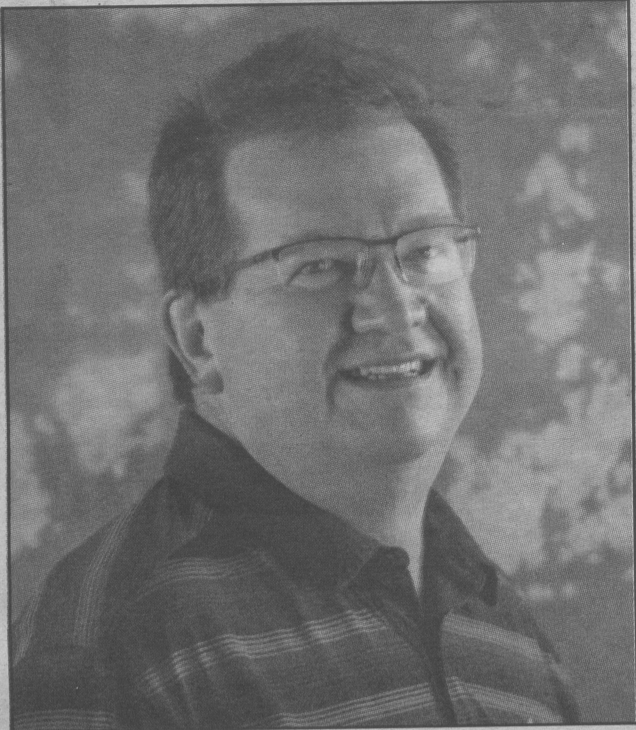


# Mi'kmaq Cultural Centre Aims To Recover Artifacts

## From U.S., Preserve History



Tim Bernard

by Silas Augustine,  
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Tim Bernard has dedicated his career to promoting Indigenous culture and self-determination.

Now, he's working on what might be his most ambitious project yet: a cultural centre that will serve as a home for thousands of Mi'kmaq artifacts and research records, many of them currently located in the United States.

The Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre is slated for construction in Debert, N.S., just west of Truro. Plans for the centre have been in the works for decades, part of a vision to protect ancestral sites believed to be around 13,000 years old.

"They're 13,000 year old sites, but for a long time, our communities were disconnected from those sites," Bernard said.

Fundraising is underway to build the \$48-million centre, and Bernard is leading the project as executive director. In an interview with the NB Media Co-op, he

highlighted the importance of reclaiming narratives like the Glooscap stories.

The project is guided by three principles: sharing stories, protecting the past, and exploring history. Bernard emphasized the urgency of preserving Mi'kmaq oral traditions.

"We're busy collecting interviews from our

Elders," he said. Examples include Becky Julian of Sipekne'katik First Nation, a fluent Mi'kmaq speaker who survived the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. Julian, 83, died on Monday, Feb. 10.

"We collected quite a record from her, and that was her gift to us, was to make sure that history is told by us," Bernard said.

Storytelling has been a theme throughout his career. He was previously the editor and manager of the Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Nations News, a community newspaper with a circulation of about 2,000 copies.

"The paper fell in my lap because I was an athlete and I would travel around to the hockey tournaments, the ball tournaments, and this is where I got to meet a lot of people," he said. "I would report on the results of those various games and it piqued my interest."

Throughout his career, Bernard has been interested

in ensuring that Native stories are told from the Native point of view. "I wanted to make sure that we could preserve those stories from our own perspective," he said. "The newspaper allowed me to do that."

Working for the newspaper also gave him an opportunity to engage his natural curiosity. "I was a pretty nosey kid, so I asked a lot of questions and people tolerated me and provided me with answers."

Publishing the newspaper led to a spin-off business. "We saw the opportunity to take it up a level and built a company, Eastern Woodland Print Communications," he said. "Instead of shoveling or putting a lot of that material out to contractors, we do it ourselves."

The newspaper and print company are owned and operated by The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, which brings together Mi'kmaq communities from across mainland Nova Scotia.

Bernard has worked for 38 years at The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, which is also administering the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre project.

Plans for the cultural centre involve the recovery of hundreds of Mi'kmaq artifacts from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

Examples include regalia such as ribbon skirts, and a traditional Indigenous dice game that was forced underground as colonial authorities deemed it a form of gambling.

"Some people sold [the games] to early anthropologists and they sat in the museum for almost 100 years," he said. "So we're bringing those back to the community."

Bernard said he hopes the facility will open in 2028 and that it will eventually welcome up to 60,000 visitors annually.

Project costs have escalated with inflation. The

current estimate includes \$30 million for the building, \$8 million for exhibits, and \$4 million for infrastructure such as a utility corridor. "And then we have overall operational costs to get there," he added.

Developers have raised \$7.3 million towards a \$12 million dollar fundraising goal, he said. Other funds will come from various levels of government, including First Nation communities.

People who want to support the project financially can donate at [mikmaweydebert.ca/donations](http://mikmaweydebert.ca/donations).

Tim Bernard spoke to the NB Media Co-op as part of a St. Thomas University journalism course at *Elsipogtog First Nation*. David Gordon Koch is a reporter for the NB Media Co-op and a STU journalism instructor. Silas Augustine and Larrah Francis are St. Thomas University students. ✪

