

Kwey, Wachiya, good evening, bonsoir.

What a great evening this is with friends sharing a delicious meal and each other's company and culture.

I would like to thank Maître Stéphan Ferron, Madame Hélène Paradis and the Val-d'Or Chamber of Commerce for their positive vision and great collaboration in planning and promoting this very successful gala evening.

This evening has brought the Crees and the Val-d'Or business community together to support an important Cree non-profit organization. It is very fitting that this event is in support of Aanischaaukamikw, which is the central institution for the preservation of our Cree culture and language, but which is also a key institution for the Cree people to reach out to our neighbours to share the richness of our culture and explain our history.

Thank you to the businesses and individuals who have bought tickets and sponsorships for this event. By your presence this evening you have in turn reached out and shown your support for a Cree project, and it is much appreciated.

Thank you to the Secretariat to the Cree Nation Abitibi-Témiscamingue Economic Alliance for your invaluable help in organizing this evening. Thank you, Ted and Pierre, for your thoughtful support for this event, and thank you Chantal and Lana for your incredible expertise and help in making it happen.

It is very appropriate that we are holding this event as part of the Secretariat's spring conference that is about continuing to build positive, mutually-beneficial business relationships between the Crees and the Abitibi-Témiscamingue business community.

This is what the Crees seek – broad, mutually-beneficial partnerships to build our economy based upon an ever-improving relationship

between our peoples. This is what reconciliation looks like, and this is reconciliation in action.

The economies of our peoples have long been intertwined. This reality has only deepened over the last few decades. Now, as our Cree communities have gradually improved in terms of their standard of living, our economies have become even more inter-dependent.

We are, more and more, becoming directly involved in the development of the resources within our traditional territory, and thereby, enhancing the spending power of our people. With our payrolls; our spending on groceries, equipment and vehicles; our building projects and our partnerships, the Crees inject millions of dollars a year into the local, regional and provincial economies. We will only continue to create mutually beneficial economic opportunities as we build up our own economic capacity.

(pause)

We Crees have always practised philanthropy in our communities. We never had a name for helping each other when in need. It is simply part of who we are and how we treat each other. Recently, though, as we have progressed in establishing the typical institutions of modern society, we have also adapted modern philanthropic techniques and institutions as part of our development strategy.

We started 15 years ago with the successful fundraising campaign to design and build Aanischaaukamikw. The Ville de Val-d'Or and some of you were contributors to that campaign that raised \$26 million.

We see philanthropic partnership as an extension of the positive, mutually-beneficial relationships we are trying to build among our communities, our institutions, our people and our businesses. And we see support for indigenous philanthropy as a concrete way to contribute to reconciliation.

The Crees are incorporating the use of modern philanthropy into our traditional practices in order to support our nation's social and cultural development goals. We have established the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation to fund charitable projects and activities across the Cree territory.

Like community foundations throughout Canada, the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation will support a wide range of projects including culture, youth, housing, women's issues, suicide prevention, early childhood development and many others.

This year we are launching a multi-million-dollar campaign for the Foundation. We will seek support from the Cree communities and entities, and also from our neighbours and business partners in the region. We look forward to meeting with each of you personally to discuss how we can work together in this philanthropic cause and how you could be involved.

Thank you again for your presence and support this evening.

Merci. Meegwetch.