

STRATEGY AT WORK.

A YEAR IN REVIEW

2020

AT-A-GLANCE



The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the operation of every business line of Des Nedhe Group. It was an immense challenge navigating the uncertainties the pandemic presented in 2020, as it was globally for every business, individual and government. But we are proud of how we defended and protected the people and assets of the companies and were able to drive growth and advance improvements last year.

EMPLOYMENT (All Entities)

TOTAL **362**

INDIGENOUS **178**

ERFN EMPLOYMENT

41 Retail

16 Tron

9 DNG Management

66 TOTAL ERFN



MAINTAINING JOBS DURING A PANDEMIC

- The Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) was important to this year's financial results.
- The CEWS allowed Des Nedhe to maintain jobs during the pandemic by providing \$2.4 million to the qualifying operating entities.
- Getting this subsidy took some lobbying to have Indigenous economic development corporations considered eligible. We are proud that Des Nedhe representatives led this national lobby effort.



PREPARING FOR FUTURE BUSINESS ACTIVITY

- Des Nedhe Group's business activity in 2020 aimed at expanding the number of clients and industries our companies support with their services.
- Many conversations were had with our clients and friends to determine how our collaboration can be even more productive in the future.
- This effort is expected to yield significant future work and employment opportunities ahead of 2025.



PUSHING FORWARD

- We made history in 2020. Under the Tron/Makwa Joint Venture we signed the biggest fixed-price contract in Tron's time. The work involves refurbishing a site building for Bruce Power, the largest operating nuclear power plant in the world. We are proud to be the first wholly-owned Indigenous company to work at Bruce Power.
- Sewer and waste water infrastructure at Grasswood is underway following the \$2.2M federal grant Jeff Balon and his team secured. This addition boosts land value, attracting new opportunities through corporate and commercial interest. It also demonstrates Des Nedhe's 'can-do' approach. Instead of waiting for the City of Saskatoon to service the area, we got it done.

MESSAGE

FROM THE CHAIR

Looking back on 2020, much of the activity that occurred within Des Nedhe Group can be summed up in three words – defend and protect.

Living and working through a pandemic presented numerous challenges demanding attention. Public health orders changed operations. Revenue became less certain and overhead costs needed managing.

Leaders navigating these challenges had to develop a defense of pivoting and adjusting in order to protect jobs and assets. They needed to preserve what was in place until better days arrived. Getting through 2020 – bruised, but alive – was a feat, but that’s not all that was accomplished.

Improvements were made and growth occurred in Des Nedhe during 2020, including a new liquor store at Grasswood and the expansion of 5Buds, the cannabis operation that Des Nedhe Group invested in. New opportunities in Saskatchewan, Ontario and beyond continue to be developed by Tron. Creative Fire is finding its footing as the market takes great interest in that company. Systems that support DNG’s operations – human resources and information technology – are being upgraded to make the group more efficient and effective.

Losing what has been established would have been a setback Des Nedhe and ERFN did not need. Instead, DNG survived the year to ensure the group is ready for what is ahead. Future growth would not be possible if jobs and assets weren’t protected during 2020.

Saskatchewan’s First Nations have tremendous opportunity in front of them. Doors are opening as the world takes

notice of Canada’s Indigenous communities and what they contribute to the economy.

We have now learned that few companies in Canada are as prepared as Des Nedhe Group to take advantage of this opportunity as commercial organizations across Canada are reaching out to Des Nedhe to build a new future for the country, one where First Nations play a much stronger role. Past leaders were wise to embrace commercial opportunities in resource development on traditional lands because that established a base from which to grow. Des Nedhe has an enviable reputation because of the skills that were developed and the relationships that were formed in earlier years. They hold value today and will long into the future.

A lot of work still needs to be done to maximize the opportunities and the companies, so they are delivering the value and prosperity that achieves economic self-determination for ERFN. It’s really about self-determination for the nation as a collective. That takes having the appropriate strategy, systems and skills in place.

The annual report reflects on what took place over the course of 2020 and provides insight into where DNG is headed in future years. The board thanks you for your interest in and support of Des Nedhe Group yesterday, today and tomorrow.



Saskatchewan’s First Nations have tremendous opportunity in front of them. Doors are opening as the world takes notice of Canada’s Indigenous communities and what they contribute to the economy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul Martin". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Paul Martin
Board Chair

MESSAGE

FROM THE CEO

The work that was deferred in 2020 by the pandemic is returning and the Des Nedhe Group of companies is ready for it – and more.

We foresee significant work coming our way as a result of our efforts to diversify. Our strategy, along with Canada's readiness to work with and for Indigenous businesses is very encouraging.

