

Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development Project

Case Study

Whitecap Dakota Nation | Whitecap Development Corporation

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One of the key actions in Saskatchewan's Growth Plan 2020-2030 is to grow Indigenous participation in the economy. The success of this action depends on Indigenous nations in Saskatchewan building and maintaining their economic development activities. The Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development project provides made-in-Saskatchewan tools for Indigenous communities to build the governance foundation that will support long-term economic development. An important part of the project involves capturing the experience of Saskatchewan Indigenous communities through case studies and toolkits based on this experience.

The case study in this document was developed by a team of researchers and their affiliates at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. The project is funded by the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Trade and Export Development.

The case studies are designed to be used first and foremost by Indigenous communities across Saskatchewan. The premise of the work is that economic development stories need to be shared among those involved in economic development, both in the community where the economic development activities take place and in other communities looking to undertake economic development. It is important to focus on what has and has not worked. One of the long-term goals is to develop a set of resources that is Indigenous-led and available to Indigenous communities across the province and the country. The cases may also be used as governance training components and/or strategic planning exercises, as well as in teaching.

The case studies combine material from websites and other publicly available sources with material gathered through interviews with leaders and representatives involved in economic development activities. The interviews last between two and four hours and involve a small group of economic development leaders in the community. The questions asked focus solely on the corporate entities and activities that have been developed, and those interviewed are asked questions in their role as a corporate leader.

When approaching community leaders and representatives, we begin with an informal discussion. If the leaders and representatives indicate an interest in participating, we proceed with sending them a formal letter of introduction, which they can use to obtain official permission to proceed. We know communities receive many requests for information, and they do not always see the results of the work that is undertaken. Our goal is to ensure that the case study is shared with the community in a way that is beneficial. To this end, a draft of the case study is shared with the community, and the case study is not finalized until the community gives its agreement. Once a set of case studies have been developed, leaders from the communities involved will be given the opportunity to discuss the findings.

We would like to thank the leaders and representatives for their time and effort. Their knowledge and insights are critical to understanding economic development in Indigenous communities.

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Whitecap Dakota Nation | Whitecap Dakota Development Corporation

Effective sovereignty and economic development

Overview and Key Findings

Whitecap Dakota Nation (Whitecap) is located 26 kilometres south of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan's largest market. While this location has often been perceived to have been an advantage in economic development, Whitecap's experience highlights that it is not sufficient on its own.

Whitecap's successful development has been underpinned by a strong emphasis on good governance and the development of effective sovereignty. The community has invested significant effort over the years to establish a robust governance framework that has enabled them to take effective control of their land and the economic development process. Rather than solely focusing on resource and project assessment, Whitecap prioritized the establishment of effective governance structures and legal regimes. This long-term approach has positioned the community for future opportunities while allowing it to actively undertake development projects.

Financial stability has been a crucial precursor to Whitecap's development journey, as the community organized its finances and addressed a substantial budget deficit. The systematic transfer of control over lands from the federal government also played a pivotal role, allowing for more agile business decision-making and the bypassing of burdensome processes prescribed under the Indian Act.

As a result of being prepared for development, Whitecap successfully secured the opportunity to host the Dakota Dunes Casino. To enhance economic prosperity, Whitecap established the Whitecap Development Corporation (WDC) with the goal of creating wealth and opportunities through business ventures. WDC oversees the leasing of land for the Dakota Dunes Casino, as well as the ownership and operation of the Dakota Dunes Golf Links, Whitecap Convenience Store, Whitecap Industrial Services, and the Dakota Dunes Resort.

In addition to these endeavors, Whitecap bolstered its governance certainty by signing in 2023 a Self-Government Treaty that affirms the Whitecap Dakota Nation's inherent right to self-government under the Constitution Act, 1982.

Collectively, these efforts have resulted in a thriving on-reserve economy, with job opportunities surpassing the number of community members available to fill them; as a result, hundreds of individuals commute daily for employment.

