

Elsipogtog First Nation

Written by Michael W. McDonald J.D.

Director of Economic Development with the Atlantic Policy Congress (APC) and
Angel Julian, Economic Development Administrative Coordinator



The Elsipogtog First Nation formerly known as Big Cove is a Mi'kmaq community located in the district of Sikniktewaq or Sikniktuk. Sikniktuk is translated into English as "the land where the water drains". Mi'kmaq territory, known to Mi'kmaq as Mi'kma'kik, was split into seven Districts. Sikniktuk is the second largest of the seven Mi'kmaq Districts. Elsipogtog is translated into English as "River of Fire". It is the third largest populated Mi'kmaq First Nation Community in Mi'kma'kik with a total population around 3,404 band members, with over three quarter of which reside on-reserve.

Elsipogtog sits along the shores of the Richibucto river lying 8 kilometers southwest of Rexton, New Brunswick. The Mi'kmaq have a long deep-rooted history in this area. Anthropological evidence shows that for over 5,000 years the Mi'kmaq people have maintained permanent summer village sites along the shores of the Richibucto river. On a small elevated island at the mouth of the river stood a permanent fortified village where the head *Kji'saqmaw* or District Chief resided. When Nicholas Deny first arrived at this village site in 1652, he described it as following:

"at basin of this river there is a ratlier large fort of stakes, with two kinds of bastions'; inside are their wigwams and large lodges. There is a great piece of wood placed upright to the top of a tree, with large pegs which pass through it in the manner of an estrapade ^ and serve as steps for ascending to the top. There sits an Indian to see if he can perceive anything along the coasts. From this place one can see far out to sea."





The Chief at this fortified village was Denis Jariet. According to Nicholas Deny, Chief Denis Jariet was feared and respected by all the Chiefs. Chiefs from all over would come and pay homage and respect to Chief Denis Jariet. Nicholas Deny further stated that if any boat or canoe was seen approaching, hundreds of Mi'kmaq warriors would rush out in canoes with their weapons drawn, demanding to know what purpose they had for entering their territory. The captain of the ships would be brought to the village to speak to the head chief. When they arrived at the head Chief's long house, they would be forced to wait outside until the Chief was ready to receive them. Nicholas

Deny believed the Chief to be arrogant or conceited because he didn't understand the dynamics of Mi'kmaq Governance and further that it was more about respect. Judging from Nicholas Deny's description of the fortified village and the respect the Chief received from other Chiefs, Chief Denis Jariet was either the Siksiktuk District Chief "*Nikanus*" or the Grand Chief "*Kji'saqmaw*" of the entire Mi'kmaq Nation. French attorney of law and historian Marc Lescarbot described a similar fortified village in 1606 where Chief Membertou lived. Chief Membertou was known to be the Grand Chief "*Kji'saqmaw*" at that time. It is unsure of who took that title after Chief Membertou died but it is conceivable the title could of went to Chief Denis Jariet during the mid-1600's.

There were two other known permanent Mi'kmaq village sites along the Richibucto river. One was at Platt Point and the other one was in the area where the town of Rexton now sits. The Mi'kmaq in this area were considered fierce warriors. According to historian Robert Cooney, it



was because of the respect and fear of the Mi'kmaqs along the Richibucto River, the English didn't colonize the area until late 1700's. In 1805, 6000 acres of land along the Richibucto River were set aside as reserve land for the Richibucto Mi'kmaq. First known as the Richibucto Indian Reserve but was later named Big Cove Indian Reserve.

At the beginning of January 1818, the settlers along the Richibucto river sent a petition bearing seventy-five signatures to the Lieutenant Governor. They asked to have part of the lands then set aside for the Mi'kmaq made available to immigrants. By February 1882, in response to further requests from the colonists the reserve was divided and reduced to 4,000 acres. In August 1879, the Mi'kmaq of Big Cove ceded part of their land to the federal government to accommodate newly arriving colonist, the reserve was reduced to 2,000 acres, one-third of its original size. In 2003 Big Cove was renamed Elsipotog First Nation.

The two main drivers of economic development for Elsipogtog are fisheries and forestry. Presently, the fishing industry is keeping the economy stable with the Band owning 77 vessels, which employ over 300 people. There are approximately 30 businesses in Elsipogtog providing various services, for example, take-out pizza, VLT operators, medical carriers and convenience stores. Elsipogtog Band owns a full-scale grocery store located on-reserve. The River of Fire



Market is approximately 9,575 square feet. Also included is a Food to Go area, Meat & Produce departments along with full complement of grocery, frozen and dairy products. There is also a band-owned pharmacy which is the first

franchise Pharmasave Drug store owned and operated by a First Nations community in Canada and is approximately 3,600 square feet. The facility employs approximately 43 community and area residents. The combined facilities projected sales are estimated at approximately \$4,000,000, annually. Elsipogtog First Nation also purchased land outside of Moncton for the purpose of commercial development.



The Elsipogtog Sewing Group purchased 9 sewing machines and formed a group of 4 women to be part of the co-op. The sewing group has partnered with Tex Medico for contracting work. Tex Medico is a designer and manufacturer of medical devices made from specialized fabrics designed to maintain skin integrity. They make Ventopedic boots, heel and ankle protectors, knee abductor pads. The sewing group also makes quilts.