2020 was an opportunity to see what works and what needs to change in our group of companies in order to achieve self-determination for ERFN.

As part of a multi-year strategy, we are moving away from depending on a single industry and one or two customers. While we are grateful for the northern uranium industry and the work it has provided, we recognize the need to diversify to ensure a sustainable future. The activities of 2020 took us further in the direction of expanding the number of clients and industries we support with our services and businesses.

We are proud of our accomplishments in 2020. We finished a four-year deal with JNE Welding that saw us fully acquire an ownership stake in their land holdings. We had the grand-opening of our liquor store, The Patch, Saskatchewan's first Indigenous-owned liquor store at Grasswood, and we continued to build the Human Resources and Information Technology systems and processes to prepare for growth, all while navigating a global pandemic.

The way business has been done is over. During 2020, we could see change was coming. In preparation, we reached out to our clients and friends to discuss and establish how we can work together even more productively into the future. Reaching out to strengthen those relationships helps us in our efforts to diversify.

It is important to understand what it means to diversify beyond one customer, Cameco, providing 95% of Des Nedhe Group's revenue. Working with other clients who are starting their Indigenous-engagement journey means needing the appropriate amount of security and capital to work with other customers, and to have the systems and processes in place that allow



you to deliver projects effectively. This journey is starting with foundational relationships that will blossom over time. Dedicating the necessary time, attention and nourishment to the seeds that have been planted will result in a bounty.

Towards the end of 2020 we began looking at areas of the business that required a closer look. That meant making a decision to help align Tron further with our overall direction, and ultimately making a change in leadership.

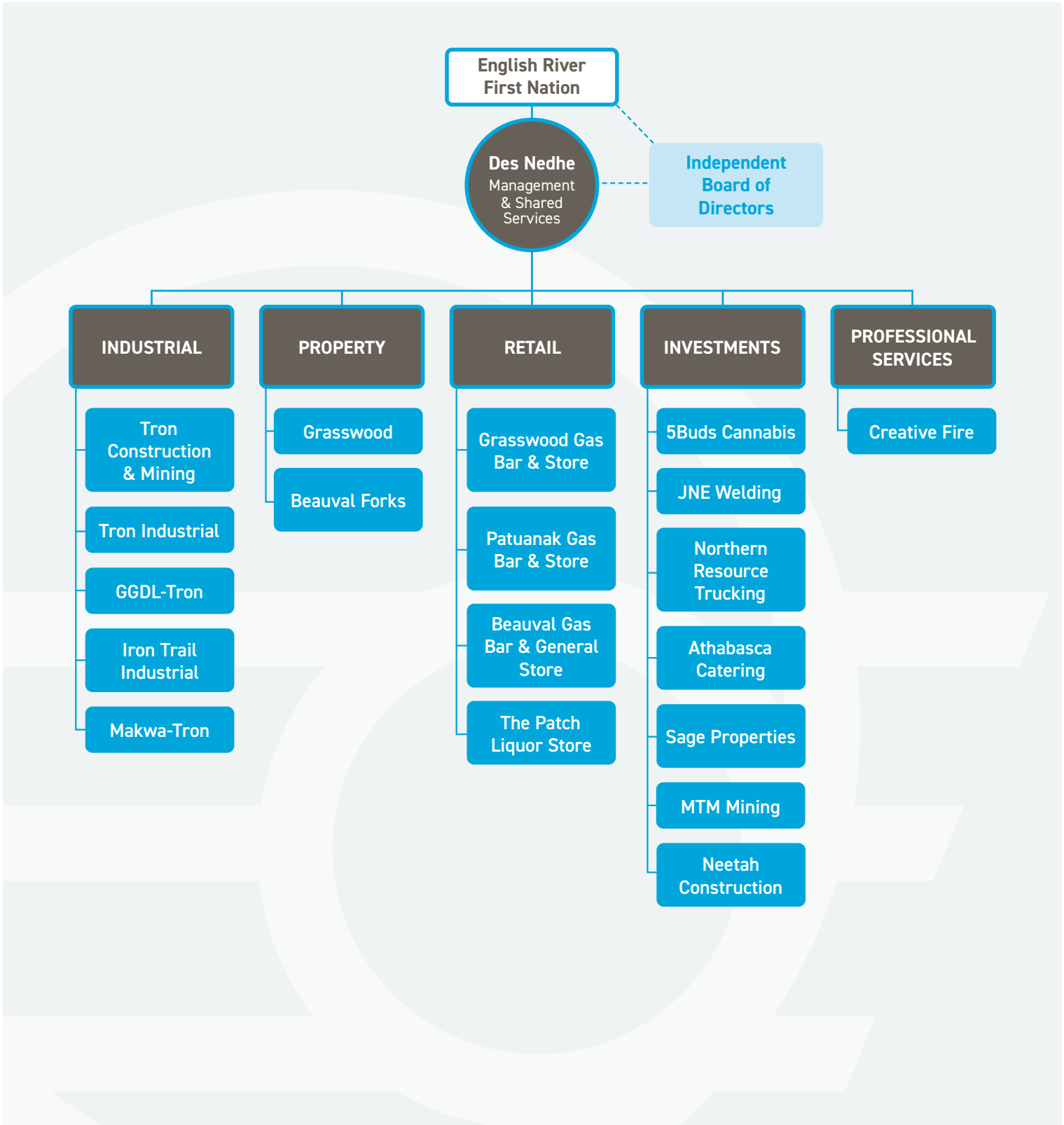
While we looked outside the company to strengthen relationships in order to diversify, it was also vital that we looked internally at needed improvements. Systems, such as human resources and information technology, needed to be addressed so the companies could work with multiple clients. Internal tools and systems were insufficient to handle the volume of information created with having numerous employees, multiple companies and a wide range of clients.