Background and History

Whitecap Dakota Nation (Whitecap) is located 26 kilometers south of Saskatoon and prides itself on its strong community cohesion rooted in a rich cultural heritage. Guided by a mandate from its members, the leadership at Whitecap is committed to achieving a vision of "Strengthening Community and Building Opportunity." Over the years, the Nation has fostered meaningful partnerships and maintained a Spirit of Alliance by collaborating with neighboring communities and governments, all in pursuit of advancing their nation-building agenda.

With a membership of approximately 700 individuals, a significant portion of whom reside within the community, Whitecap places a premium on responsible leadership and transparent governance to attract external investment. As a testament to their efforts, the Nation has successfully garnered over \$160 million in capital investment dedicated to economic development, tourism initiatives, and critical infrastructure.

In Dakota, the word Dakota means ally.

Chief Darcy Bear

Building Alliances for Development

The vision for Whitecap began to take shape when Darcy Bear assumed the role of Chief in 1994. From the outset of his leadership, Chief Bear recognized the significance of alliances and collaborative efforts. He underscored the cultural significance of the term "Dakota," which means "ally," emphasizing that the community members' ancestors had a longstanding tradition of forming alliances and collaborating with other nations well before European contact, with the Mississippi, Missouri, Souris, Red, and North and South Saskatchewan rivers serving as vital trade routes. The horse, buffalo, and tools were indispensable elements of survival and cultural identity for Plains Indigenous nations, shaping their lifestyle, hunting strategies, and material culture. Each nation boasted its own governance structures, education systems, healthcare practices, and even policing and military systems. These communities operated with distinct territories, economies, and trade networks, primarily centred around river systems. The bison, with its multifaceted utility in providing food, shelter, clothing, and tools, played a central role in ensuring food sustainability.

Sometimes to go ahead, you have to start by looking back.

Chief Darcy Bear

The practice of building alliances has thus been a fundamental aspect of Whitecap's history, shaping its development over time. For example, a meeting between Chief Whitecap and John Lake in 1882 led to the selection of the location for the City of Saskatoon and made Chief Whitecap a recognized founder of the city.

The Chief's foresight in engaging with settlers laid the groundwork for the Nation's proximity to one of Saskatchewan's largest urban centers. However, this proximity did not come without challenges. In the past, the First Nation faced considerable hardships, including a 70 percent unemployment rate and a lack of modern infrastructure. Fast forward to the present day, and Whitecap has achieved a remarkable transformation, boasting more job opportunities on the reserve than available members to fill them, along with modernized infrastructure and facilities.

Whitecap's progress and prosperity are rooted in a co-operative community spirit and a robust work ethic. Whitecap's historical resilience and unity have provided it with an enduring commitment to

collective projects, aimed at benefiting all community members. Their deeply ingrained work ethic, rooted in their cultural heritage, remains an integral aspect of their identity.

Establishing Effective Sovereignty

With the election of Chief Bear in 1994, Whitecap leveraged its advantageous location and pursued collaborative partnerships. Recognizing the importance of financial stability, they addressed a significant budgetary deficit of \$250,000 within their \$800,000 budget. A comprehensive financial management plan was devised, and debt consolidation initiatives were undertaken in collaboration with a financial institution. The community's steadfast commitment to the plan led to the successful elimination of the deficit. With their financial affairs in order, Whitecap was able to undertake a range of other initiatives.

In 1995, the community achieved an important milestone by entering into a Financial Transfer Agreement (FTA) with the federal government (at that point, 11 other First Nations in the province had FTAs). They also began lobbying for essential infrastructure such as a water treatment plant, a new school, and their inaugural subdivision. Remarkably, all these projects were successfully completed in 1996. This progress was made possible through meticulous resource planning and design.

Once Whitecap got its financial house in order, it could focus on building community infrastructure. The community now boasts modern infrastructure, including a health center, significantly enhancing the quality of life for its members. Subsequently, the focus shifted to the crucial matter of economic development. However, this endeavor was complicated due to the restrictive policies imposed by the Indian Act, which limited the utilization of reserve land for development purposes. Nonetheless, the community took the first step by establishing a small store and remained committed to exploring further opportunities to expand its economic capacity.

