

Economy: Banking, Financing and Investments

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Image courtesy of Matsqui First Nation

Creating a Community Hub

After years of dreaming, British Columbia's Matsqui First Nation prepares to welcome members to its very own community centre — a place to gather, play and access basic healthcare

With just 80 members living on reserve, Matsqui First Nation could be considered tiny. But when it comes to ambition and care for one another, this community near Abbotsford, British Columbia is bursting with pride and purpose.

“We try hard to make sure that everyone who can work *is* working,” says the community's long-time leader, Chief Alice McKay, explaining they run a number of businesses including a trailer park, paint ball operation and timber shake and shingle mill to create jobs and revenue for Matsqui's 200 members. Yet this enterprising community was missing something big: a community centre.

For years, members have borrowed the hall of another First Nation to host their special events. Seeing a doctor has meant leaving the Matsqui reserve. Members without a driver's licence or access to a car have relied on local buses to nearby Abbotsford or Mission, having to walk to the nearest bus stop, about six kilometres away.

“We couldn't hold off anymore,” says Chief McKay. “We were tired of going to another First Nation to have our celebrations and dinners, of travelling to other towns for our basic healthcare needs. We needed to act on our dream of building a community centre of our own.”

When leaders did the math, they realized achieving their dream would require more money than already saved, so they sought help. The BC First Nations Health Authority agreed to fund the healthcare wing of the new building, which will offer members wellness programs and more.

Matsqui also secured a \$3.8 million loan for construction of the \$5 million building from RBC. “If they can help us, they will, so we're very happy with the Royal Bank of Canada,” says Chief McKay.

RBC banker Grant Van Egdome in Chilliwack likes visiting Matsqui. “It has a real community vibe, and I think it's because of the way they run things,” he explains. “They spend time listening to members of their community, especially through family reps.”

In fact, community engagement was key to the design process, notes Chief McKay. In addition to local healthcare, the family reps also requested a large gym for playing basketball, floor hockey and other recreation and events.

RBC's Van Egdome also praised the community for its professionalism and use of partnerships: “They've done an amazing job, especially for a community that didn't have a lot of previous experience with a building project of this size.”