Des Nedhe Group is proud to be an example for other First Nations who are recognizing the need for robust systems to support their own expanding business needs.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sean Willy'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Sean Willy
CEO

CORPORATE STRUCTURE



OVERVIEW

Des Nedhe Group started 2020 hopeful it would be a breakout year – but 2020 did not unfold the way we expected.

Measures implemented to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus had an impact not just on how we were able to do business, but also on finances.

It was important to monitor, manage and maintain our overhead costs in 2020. Public health orders that prevented travel made it easy to recognize that travel expenses would be down last year. Investing in what employees needed to be safe and secure was more involved.

Moving to Office 365 and having Microsoft Teams to hold virtual meetings kept people connected so business activity could continue, and there were initial costs to set up the technology needed to communicate and connect. However, that change to how we interact with one another will help us be more efficient and lower expenses over the longer term.

Keeping people in jobs was vital but challenging. For example, at Tron, one of its major projects for the year was the continuation of work at Port Hope, Ontario. That project was shutdown after it initially mobilized. That temporary shutdown was extended numerous times until the project was finally suspended through year end. However the skillset of the people who will work on that project needed to be retained so Tron is prepared for other opportunities.

We implemented a 20% salary reduction for a few months and then were successful in lobbying to make First Nations economic development corporations eligible for the federal wage subsidy program. This significantly benefited our group of companies and employees.

The Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy allowed us to maintain jobs during the pandemic. It helped us retain skilled and experienced people to reduce costs due to turnover or layoffs and reduce the expenses of hiring new people when we need them to take advantage of business opportunities.

We saw the importance of Des Nedhe Group's strategy of forming strategic partnerships as well as acquisitions in 2019 and 2020.

A sustainable business needs to generate profits over the long term to stay in business. Across the group of companies, we need to focus on being sustainable in all our operations.

It's an opportunity to challenge our business models so we are focused on the appropriate priorities and are profitable in the years ahead.

It is essential we get into new markets and expand our core customers. A company that relies exclusively on one or two customers is at risk.

It takes a significant amount of time to secure new projects. At Tron, as an example, the project serving Bruce Power took 18 months from the time the relationship was initiated to when workers were on the ground working.

It takes patience and persistence, but it is important to invest the time it takes to develop relationships as they result in contracts and work that employs people.

The challenges of 2020 didn't evaporate when the calendar flipped over to 2021. During the first quarter of this year, it was obvious the pandemic is still having an impact. Travel was still limited, meaning sales of fuel were down, impacting our retail businesses. But business activity in 2019 and 2020 aimed at diversifying our customer base is expected to pay off in 2021.

2021 is a year that we will be particularly focused on running the businesses as efficiently and effectively as possible. It's an opportunity to challenge our business models so we are focused on the appropriate priorities and are profitable in the years ahead.



Preston Kaylnuik,
Controller and Senior Director, Finance

2020 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

REVENUE

2020

\$51.5M

2019

\$57.4M

After forecasting a major revenue increase in 2020 from previous years, revenue ended up decreasing by \$5.9 million in 2020 (due to the challenges created by the pandemic).

NET INCOME

2020

-\$1.1M

2019

-\$0.6M

Net income decreased by \$0.5 million compared to 2019.