First Nations traditionally found it difficult to undertake economic activities on reserve because communal ownership makes it difficult for financial institutions to secure an interest in the project's assets, thus creating challenges for financing. The land designation process under the Indian Act allows First Nations to designate lands for commercial purposes, permitting them to utilize specific areas for economic activities. This process provides a way for First Nations to have access to a stream of funds that can be used to secure financing.

The land designation process is a time consuming and multifaceted endeavor. Since the land is collectively owned, community involvement is important when making decisions about its use. In addition, the paperwork involved is complicated and onerous.

The process can be illustrated by examining the steps Whitecap went through to develop the Dakota Dunes Golf Course. The process was started by developing a comprehensive land designation proposal that indicated that the land would be used for economic development, specifically a golf course. After approval by a community vote, the proposal was forwarded to the federal government, which approved it after a round of negotiations. With the federal government's approval in place, the First Nation leased the land to a company established for this purpose (the lease required the minister's signature). The lease provided Whitecap with a predictable revenue stream which could be used to secure financing. The process took approximately three years to complete.

The passage of the First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA) in 1999 provided Whitecap with another way to self-govern their land. This was a sectoral self-government agreement, and it was the

first step to Whitecap's journey towards its Self-Government Treaty signed in 2023. The FNLMA empowers First Nations to assume control over all reserve lands and thus goes beyond the designation of land for specific purposes and projects. In 2003, Whitecap made the decision to become a part of the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management. After conducting extensive consultations with the community, an overwhelming 89 percent of members voted in favor of joining the agreement. In 2004, the community adopted its own land code. The Land Code replaces relevant sections of the Indian Act, recognizing Whitecap's autonomy in land management and allowing the First Nation to manage its reserve lands and revenue management independently.

The benefits that accompanied the agreement included financial resources for environmental reviews and land reclamation. As a result, the First Nation was able to close several landfill sites and implement a regional garbage disposal model, transporting all waste off reserve to a regional landfill. Additionally, door-to-door garbage pickup and recycling initiatives were implemented.

With the resources obtained through the FNLMA, the First Nation engaged a third-party to develop a comprehensive Land Use Plan, a process that involved consultations with the community, leadership, and elders. The Land Use Plan encompassed zoning regulations, including designations for residential, industrial, resort, and commercial districts, as well as natural resource conservation areas, protection of cemeteries, sacred sites, and agricultural districts.

Following the establishment of the Land Use Plan, zoning measures, and development centres, the council was empowered to issue legally surveyed lots, including residential and commercial parcels with lease terms of up to 99 years, all recognized by financial institutions and thus eligible for use as security. Furthermore, the First Nation gained the ability to secure mortgages on commercial properties, enabling further economic development and investment opportunities.

In addition to these endeavors, Whitecap has recently signed a Self-Government Treaty that affirms the Whitecap Dakota Nation's inherent right to self-government. The Treaty gives Whitecap Dakota Nation jurisdiction and law-making powers on their reserve lands over governance, land, natural resources, membership, cultural matters, language revitalization and preservation, education, financial management and accountability, health, and social services.

Whitecap Development Corporation

The Whitecap Development Corporation (WDC) was formally established in 1990. However, its operational activities remained dormant until the early 2000s. The corporation's primary objective centres around generating sustainable revenue through the establishment of profitable businesses, recognizing that long-term success hinges on financial viability. Its mission also involves creating employment opportunities within the community and prioritizing support for education and training initiatives for its members.

In pursuit of these goals, WDC adheres to specific criteria and core values to preserve and promote Dakota culture and embrace environmental responsibility. These guiding principles inform the corporation's assessment of potential business ventures, ensuring that each opportunity aligns with the community's overarching vision and strategic objectives. To maintain this approach, a meticulous screening process is used to evaluate the suitability and alignment of prospective businesses with the community's interests.