Furniture manufacturing is another enterprise in the community whose mission is to deliver a high-quality, unique First Nations branded rustic wood products and value-added creations. The team looks forward to meeting customer product expectations on time and within budget while also building worker skills and expertise. Employees are recognized for good work and the operation provides stable employment with incentives based on business results. In an effort to gain capacity building within the workers, Elsipogtog partnered with the College Communautaire Du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB) Bathurst to deliver a 16-week rustic wood working program. There were 6 community members enrolled in the program to gain employment in the co-op.





In 2011 Elsipogtog started working on a community garden. Today the community Garden employs 10 youth who learn various aspects in agricultural farming. Some of the duties include clearing, seeding and maintaining 6 acres of agricultural land. The vegetables were donated to the community foodbank and sold at various markets. The community also has the Elsipogtog Youth Summer Co-operative that will address local economic and social needs while helping to educate young people about co-operatives and developing young leaders in the community.

Community, Leisure, and Culture Development (CLCD) provides recreational, sport and cultural services to the community. CLCD provides a weekly drop in service for youth ages 7—18 called “Safe Space”. Staff also run a March Break program, seasonal activities and events, and a 6-week summer camp program for youth. CLCD provides sports events and leagues, cultural dances and craft classes and many other cultural related events and activities. It also organizes and implements community events of Elsipogtog First Nation.



As part of cultural experience offered, Annie Clair and Joseph Gary Augustine are employed with the Elsipogtog Basket Making and Heritage Path Tour. The business was created to bring jobs to the community and to boost the local economy, but Augustine said its also about brining understanding and putting an end to misconceptions about First Nations people. Anne-Marie Weir, owner of Roads to Sea, a tour and training company, has worked in Elsipogtog for years, giving employment training. The tour begins with an introduction and traditional greeting. Following the introduction, there is a screening of the video of Elder Joe John Sanipass telling a story of how basket weaving was a means of survival for the Mi’kmaq. The tour continues with a walk along heritage trail to the teepee. Visitors are then presented with an introduction of the materials and process for making a basket. The group learns traditional Mi’kmaq words and visitors leave with a basket they made themselves with the help of experts.



The Elsipogtog Economic Development Department was established in 1992 with the assistance of Indian and Northern Affairs Development and HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada). Elsipogtog Economic Development is a public service provider dedicated to offering



training opportunities, technical assistance, and administrative support to the community. Elsipogtog Economic Development's operations are directed by Lynn Francis under the guidance of the Elsipogtog Chief and Council. Some of the services offered: Resume & Cover Letter assistance, Business information literature/videos, Business loan/grant applications, assistance in business plan writing, career counselling, college applications & funding, and guidance for marketing and bookkeeping. Elsipogtog's workforce consists of individuals in the areas of: tobacco retail, fisherman, carpentry, plumbing, artisans, IT specialist, transportation, gaming & entertainment, radio broadcasting, licensed lounges, forestry, wholesale, welding, plant workers, security, consulting, caterers, tourism, television broadcasting, prepared food, manufacturing, labourers, electrical, custodians, heavy machine and equipment, band administration, cultural consulting and translation, media production, DJ entertainment, and pizza delivery and take out. The community also utilizes tools for employment such as the Working Warriors website where Indigenous peoples can upload or create resumes and apply for jobs in New Brunswick and across Canada. Working warriors also allows industry to connect to the Indigenous labour market. Elsipogtog recently used this tool to fill 50 vacancies for the pharmacy and grocery store.

Over the years Elsipogtog Economic Development has collaborated with internal and external organizations to offer training and employment opportunities to clients. Some of the recent programs offered were: Trades Skills & Orientation – NBCC Moncton, Fisheries Skills



Improvement Training – CCNB Shippagan, Personal Support Care Worker (PSW) – NBCC Moncton, New Brunswick Workplace Essential Skills – NBCC Moncton, Youth For The Future – Canadian Council on Rehabilitation for Work (CCRW). Elsipogtog Economic Development hopes to have its own vocational training institute soon.

A major economic driver for the community is the McGraw Seafood processing plant owned and operated by Elsipogtog First Nation Band. The plant employs approximately 150 people each year. McGraw Seafood mainly processes snow crab sections and herring roe for the Japanese and American markets. Historically operating approximately 16-20 weeks out of a year, the short seasons have generated significant benefits for the community of Elsipogtog. The company is a prime example of how collaboration between different cultures can yield incredible benefits for everyone. The Mi'kmaq-owned



company directly creates 150 positions, held primarily by Acadians, in addition to another 150 Mi'kmaq fishermen who sell product directly to the plant. Benefits generated by the company are often used to aid in the well-being of the Elsipogtog First Nation. Some of the biggest contributions have been a specially-designed toddler school bus, a plow, large maintenance vehicles and the School Lunch Program. Throughout the winter of 2014-15, McGraw Seafood underwent a \$2.5 million expansion to adapt better to the changing Japanese and American markets. The following season, the company processed a record amount of snow crab and herring in its history.