OPERATING OVERHEAD COSTS

2020

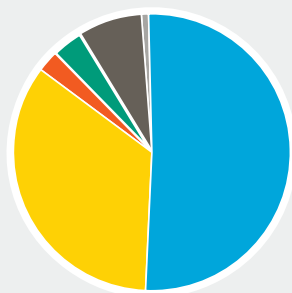
\$14.3M

2019

\$12.4M

Overhead costs increased by \$1.9 million in 2020. We had staffed up in preparation for a breakout year.

2020 REVENUE



- Retail: 51.1%
- Industrial: 34.5%
- Property: 2.4%
- Investments: 3.6%
- Professional Services: 7.7%
- Other: 0.6%

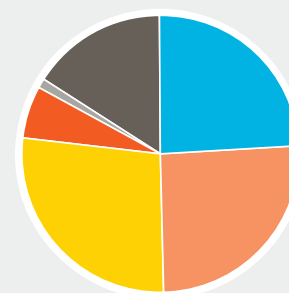
Des Nedhe Group was able to weather the negative impacts to revenue and margins while maintaining its core staff through those initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was in large part due to the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy program, which contributed \$2.4 million to the qualifying operating entities.

Industrial was down \$1.7 million in contributed earnings compared to 2019 as project activities yielded much tighter margins on reduced revenue levels.

Meanwhile, Creative Fire (Professional Services) contributed \$0.45 million to the loss for the year as that business line underwent many transitional changes throughout 2020.

2020 OPERATING OVERHEAD COSTS



- Industrial: 27.0%
- Corporate Administration: 25.5%
- Retail: 24.4%
- Professional Services: 15.6%
- Property Rental: 6.1%
- Equipment Rental: 1.3%

DIVERSIFICATION IS KEY



2020 was shaping up to be the largest revenue year in the company's history with three significant projects for Tron to execute.

But Tron's experience during the pandemic showed Des Nedhe that when change is required, what is necessary will get done. In part, that meant building relationships to secure new types of projects, which puts Tron in a solid position for future years. Diversifying the customer base will pay off.



By diversifying the customer base so work comes from outside of Saskatchewan in a broader range of industries, Tron can be a more sustainable company.

As for 2020, here is how the year unfolded:



This project was a continuation of work and involved building underground mining machinery at the K3 mine site. That work was delayed but did move forward and is still underway in 2021. Because of the pandemic and the changing economy, the scope of the project was cut in half. However, the expectation is that Tron will continue to support Mosaic into 2022 and 2023.



This was a continuation of work Tron did in 2019 at Port Hope in Ontario. Tron mobilized but after three weeks of work, when the pandemic was declared, it was shut down. While hopeful work would resume in 2020, it was repeatedly deferred. The contract still exists, but the work is unlikely to resume until 2022.



This contract to refurbish a site building was deferred by four months early in 2020, but got back on line and continues in 2021. This contract was actualized through the Tron/Makwa JV and is Tron's largest fixed-price contract to date.

Even though work was deferred, Tron still needed to maintain the skillset, knowledge and expertise of the employees, particularly those who do estimating, project management and construction management.

To accomplish that the company implemented cost-saving measures to reduce overhead and expenditures while minimizing potential impact to employees. So, vacation time was used, employees worked fewer hours, and then the federal government's wage subsidy program was utilized.

Business development was a challenge in 2020 as the traditional way of doing it went on hiatus. Customers' interest in spending during such an uncertain time was also impacted by the pandemic.

But Tron successfully built valuable relationships which will lead to new work. One of those relationships is with SaskPower.

Tron also found opportunity to expand into wastewater and sewage treatment plants as a complementary business

Last year was the first year in the history of the company that half the revenue came from outside Saskatchewan and came outside of Cameco. That's what Tron's relationship with Bruce Power was able to accomplish.