The WDC is overseen by a five-member board of directors made up of elected council members alongside representatives from the broader community. For more extensive business endeavours, separate boards of directors are established, each with council representation along with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO typically has a position on the board of directors of the corporation's investee companies, further reinforcing collaboration and alignment between the entities.

Profit means sustainability. You can't sustain the jobs that you create unless you're generating profit.

Darrell Balkwill, CEO

Economic Development Projects

Dakota Dunes Golf Links

Given its proximity to Saskatoon, the popularity of golf, and the suitability of its land for the popular links-style course, the Whitecap Dakota Nation saw an opportunity for economic development. To achieve this goal, Whitecap engaged in a collaborative effort with three other First Nation groups. Over time, they made the decision to acquire full ownership of the golf course by buying out their partners, resulting in Whitecap now owning 100 percent of the venture.

The Dakota Dunes Golf Links officially opened its doors in 2004, marking the inception of the Dakota Dunes Resort. The golf course quickly garnered recognition and acclaim. It earned accolades such as the title of Best New Course in Canada by Golf Digest and secured the top-ranking position as Saskatchewan's #1 Ranked Public Course according to SCOREGolf. The course's reputation and facilities were also distinguished enough to host the esteemed Dakota Dunes Casino Open, a major PGA of Canada golf tournament, for nine years.

Whitecap Trail Convenience

Whitecap Trail Convenience Gas Plus is a gas station and store situated in the Whitecap Community, adjacent to Chief Whitecap Trail. It is wholly owned by the Whitecap Development Corporation.

The gas station has five self-serve fuel pumps, while the store carries an array of convenience, automotive, and grocery items, catering to the needs of the local community. The store also offers freshly prepared daily hot meals, enhancing its appeal to customers seeking convenience and quality.

Formerly under the management of local entrepreneurs, Whitecap Development Corporation acquired the store at a nominal cost of one dollar, assuming its debt in the process. Since the acquisition, the store has experienced remarkable growth, with current annual revenue exceeding \$4 million. With a dedicated workforce of approximately 17-18 employees, the store's operations are well-staffed and efficiently run.

Whitecap Industrial Services

The Whitecap Industrial Services division serves as a platform to attract partners to set up operations on reserve land. The subsequent activity enables Whitecap to generate rental income as a landlord and to form mutually beneficial partnerships with companies from various industries.

The primary focus of the Whitecap Industrial Services division is to provide services to the resource, oil and gas, utilities, and pipeline sectors. By creating a consortium of companies with complementary business lines, the division's goal is to offer multi-dimensional services, positioning itself as the preferred choice within the industry.

Central to these partnerships are four core pillars: revenue generation; fostering aboriginal employment and recruitment; equity investment in business assets; and ensuring the establishment of business locations within the Whitecap community. These pillars form the foundation of relationships in which the partners, distinguished by their expertise and resources, provide employment and training opportunities to Indigenous people while prioritizing safety in their operations. The division stands as a testament to the successful implementation of strategic partnerships that foster economic growth, empower the local community, and establish a reputation of excellence within the industries it serves.

Dakota Dunes Casino

Dakota Dunes Casino opened in 2007 as the largest Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA) casino in the province. The choice of Whitecap Dakota as the casino location is linked to a plebiscite held in 2003 by the City of Saskatoon. In the plebiscite, 55 percent of voters opposed the construction of a casino in downtown Saskatoon. This result presented an opportunity for Whitecap to host the casino. Since it had its own land code, Whitecap was able to grant a leasehold interest to the Saskatoon Tribal Council, avoiding the protracted land surrender vote process.

As part of its development approach for the casino and golf course, Whitecap worked with the City of Saskatoon, along with several rural municipalities and towns, to build a tourism corridor extending from Saskatoon to Lake Diefenbaker along Highway 219. Paving the highway leading to Whitecap emerged as an important element in preparing the community to host the casino. Whitecap successfully managed three of the five phases of the \$43 million highway project. The highway was renamed Chief Whitecap Trail, marking the first instance in the province where a highway received the name of a chief.

