

Traditional Celebration of Achievement

This annual event celebrates and honours the Indigenous graduates from across the Wood Buffalo Region. Eagle Feather teachings are shared with graduates and their families before they are gifted an Eagle Feather for completing their high school education.

How it started

In 1997, Father Mercredi Indigenous Liaison Irene Louttit, parent committee Julia McDougall and Janet Alook and Father Mercredi Principal George McGuigan began planning a small gathering to honour their Indigenous graduates.

The first celebration was held in 1998 in the Father Mercredi High School cafeteria with 33 Indigenous graduates from Father Mercredi and Composite High School and their families. The celebration began with sharing a meal with the graduates families and ended the evening with an Elder presenting an Eagle Feather to the graduates for their accomplishments. Once TCOA became a known entity, they felt it needed to expand and include the Indigenous people of the Wood Buffalo Region. It has now grown to over 100 Indigenous graduates each year from all across the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. This celebration now honours all First Nation, Metis & Inuit students who have graduated from and currently reside in Fort McMurray, Anzac, Janvier, Conklin, Fort Mckay & Fort Chip.

Vision for TCOA

An intimate gathering to honour and celebrate the achievements of the Indigenous graduates. Irene, Julia, Janet & George knew how important it was to celebrate the Indigenous students and their success in school. Creating space for Indigenous Culture and Language throughout the schools brought a sense of belonging to the Indigenous students. The original celebration "Native Grad" was to come together to honour the Indigenous students for their dedication to their studies and gift them their Eagle Feather for completing their grade 12 education.

Values & commitment

Our commitment is to our Indigenous graduates, to bring them a celebration that is designed wholeheartedly for them to enjoy and to feel important and empowered. The Indigenous graduates are the guests of honour and this night is for them. We value Indigenous Culture, Tradition and Language and will always seek guidance from Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

What to expect

The event is now held at Keyano Theatre each year to continue honouring our graduates while maintaining the small intimate feel with the families and friends who have come to love and look forward to this milestone. Each year we have a Grand Entry with graduates and Dignitaries, a Keynote, Entertainment, a photo booth for family photos and light snacks and refreshments after the ceremony.

TCOA Requirements

Students who are 19 years of age or younger that complete their grade 12 education from a high school (or equivalent program) that is in the Wood Buffalo area (Fort McMurray, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Anzac, Janvier and Conklin). Students must be on track to graduate by April 30th- will have at least 100 credits by graduation, passing and attending all classes and have all of the required courses for their grade 12 diploma. Students must be in attendance to receive their Eagle Feather and their teachings from the Elder.

Gifts for Graduates

Being gifted an Eagle Feather is a great honour and brings a sense of gratitude and accomplishment. Graduates receive the Eagle Feather for completing their grade 12 education. To receive an Eagle Feather is one of the highest honours in Indigenous Culture. Graduates are also gifted Sweetgrass, an abalone shell with a stand and mini Metis Sash.

Event planning & Sponsorship

TCOA happens once a year in May. TCOA was started by Father Merc Indigenous Liaison, parent committee Julia McDougall and Janet Alook and Father Mercredi Principal George McGuigan. TCOA is now organised by a small volunteer committee made up of school staff who work with our Indigenous students each day. The committee requests sponsorship from local businesses, school districts and the time and generosity of our community.