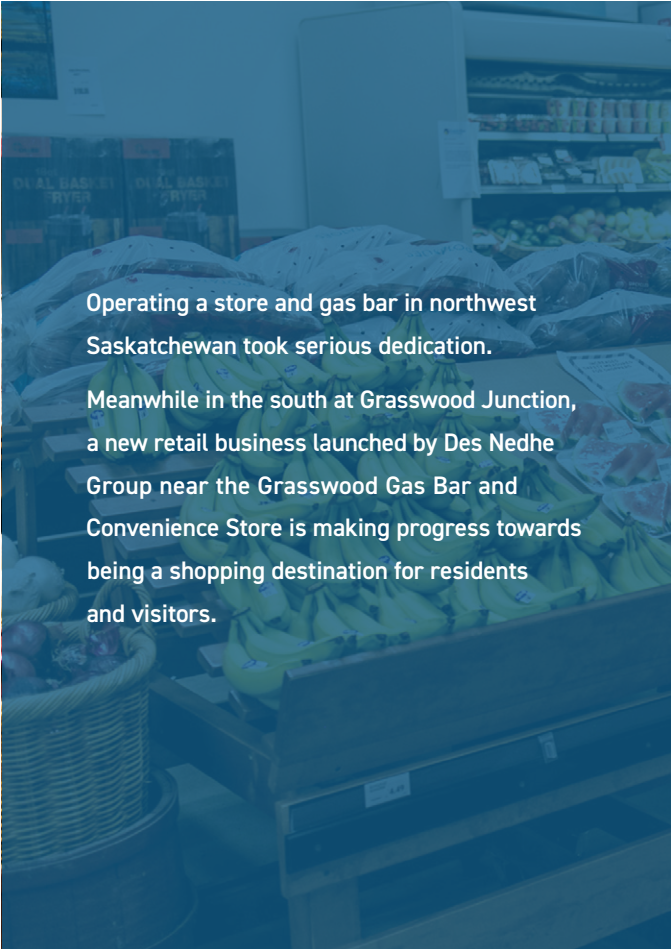
line through a relationship with Brookfield (BGIS) and an opportunity with Batchewana First Nation in Ontario.

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By diversifying the customer base so work comes from outside of Saskatchewan in a broader range of industries Tron can be a more sustainable company and increase benefits to the community members of ERFN.

RETAIL

OPEN FOR BUSINESS



SERVING THE COMMUNITIES' NEEDS

During the pandemic, the two northern stores – the Beauval General Store and Gas Bar and the Patuanak Gas Bar and Convenience Store – relied on the community as much as residents relied on the stores.

Beauval General Store and Gas Bar offers a bakery, butcher, full grocery selection and ATM as well as unleaded and diesel fuel. Its gas bar is a hub for numerous communities in the area. The Patuanak Gas Bar and Convenience Store sells fuel, basic groceries and a full line of convenience items and features an ATM. The next nearest location with this range of services is Meadow Lake.

The stores helped people secure the supplies they needed during the pandemic lockdown and community members shopping at the stores brought in revenue.

"During the first two weeks of the pandemic, the store was booming as people stocked up. Sales were about double," said Jason Allen, director of retail for Des Nedhe Group.

Later in 2020, as the number of COVID-19 cases rose in northwest Saskatchewan, finding enough local people to work to keep the stores open became a challenge. It is an issue that is still being worked on in 2021.

KEEPING PEOPLE WORKING

The central focus in 2020 was to maintain a safe environment for customers and for the employees serving them. This meant sanitizing often, installing barriers around cashiers and providing masks to staff. This increased costs, but it was a necessary expense to keep the stores open.

Despite their best efforts, numerous employees at the Beauval and Patuanak stores tested positive for COVID-19 in late April, forcing the stores to close.

The closure of the northern stores was brief because of the travel restrictions. In the early weeks of the pandemic, checkpoints restricting travel were initiated by leadership in northern communities and then supported by the provincial government. Keeping the stores closed would have meant people would need to travel south to get groceries and other supplies and therefore increase the risk of spreading the virus.

Local people are employed by the stores. This was explained to provincial government officials who allowed three employees at the Patuanak store who tested negative and were not in close



Jason Allen,
Senior Director, Retail

contact to keep the store open. After a three-day closure, the Patuanak store was back in business.

Each workday, the three Patuanak employees had to record their temperature. Any employee with an elevated temperature had to isolate until they were cleared to return to work. Outside of work hours, they were required to isolate.

The Beauval store was closed for a week. Before that store and the one at Patuanak could re-open, staff had to clean and order products to replace food that was no longer fresh. Some employees at the Grasswood store also needed to isolate at one point during 2020, but that store was not required to close because other employees were able to work more hours.

Retaining employees, particularly at Beauval, has been a challenge during the pandemic. Some returned home to be with family during such an uncertain time. Recruiting new employees was not easy because the work requires people to interact with the public.

Having fewer employees meant reducing the stores' hours of operation, which impacts their profitability. The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy supported the retail division's 2020 performance. Employees at the stores were given pay increases during the pandemic to help with retention.

"We did maintain profitability – the wage subsidy helped. I had hoped to exceed 2019 numbers in 2020 - but didn't with the COVID restrictions."

Full-time positions still need to be filled, so local leaders are being asked to help make others aware of the opportunities.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

FUEL SALES DOWN

While the number of hours the northern stores could operate impacted fuel sales, so too did the fact that people weren't travelling in 2020. The northern stores as well as Grasswood saw the number of litres of fuel sold drop from 2019 numbers.

"Grasswood lost the bulk of its highway traffic with people working from home – 2020 was pretty trying," said Allen.