The casino venture has been a catalyst for numerous employment opportunities within the Whitecap community. Paired with the Dakota Dunes Golf Links, the combined complex attracts over a million visitors annually.

Dakota Dunes Hotel

Dakota Dunes Hotel officially opened in 2020 as a complement to the Dakota Dunes Casino and Dakota Dunes Golf Links. The multi-story complex features 155 sleeping rooms, meeting space, restaurant/lounge services, and pool/health club facilities.

Whitecap faced numerous difficulties in raising the capital for the hotel. Among these obstacles were the requirements of the Community Opportunities Readiness Program (CORP) through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). CORP was designed to fund 25 percent of economic development projects, with a

payment cap of \$3 million. While the cap ensured a 25 percent contribution for projects up to \$12 million in cost, it meant Whitecap would only receive a 7.5 percent contribution to its \$40 million hotel. After extensive lobbying efforts, the federal government agreed to lift the cap and Whitecap was able to receive a federal contribution equal to 25 percent of the \$40 million.

The hotel faced further challenges when it opened in October 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the hotel did not qualify for wage or rental subsidies due to the lack of historical financial data, Whitecap lobbied the provincial finance minister to appeal to the federal finance minister for fairness in their situation. Eventually, a compensation package was created to help the hotel through the pandemic. The hotel currently employs 160 people and has plans to build a thermal spa, which is expected to create an additional 220 jobs. In total, Whitecap has approximately 750 employees across all the enterprises on the reserve.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure, including water and sewer systems, power, and fibre for high-speed telecommunications, is crucial for economic development. To finance the \$13.6 million in infrastructure required for the hotel expansion, Whitecap accessed a portion of the funds from Indigenous Services Canada and a portion through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP). ICIP is a matching program, with one third of funding from the province, one third from the federal government, and one third from the local jurisdiction. To access this program, community leadership approached then Premier Brad Wall and they jointly lobbied the federal government. The federal government approved Whitecap's access to the program. The Investing in Infrastructure Program is now available to all First Nations for accessing infrastructure.

More recently, Whitecap used ICIP to provide high-speed fibre to every household in the community, including those on income assistance. Access to high-speed internet is especially important for e-learning, e-health, and job training purposes. Whitecap has also partnered with the University of Minnesota to provide Dakota language classes online, with some students now able to instruct programs themselves. This investment in infrastructure has made a significant difference in the community.

Taxation

Whitecap has implemented several innovative taxation schemes to fund the provision of business and community services, including a real property tax and a Whitecap Community Improvement Fee.

The property tax is levied on businesses operating on Whitecap land. To ensure fairness, land assessments are carried out by the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency; Whitecap then applies a comparable mil rate to the businesses in its jurisdictions. The taxes received by the Whitecap Dakota government are used to provide services to the businesses. Whitecap also charges a development levy for new developments to help pay for the infrastructure on newly developed lands.

The Whitecap Community Improvement Fee is effectively the Goods and Services Tax (GST) that is levied on the goods and services provided by the casino, golf course, and other businesses. However, instead of the tax being collected by the federal government, it is collected by Whitecap. The federal government was willing to vacate the GST providing the replacement fee was charged to everyone regardless of Indigenous status. The federal government allows First Nations to replace the federal GST

with the First Nations GST. They also allow the First Nation to rename the tax. As a result, Whitecap adopted the Whitecap Community Improvement Fee. It required a by-law change by the Whitecap council and it was approved by the community. It required a community vote because people needed to agree to have a tax levied on themselves.

Whitecap has also exercised its jurisdiction over the liquor consumption tax, with the province agreeing to collect the tax from everyone, regardless of status, and then to remit the tax to Whitecap. The revenue collected from the tax is allocated towards cultural and language preservation efforts.

