Passenger train advocates ‘optimistic’ about progress in 2017

An advocacy group seeking to reinstate passenger train service along the Hearst-to-Sault Ste. Marie Algoma Central Railway line said it is optimistic about making progress in 2017.

The Algoma Passenger Train Working Group, led by Chief Jason Gauthier of the Missanabie Cree First Nation, and has been lobbying for the return of service after CN Rail canceled the train in July 2015.

Supporters of the service, which largely served tourist outfitters and camp owners between Sault Ste. Marie and Hearst, are seeking the restoration of a federal subsidy to operate the service, which was initially pulled in 2014.

"I continue my commitment to leading the process of restoring passenger service through the new Missisquoi-Ontario (Bear Train)," Gauthier said in a Jan. 24 release.

"This economic development project for our First Nation fits totally within the stated priorities of the federal government: reconciliation through First Nation economic development; job creation; reduction of carbon emissions to fight climate change; and regional economic development.

Gauthier said a number of activities in recent months have boosted the hopes of the group.

- Gauthier and lodge owner Al Ertinger met before Christmas with Transport Canada (TC) and senior officials from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), as promised earlier in 2016.
- TC had informed INAC funding to develop a new business plan; and
- Gauthier met with CN in Toronto the first week of January to discuss important information required for the business plan.

Gauthier said talks with Transport Canada, INAC and CN have been open and collaborative and the group is now "much clearer as to what has to be done to get the train back in service."

Although much of the content from the meetings is confidential, Gauthier said the group will provide ongoing updates as things progress.

The aim is to have the service restored by this summer.

Thunder Bay and Fort William partner

Representatives from the City of Thunder Bay and Fort William First Nation participated in the Community Economic Development Initiative (CED) on Feb. 1, a national program delivered jointly by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

The initiative enables participating communities to benefit from workshops, study tours, and peer mentorship to help build strong partnerships and capacity for joint economic development planning, strong inter-community relationships, and improve the quality of life for residents.

It is one of four partnerships in Canada to embark on a five-year First Nations-municipal collaboration program.

CED seeks to improve economic prosperity through joint community economic development and land use planning.

"We are thrilled to participate in this important initiative with Fort William First Nation," said Mayor Keith Hobbs in a Feb. 1 news release. "We have recognized for years that working together to address our economic challenges will strengthen our relationship and the regional economy, and move our communities forward."

"We are confident that our common goals for local economic development will foster benefits that extend to many other aspects of community building, and will help us explore ways to strengthen our communities even more," said Chief Peter Collins.

Thunder Bay to host Aboriginal women’s business conference

Thunder Bay is getting ready to host the 4th annual Aboriginal Women’s Business Entrepreneurship Network (AWBEN) conference March 1-2.

An initiative of the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), the conference is open to Aboriginal women entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. The two-day event aims to inspire, educate, and empower Indigenous women entrepreneurs from across the country.

The conference, which will take place at the Best Western Nor’Wester Hotel in Thunder Bay, will include panel discussions, networking kick-off night, workshops, and a mini-challenge. Keynote speakers include Patrice Mousseau, founder of Sanya Organics, and Ashley Callingham, an actress featured in the TV series “Blackstone” and the winner of Mrs. Universe 2015.

Participants will also hear from Devon Fiddler, founder of SheNative, Sunshine Tenasco, founder of Her Brides, Heather Abbie, founder and president of ShopIndig and Kendal Nettmaker, founder of Neceal Gear.

Attendance is free for Indigenous women entrepreneurs.

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Briefs

Sudburians feted for excellence

Eight of Greater Sudbury's outstanding citizens were celebrated during the 12th annual Community Builders Awards of Excellence (CBEs) gala on March 26.

"Each year we hear inspiring stories of struggle and success, of inventiveness and ingenuity, of dedication and delivery, and of commitment and caring," said Abbas Homayed, publisher of Northern Life, in a news release. "These are attributes that build community. These are attributes that sustain communities, and these are attributes that we honour at the CBEs every year."

Michael Atkins, president of Northern Life, said, "We are so lucky at Northern Life. Not only do we tell your stories, but once a year we get to experience the true greatness of Greater Sudbury through the Community Builders Awards of Excellence."

Award recipients include:
- Arts – Darcy Queen Out of the Cold Concert Series
- Economic Development – Dr. David Robinson
- Education – Sonia Del Misier
- Environment – Dr. Jacqueline Littugas, Dr. David Lesbiatines, Iulia Bilen, James Baxter
- Health Care – Miners for Cancer Sports and Recreation
- Sudbury Masters Running Club

Young Leader – Melanie Rose Frappier
Hall of Fame – Kinmen Club of Sudbury

The event's platinum sponsor is Eastlink.
Award sponsors are Dynamic Insurance Brokers, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, Sudbury Integrated Nickel Operations (Glencore), Sudbury Theatre Centre, Laurentian University, Porter Airlines, Vale and Joy Global.

Event sponsors include BESTECH, Fortin Foundation, Huntington University, Superior Propane, REMtech Industries, Benefit Partners, and Staples.

Media sponsors include Northern Ontario Business and Sudbury Living.

This year's award recipients were selected by judges Laurie Biassette, Tina McCaffrey, Leo Lefebvre, Karen Tait Peasick, Lisa Kivinen, Paul Reid, Judy Benvenuti, and Vicki Jacobs.

Detailed winner profiles, videos, and photos will be posted online at www.cbeawards.ca. A documentary about the event and the winners will be aired on Eureka Channel 10 at the following dates and times: Sunday April 5 at 8 p.m., Tuesday, April 7 at 7 a.m., Wednesday, April 8 at 7 p.m., and Thursday, April 9 at 7 p.m.

Published twice weekly in Sudbury, Northern Life is the sister publication of Northern Ontario Business.

Influential Women coming to Soo, Thunder Bay

Launched in 1997 in order to seek out, honour and profile women in Northern Ontario who contribute to the North's economic success, the Influential Women of Northern Ontario Awards (IW) has engaged more than 100 influential women have since its inception.

"This year's event takes the celebration to a whole new level," says event manager Kimberley Wahamas. "The awards have always been held every lunch, and this year we will be celebrating over a Gala dinner."

Also offered is a day program to the event, a luncheon workshop, in partnership with PARO Centre entitled "Everyday Lean." The session is led by Neha Singh from TimeLab Consulting Inc., and focuses on creating more value for customers while using fewer resources.

The awards program recognizes and celebrates women in both Northeastern and Northwestern Ontario in two different categories. This year's event will take place in Sault Ste. Marie on May 25 at the Comfort Suites & Conference Centre, and Thunder Bay on May 28 at the Valhalla Inn.

Tickets can be purchased for the dinner and workshops separately. Registration can be made online at www.influentialwomen.ca or by calling 1-800-757-2766 ext. 304.