"We lost the traffic for Riders' games – on game days we see sales double. Without concerts, people aren't coming into the city."

But that is changing in 2021, which should help fuel sales as well as a new retail outlet for DNG.



EMPLOYEE PROFILE

Billy Campbell is a part of the TRON team working at Cameco's McArthur mine site. In true ERFN and Des Nedhe Group entrepreneurial spirit, he's also running his own groundwork company – Billeez Bobcatting and Hauling.



Des Nedhe is proud to see the training and opportunities offered through the group of companies support ERFN members in the paths they choose, including using their skills and knowledge to build their own businesses.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

I trained in pipe fitting through Northlands College in La Ronge and almost have my journeyman designation. I've done underground training and work as a zoom boom operator for TRON at McArthur. It's been good, but my goal is to keep getting my own contracts. I am an entrepreneur at heart which led me to start my own side company in 2016. My sister, Angie, helped me put my business proposal together and I applied for a loan to buy a bobcat and I've been growing it ever since. I'm not getting rich off it, but I have steady cash flow. It's good to be your own boss.

WHAT KIND OF WORK DO YOU DO?

I work mostly in La Plonge and Beauval and do work for the Band. I do demolition, install footings and haul dirt and gravel mostly. I grade the roads, remove snow, clear yards and the dumpsite. Right now, I am making a large root cellar to store potatoes for the community.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

More hard work, that is what it takes. I have a bobcat, loader, 20-tonne trailer and a five-tonne haul truck now. I've mostly been picking up jobs through word of mouth, but it's time to do some advertising as well and spread the word.

NEW LIQUOR STORE OPENS AT GRASSWOOD

A brand-new store at Grasswood Junction is another opportunity to make money for the people of English River First Nation.

The Patch is the first of its kind in Saskatchewan as a 100% Indigenous-owned, on-reserve liquor store. Because of some construction delays, it opened in late December of 2020.

The store opened to a slow start, which is typical of January and February sales at liquor stores. It takes time for customers to become aware of a new place selling alcohol and tobacco, but as 2021 progresses, sales are gradually increasing week by week and month by month.

Having visible signage directing people to the store and running radio promotions is raising awareness of this new shopping option for residents of Corman Park as well as visitors to the area. Tournaments that draw Indigenous spectators to the Saskatoon area are expected to boost sales as status individuals save 15% on their purchases at the store because they don't pay the liquor tax or GST.

Relationships are also being built to develop the store's wholesale revenue. Selling liquor to a nearby golf course and arena will also boost numbers. Some other significant wholesale accounts are close to being secured.



PROPERTY

STABLE IN A CRISIS



While some companies and business divisions were significantly impacted by the pandemic, Des Nedhe Group's property division was not.

Lorne Wolfe, Senior Director, Property Management, explained that most of the tenants at Grasswood are institutional tenants who had stable funding and were able to keep making their rent payments through the year.

As for property development, more work was done to prepare new development areas at Grasswood Junction. That work started in 2019 and continued through 2020.

The sewer/wastewater treatment project at Grasswood is currently under construction. That project is funded, in part, through a federal grant worth more than \$2 million. There was sign-off on the project in the first quarter of 2020 and it should be ready to operate by spring of 2022.

That is of considerable interest to potential clients. A real estate firm is advertising opportunities at Grasswood for organizations

Most of the tenants at Grasswood are institutional tenants who had stable funding and were able to keep making their rent payments through the year.

looking to build or rent. By 2023/2024, there should be enough development for that area to be a new hub of economic activity.

Right now, it houses post-secondary, government and community organizations as well as mining businesses and other service companies. In the future, it is expected to expand to include other retail, office and hospitality sector businesses. The construction of The Patch is an example of new development that is happening at Grasswood Junction.

At Beauval Forks, there is a plan to develop land for more businesses that will provide services to ERFN and the surrounding communities. However, that plan was delayed somewhat by the pandemic and it is still a couple years out.

INVESTMENTS

BRANCHING OUT

Des Nedhe Group investments support diversification beyond the uranium industry in northern Saskatchewan.

These investments are often in partnership with other First Nations and Indigenous economic development organizations. The companies that DNG invests in provide income and workforce development opportunities for our members and other Indigenous partners.

Other investment opportunities in professional services, construction and community services continue to be examined. These opportunities are considered for the extent to which they can create new wealth for ERFN and new opportunities for ERFN members. The businesses Des Nedhe Group choose to invest in need to be well-managed, viable operations that will experience high growth and have strong margins.