Effective Sovereignty

One of the key elements in Whitecap's economic development approach is its effective sovereignty which gives it control over its land and economic development activities. To provide even greater governance certainty, Whitecap signed a Self-Government Treaty with the federal government on May 2, 2023. The self-government agreement was ratified by the community, with 92 percent of voters voting in favour of the agreement (voter turnout was 60 percent). An advisory committee of Whitecap members helped to shape the agreement and ensure the protection of First Nation perspectives, values, and culture.

The Treaty recognizes Whitecap Dakota Nation's inherent right to self-government under the Constitution Act, 1982 and provides Whitecap Dakota Nation with "jurisdiction and law-making powers on their reserve lands over governance, land, natural resources, membership, cultural matters, language revitalization and preservation, education, financial management and accountability, health and social services" (Government of Canada, 2023).

The treaty requires community approval of three items: (1) amendments to Whitecap's constitution; (2) a Governance code that sets out rules for the composition of Council and its law-making processes; and (3) a Financial Management and Accountability Code that sets out rules for dealing with financial matters. These are now complete and have been approved by the community membership.

Community Tripartite Agreements

Through a pilot project with the federal and provincial governments, Whitecap has established a Community Tripartite Agreement that allows for RCMP officers and community safety officers to reside in their communities and enforce laws. Whitecap's community safety officers have approximately 80 percent of the powers of RCMP officers and can issue tickets for various offenses.

In addition, the province has introduced legislation to amend the Summary of Offenses Procedures Act (SOPA). As Chief Darcy Bear says, "Through our work with the provincial government, the amendments to SOPA will give us access to prosecution and enforcement tools that will give force to our laws and strengthen the place of our laws alongside federal and provincial law."

What All This Means

One of the key outcomes of the activities undertaken by Whitecap over the last 30 years is a vibrant business environment and strong employment growth. As Chief Darcy Bear says, "Currently, there are over 700 jobs in the community, with another 350 expected in the next three years. Imagine a First Nation with more jobs than people to fill them. Between 400-500 people from Saskatoon and the

surrounding area commute daily to Whitecap for work.” The unemployment rate on Whitecap is roughly the same as the provincial rate of 5.1 percent.

The Whitecap Brand

When asked to describe the Whitecap brand, Chief Bear emphasizes the importance of stable governance, transparency, and credibility, all factors that are important in ensuring there is consistency and that businesses understand that their lease and their operations will be allowed to continue regardless of changes in the chief and council. Educating non-Indigenous businesses about how Whitecap’s systems work is crucial in building successful partnerships. This focus on transparency and credibility starts at home — Whitecap has been providing audits to its members long before it was required by law and the Nation always shares its business plans with its members at community meetings.

In discussing the business attraction strategy of their community, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Whitecap Development Corporation, Darrell Balkwill, emphasizes the importance of attracting external investment to create jobs and generate revenue. Both Balkwill and Bear acknowledge that while starting businesses from scratch is necessary in the early stages of economic development, the goal is to establish a foundation that allows for outside investment to accelerate growth. The community's proximity to Saskatoon is a fortunate advantage that not all communities have.

Chief Darcy Bear and CEO Darrell Balkwill point out the need to have structures in place that are consistent with other jurisdictions to increase comfort levels for investors. Consistency is important, and unilateral actions by one First Nation can scare away investment from all First Nations. It is important to have a structure in place where First Nations can work together and have a way to enforce their laws.

Chief Bear highlights the satisfaction of seeing a vision become a reality through careful planning and teamwork. He emphasizes the importance of having a good team, which includes council members, executives, elders, and consultants. Chief Bear also speaks about the rewards of seeing community members employed and happy, as well as the improvements made in infrastructure and quality of life. He notes that economic involvement was essential to creating positive change and that without it, the community would not have experienced the level of progress it has had.

