years of service with SIEF.



Cree Cheechoo

Business
Development Officer

Cree Cheechoo is a member of the Moose Cree First Nation in Ontario. She was raised in Saskatchewan as her father is from the James Smith Cree Nation. Cree began her career at SIEF in March 2016 as an Administrative Assistant. She has diligently worked her way to become a Business Development Officer. Her education history involves Indigenous Social Work, Office Administration and Professional Community and Economic Development. Cree represents SIEF on the Matchstick Program through Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan as well as being on the working group for Indigenous Commercial Fisheries of Saskatchewan. Cree is also involved with coordinating the Indigenous Women's Entrepreneur Workshop program. Congratulations Cree on your five years of service with SIEF.



Ray Jones

Accountant

Ray Jones was born in Uranium City and is a member of Fond du Lac Denesuline First Nation. He joined SIEF in 2015 accepting the accountant position in the organization. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from the University of Saskatchewan. He has a Certified Aboriginal Financial Manager (CAFM) designation from the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association (AFOA) and a Certified Payroll Manager (CPM) certification from the Canadian Payroll Association. Ray has garnered vast experience in the accounting field while working for various Indigenous not-for-profit organizations. Ray held positions at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) in Ottawa as well as the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association (NACCA). Aside from work, Ray's work-life balance consists of practicing Taekwondo and enjoying competitive curling in his free time. Congratulations Ray on your five years of service with SIEF.



SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN EQUITY FOUNDATION INC.

“Entrepreneurial Spirit Award 2021”

To our Valued Clients; Stakeholders and Members:

The Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation Inc. (SIEF) is pleased to accept applications/nominations for the annual **“Entrepreneurial Spirit Award”**. This award is given to a First Nation entity that is an individual, business, corporation, organization, or First Nation that exemplifies forward movement and involvement to create sustainable economic development for First Nations of Saskatchewan. To qualify for this award or to nominate someone, the following criteria must be met:

- be the owner/operator of a business for a minimum of one year and demonstrate that the business is viable and sustainable.
- or be a First Nation community or organization that has a focus on First Nation business/economic development.

Qualifications may include the number of employees; value to the community, the use of various management tools and testimony of the entrepreneur as to the determination, drive, and process to achieve success.

You may apply for this award yourself or you may nominate another individual, organization or First Nation.

If you would like to apply or nominate someone for this award, please complete the application located on the SIEF website at www.sief.sk.ca and return it to the SIEF office. **Deadline for applications is October 31, 2021.** The successful applicant will receive an award and special recognition at the Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation Annual General Meeting scheduled for Friday, November 19, 2021, at the Dakota Dunes Resort, Whitecap, Sask.



SIEF

SASKATCHEWAN INDIAN EQUITY FOUNDATION INC.

Annual General Meeting

Friday, November 19, 2021

Meeting Time: 9:00 a.m.

Dakota Dunes Resort

Whitecap, Saskatchewan

In conjunction with

“Growing Together, Community ...”

A day of learning dedicated to Economic Development and Entrepreneurial Business for Saskatchewan First Nations

Call 306.955.4550 for more information or visit our website at www.sief.sk.ca

The day will include a focus on FIRST NATIONS entrepreneurial business. The day will feature a keynote address, information presentations and luncheon. The luncheon will feature the presentation and awarding of the 2021 Entrepreneurial Spirit Award.

Mark your calendar to attend!

Friday, November 19, 2021

Dakota Dunes Resort

Whitecap, Saskatchewan

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