JNE WELDING

JNE is one of Western Canada’s most diverse custom steel fabricators, with clients in North American industry sectors ranging from mining, environmental and construction to petrochemical and power generation. DNG re-invested in the company contributing to its ability to complete a four-year land deal process in 2020.



5BUDS CANNABIS

5Buds is a Saskatchewan-based cannabis retailer whose profits support economic development for the First Nation owners. It operates locations in North Battleford, Warman and Yorkton. It expanded in 2020 with new locations established at Kindersley and Prince Albert. Other positive developments include a transition in leadership with the company becoming cash positive in 2020.



CREATIVE FIRE



“We needed to take the time to know who we are and our value in the marketplace,” said Leanne Hall, Creative Fire’s CEO.

Creative Fire had a transformational year in 2020 that exceeded expectations during a trying time globally.

It started with Des Nedhe Group acquiring 100% ownership of the communications company in December 2019, making 2020 Creative Fire’s first full year as a company in the group. In its first 100 days after the acquisition, work was undertaken to develop a solid understanding of the business.

“We needed to take the time to know who we are and our value in the marketplace,” said Leanne Hall, Creative Fire’s CEO.

But the arrival of the pandemic added a complexity – and delivered opportunity – that accelerated its growth.

Before Des Nedhe Group acquired the 20-year-old company, Creative Fire primarily did work in the Saskatoon area. Under its new ownership, it became a national professional services firm, a transition that was officially announced on National Indigenous Peoples Day in June.

Going where it was invited, Creative Fire doubled the size of its team, hiring people in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario and

New Brunswick, and secured new projects. To do its work safely during the pandemic, the team transitioned to working from home. Plans had already been made to move systems online, so the transition was seamless.

It did not take long for the team at Creative Fire to see that the market is eager to work with a company like theirs.

“During a strategy session in January 2020, a goal of going global in five years was set. That goal was reached in six months,” said Hall.

Creative Fire has been sought out by Canada’s largest First Nation and the largest manufacturing supercluster as well as the world’s largest non-profit corporation, real estate company, defense company, engineering company, agricultural company and First Nations’-owned insurance company.

“It was an honour and pleasure at the end of the year to look back at our list of firsts,” said Hall.

“Being a purpose-driven, 100% Indigenous-owned business is really resonating with the marketplace.”

100% of Creative Fire’s profits go to Des Nedhe Group and English River First Nation. Its purpose to Canadian corporations and public sector entities is to be exclusively committed to providing expert strategy, communications, research, data analytics and creative services with a specialty in Indigenous engagement and relationship building. Its people provide

insight and services that contributes to these organizations developing vital relationships that are sustainable over the long term.

Its credo outlines the beliefs of its team, which is that great communication inspires change, there is power in collaboration, all people have dignity, deliver quality in all things, and that the work being done now shapes future generations.

It also believes in diversity, inclusion and equity. The team includes ERFN members and Métis, First Nations and Inuit individuals from across Canada. 75% of its leadership are women. Its supply chain is made up of 100% Indigenous-owned vendors.

"We infused our corporate culture with Indigenous knowledge, history and culture," said Hall, who explained employees participate in cultural awareness training and lunches with elders from ERFN.

Members of the team are inspired by work that allows them to make an impact. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was plenty of opportunity to take on such work.

Numerous communities reached out to Creative Fire to get support to develop communication tools and strategies to provide residents necessary information. Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario, Canada's largest First Nation,

was among those communities and the work done for it was recognized by Canada's Chief Public Health Officer.

Once COVID-19 vaccines were ready, the federal government sought support from Creative Fire to create communication strategies, tool kits and designs to unroll those immunization programs to First Nations across the country.

"That's where we really rise and do our best work where we know we can make that impact on other Indigenous people and other Canadians," said Hall.

Another inspiring project was Dunk Out Bullying, which saw players with the Saskatchewan Rattlers team up with Charleston Hughes and other members of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, as well as retired NHL pros, to tour Saskatchewan promoting a message of anti-bullying through the game of basketball. The tour visited St. Louis School in Patuanak as well as Father Vachon and Chief Whitecap School in Saskatoon plus Kenaston School and Dalmeny High School.

Hall said her team recognizes 2020 was a turning point in corporate Canada's view of the Indigenous community.

"When they had a choice to place their business, they chose an Indigenous business. We've seen a shift in Canadian corporations truly believing and investing in Indigenous economic prosperity."

OUR CREDO

Great communication inspires change, there is power in collaboration, all people have dignity, deliver quality in all things, and that the work being done now shapes future generations.