There is also a perception that, in some cases, Indigenous businesses are not as good in delivering their goods and services as non-Indigenous businesses. This perception can be a disadvantage to First Nations as they pursue economic development. One way of overcoming this perception is to focus on the elements outlined above — e.g., stable and transparent governance, consistency in the rules that are put in place, education as to how development works on First Nations — as well as to constantly strive to be at least as good as other businesses, if not better.

Focus on Community

Despite the discussions of big employment numbers and revenues, improving the quality of life for community members is the real goal. Chief Darcy Bear and CEO Darrell Balkwill emphasize the importance of understanding how their actions impact each person in the community, the importance of role models, and the impact of opportunity and preparation on young people's career paths.

Our community members are the key to Whitecap's ongoing success. They have high expectations of the performance of their government. We emphasize education, and our members know what they want, and they have a say in the direction of the community. There are provisions to remove leadership that don't follow our rules, should it ever come to that. Whitecap's success is based on drawing from our past, executing today, and building our future.

Chief Darcy Bear

Chief Bear and CEO Balkwill believe development corporations are a useful tool for communities to initiate their economic development. However, they also emphasize that a strategic plan is necessary to utilize this tool effectively. The community must identify their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to utilize the development corporation to fulfill their plan. Capacity building in terms of human, financial, and leadership capacity is also crucial for successful implementation.

There are no easy or short-term fixes, and patience is required for long-term success. Communities often fall into the trap of seeking quick fixes, but this approach usually ends in failure. Therefore, the upfront work of developing a strategic plan and building capacity is crucial to achieve sustained economic growth.

Economic development corporations require many supports to work well. The stability of the First Nation's government and support from the membership were identified as critical factors, as well as the location of the corporation and its potential for building alliances. The importance of working together as a team was also emphasized — it has been suggested that smaller councils with a chief and four headmen, as outlined in the treaties, might promote greater co-operation and less infighting than the larger councils mandated by the Indian Act. Ultimately, the goal of the corporation should be to serve the people and provide them with better opportunities and quality of life.

Working together as a team and making a difference for others is important. However, Whitecap also emphasizes the importance of making a profit as it ensures sustainability and the ability to create employment opportunities. Strong management capacity is also critical.

Chief Bear recalls a visit to Mississippi where they learned about a tribe that invested in its people through education, healthcare, and industry partnerships; the outcome was that the tribe was the largest employer in the state. Chief Bear believes that reinvesting money in the community is important to create a legacy for future generations.

Traditional thinking dictates that business and politics should be separated in a development corporation. However, it is possible to have the same people involved in both aspects as long as they can switch between their political and business roles effectively. Whitecap is an example where leadership has been involved in both areas and people can wear both hats. However, it is important for leaders not to get involved in day-to-day operations once businesses are up and running. There is also a need for consistency and in the delegation of responsibilities to those overseeing operations. It is important that community members understand this process, that council is not involved in micromanaging operations, and that any concerns brought up are directed to the appropriate person in charge.

While separating business and politics is important, it is also important for the community leadership to leverage the rights of the First Nation to bring opportunities to the development corporation and to lobby for the resources so the strategy and goals can be achieved. There needs to be a partnership between the political leadership and the development corporation with each staying in their own lanes while supporting each other.

Darrell Balkwill, Chief Executive Officer

Chief Bear is confident in the Whitecap's future. He cites many reasons for this confidence. Community members have a high expectation for the performance of their government. They expect the annual audit to be presented to them and the leadership has monthly meetings with the Elders. They also have a minimum of four meetings with membership and sometimes more depending on the latest developments. The council is small enough to be cohesive. The community has adopted interim self-government measures like the First Nation Land Management Act (FNLMA). They have also signed a self-government treaty which gives them additional control over the land and activities. At the same time, the constitution is difficult to change, thus ensuring the consistency and stability that is crucial for economic development. Each individual councillor also has an advisory committee that he/she can use as a sounding board. This helps them stay connected to the community and to get input and feedback on community plans and initiatives.

We're the only First Nation in Saskatchewan where you can go for both a Starbucks and a Tim Horton's coffee on the reserve.

Chief Darcy Bear

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