



Image courtesy of Little Black Bear First Nation

An Opportunity for Little Black Bear First Nation

Smart planning and expert advice is helping the community prepare to open Saskatchewan's first Aboriginal-owned Tim Hortons franchise combined with a brand new Petro-Canada gas station to generate revenue and create jobs

Very soon, visitors to and local residents of the Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan area will be able to fill their tanks, grab a cup of coffee to go or sit down to a bowl of fresh hot soup at a full-service Tim Hortons restaurant, all thanks to a local First Nation.

When the doors open, Little Black Bear, located about 80 kilometres northeast of Regina, will become the first Aboriginal community in Saskatchewan to own a combined Petro-Canada Tim Hortons franchise.

With 38% of their population 15 years and younger, the need to generate revenue and create jobs to secure the future of this community is urgent, says Clarence Bellegarde, Little Black Bear Chief.

That is one reason why, in 2005, the Little Black Bear First Nation began a two-year process to develop a 30-year Strategic Economic Development Plan focused on creating economic stability for the community through the development of job-creating businesses. Land claim funds were used to purchase thousands of acres of land, including five acres of commercial development land at the junction of two major highways in Fort Qu'Appelle.

In 2006, the community began executing the plan by opening a gas bar on its commercial land in Fort Qu'Appelle to take advantage of the provincial tax rebate system, with plans to transition it into a brand name gas station. The plan included expanding the commercial

zoning to include two separate businesses in one location, adding convenience and variety for customers. Petro-Canada was approached early in this process because of their developments with other First Nations.

By September 2007, the commercial land and existing gas and convenience business owned by Little Black Bear in Fort Qu'Appelle gained reserve status, a long process with the federal government to officially add the property to the First Nation. Now the planners who had envisioned supplementing their gas bar with a coffee franchise were ready for further development. Discussions started with two coffee franchises and concluded with the tried-and-true brand: Tim Hortons.

Enter Thomas Benjoe, an RBC Commercial Account Manager in Regina who was able to draw on RBC's Franchising Program for expert advice. Benjoe was key in guiding the Little Black Bear community through the various financing processes and liaising with all the partners involved.

Throughout the two-year process, engagement of Little Black Bear's members has been very important. "Vital to the Strategic Economic Development plan has been the participation and voice of our people, who approve all Band ventures," says Chief Bellegarde. "We would like to thank RBC for partnering with us on this development, and our citizens for providing direction to our leadership."