Leanne Hall, CEO

LEADERSHIP

75%

of Leadership are women

SUPPLY CHAIN

100%

Indigenous-owned vendors

MAKING AN IMPACT



INVESTING IN PEOPLE



Lacey Unrau,
Senior Director, Human Resources

Going into 2020, Lacey Unrau, director of Human Resources, began looking into a single tool to manage employee information.

More sophisticated Human Resource Management Systems (HRMS) need to replace other methods of information exchange and storage of employee information to allow staff in human resources, payroll and information technology to be more efficient. This HRMS tool needs to support the full employee life cycle, from the time they apply for a job until they retire or no longer work at a DNG company.

Some legacy employees have been with DNG for 15 years or longer. They have a wealth of knowledge that needed to be honoured and captured.

"We realized that in order for us to get to the level we wanted to be at as a highly competitive group of businesses, we needed to start investing in ourselves," said Unrau.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the focus of human resources abruptly flipped. DNG companies and their partners had to set aside plans for sustainable growth to simply survive the year.

Unrau recalls some of the measures that were taken.

"We didn't know how the markets, our clients or people were going to recover so we shifted to trying to save as many jobs as we could," she said.

"Research and investments in HRMS were stalled; some of our people took reductions in salary or hours – anything we could do to sustain our workforce, their families and their communities."

BETTER BUSINESS SYSTEMS FOR EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN 2021 AND BEYOND

The goal of achieving economic self-determination for ERFN by 2025 remains at the forefront of all that Des Nedhe Group does. To get there, DNG realized a need to advance its systems and processes to nurture growth.

The employees of Des Nedhe Group companies are vital to their business success which makes Human Resources crucial. So too is Information Technology (IT) which supports those employees' ability to be efficient, effective and, during a pandemic, safe.

Des Nedhe Group is proud to be an example for other First Nations who are recognizing the need for robust systems to support their own expanding business needs.

"I think that's really telling of the kind of organization we are."

By late 2020, Human Resources could revisit the need for cost-effective, advanced systems that could include DNG's individual business units and provide insights across functions.

"It's not just about HR. It also supports our partners in payroll, training and information technology," said Unrau. "We look forward to realizing even more efficiencies that digitization will allow. Employees and managers can have access at their fingertips, while leaving a smaller, smart and more sustainable footprint."

"We have to remove barriers and equip and enable our managers to be able to make smart decisions based on the unique needs of their workforce."

She is optimistic about the future of DNG as it embraces more inclusive business processes and prospects for DNG employees.

INVESTING IN OUR COMPANIES

As a legacy company with over 30 years of experience in construction, mining, industrial machinery, retail, property management and professional services, DNG's information technology (IT) needs are complex.

Advancements in technology can make equipment out-of-date in a few short years and outdated technology can be costly to manage.

DNG needed new solutions.

Many companies chose to take a wait-and-see approach with respect to sourcing and implementing new technologies during the pandemic.

Greg Miller, Senior Director, Technology for Des Nedhe Group, used the time to re-evaluate DNG's technology strategy. The slowdown caused by the pandemic was an opportunity to accelerate DNG's IT plans.

This required users and the organization to be agile in adopting new technologies and ways of doing business.

"We have construction sites, office workers, retail staff and employees all over the country," said Miller.

"We needed to find platforms that were common to everyone, flexible enough to support the unique business needs of each unit and provide cost savings."

One solution was moving all business units to Microsoft 365.

"By migrating to the Microsoft cloud, we could save the costs of running our own on-site servers and facilities, but we had to ensure that our data remained secure, on Canadian soil."

Another need of the organization had to do with efficient telecommunications.

"With people working from home, we knew that conference calls would be the main source of communication, but the system we had could only handle voice calls."

Microsoft Teams was rolled out to all users and integrates video, file transfer, chat and presentations as part of Microsoft 365.

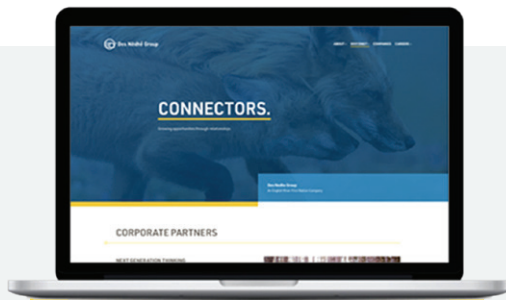
"Having only a few Microsoft licenses was more expensive than all of our 365 subscriptions combined across all of the DNG companies," said Miller.

DNG is looking toward the future to scale IT for the sustainability of its businesses. Miller realizes that with any digital adoption and transformation, there will be growing pains, but at the end of the day the benefits will be substantial.

"It's really an investment back into our companies and the ERFN community."



Greg Miller,
Senior Director, Technology



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