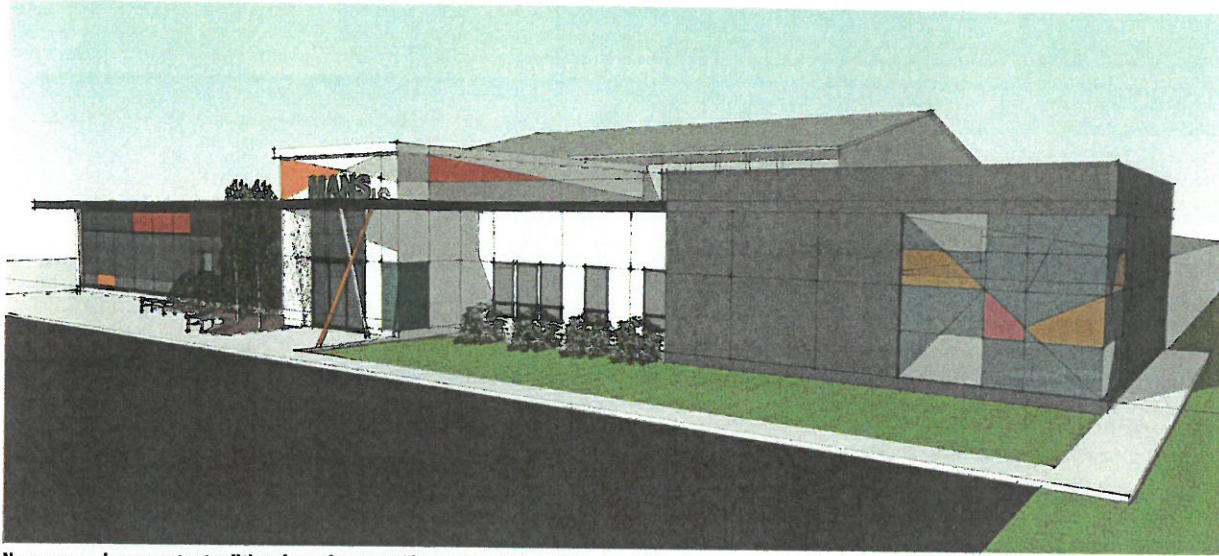


Construction begins on high school buildings



New campus incorporates traditional art elements: The main building of the new high school campus, adjacent to the elementary school, features the Ptarmigan Cree Cultural Centre (far right), funded by a private foundation in Calgary. A separate industrial arts building will house a welding shop furnished by the Canadian Welding Association Foundation. Architectural drawing and exterior design by Zayda Steinke.

After a tremendous amount of prayer and hard work, construction of Mamawi Atosketan Native School's high school and industrial arts centre is underway. Excavation of the site began shortly after Mamawi Atosketan Native School's (MANS) May 25 groundbreaking—an event that featured Native Council members, government officials, as well as the Grammy-nominated drum group Northern Cree.

A palpable sense of accomplishment and excitement pervaded as the footings for the school were poured. "We have been dreaming about and planning for a high school for a long time," says MANS principle Gail Wilton. "Finally seeing the ground work begin has created such a sense of excitement. The Lord is busy at work here at Mamawi, and we are eagerly looking forward as we watch His plans unfold."

The sentiment is one that construction manager William Piersanti shares. After five years of prayer, planning, and discussion, he was ready to begin construction. "The school is exactly where it needs to be, and I can't take the credit. I'm just the clay working in the clay," he says with a smile.

Reflecting on his involvement with the MANS project, newly retired Alberta Conference secretary, Larry Hall, echoes the principal's enthusiasm. "The MANS project is one of the most significant, timely, and relevant mission projects ever undertaken by a tremendous amount of dedication, work, and prayer over the past few years, and it is truly one of my greatest delights ever to finally see its construction begin.

The new project is having an impact on the community. "The Lord has truly blessed this project on behalf of a people who have experienced so much injustice in our country," Hall observes. "I recently chatted with several First Nations individuals who could hardly find words to express their joy and the sense of hope they have in the difference this MANS expansion will make to their community. Personally, I am very grateful to all who have contributed financially and otherwise to make it happen."

"The beginning of construction is the hand of God at work," says honorary campaign chair Larry Wilkins, "He still listens to the prayers of average people. He still acts on their behalf. He still performs miracles."

Wilkins, who is himself First Nations, expressed gratitude for the vision and commitment of Conference administrators Larry Hall and recently retired president Ken Wiebe. "I cannot thank them enough for giving everyone involved with this ongoing project the courage to believe. Their humble bravery solidified our faith in the question of not whether the school would be built, but when."

"When I am in my rocking chair," concludes Wilkins, "I know I will remember [Ken and Larry] and this time with joy and intense gratitude. I will be smiling like a Cheshire Cat for apparently no reason, but for now, it's back to work." ■

Myken McDowell is communications assistant for the Bridge Campaign, which funds the new high school buildings of Mamawi Atosketan Native School.