



IN THE HEART of the southern-most point in Ontario is Walpole Island, on the border between Ontario and Michigan. The Island is about an hour from Windsor and an hour from Detroit, and houses the Walpole Island First Nation — unceded territory inhabited by the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa members of WIFN.

Walpole Island First Nation members call the Island Bkejwanong, meaning “where the waters divide,” and the land is certainly known for its benefits to residents. A rich environment provides WIFN with ample opportunities for business development and growth, and has sustained the WIFN community for thousands of years. Bkejwanong

is home to very diverse wetlands, oak savannas, and tallgrass prairies of the Great Lakes region. The WIFN community considers recreation and tourism are important to the local economy, as Walpole Island’s unique ecosystem is an attraction for hunters and fishers worldwide. Community members not only provide guide services, but they also continue to hunt, fish and trap on the land.

The nations on the Island represent the Council of the Three Fires, which is a political and cultural confederacy that has survived many generations. The community itself has a to-





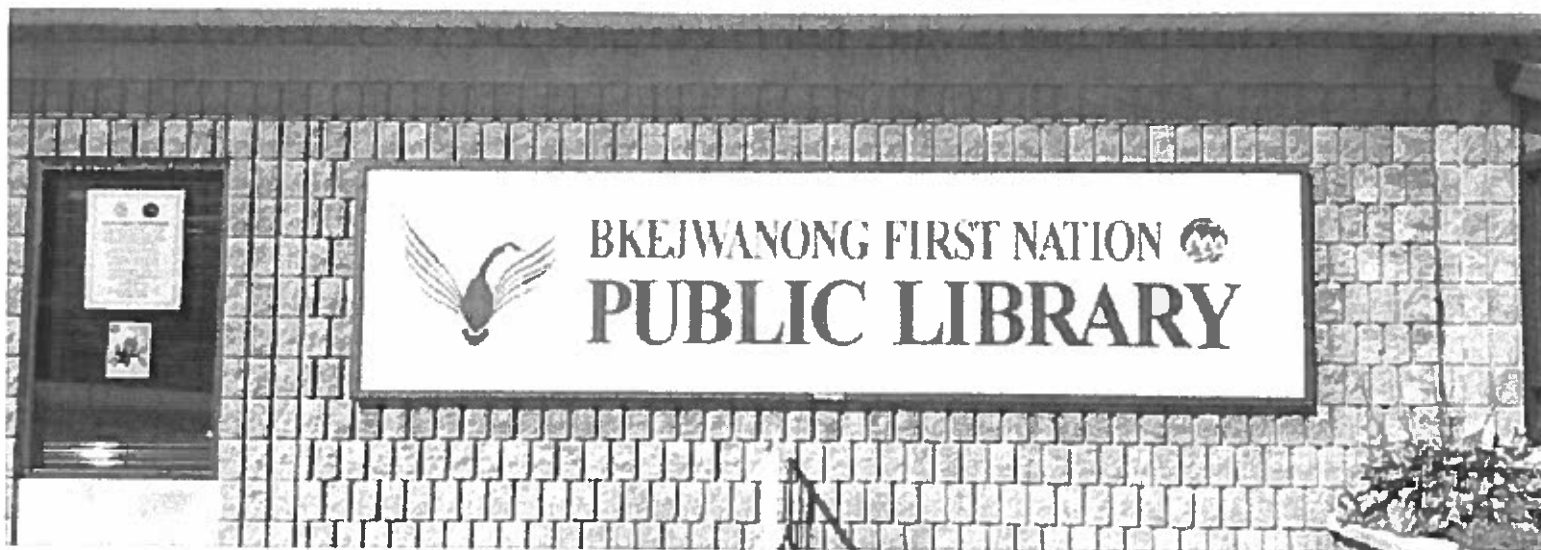
tal membership of 4338 people, 2256 of whom live in the community. In addition to traditional fishing and hunting activities, as well as tourism, agriculture is another significant industry, and the First Nation farms several thousand acres under a co-operative called Tahgahoning.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WIFN also hosts many private and First Nation-run business enterprises ranging from gas bars and convenience stores to a bank and full-service pharmacy. The largest employer on Walpole Island

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is the First Nation itself, which delivers programs and services to the community.

CIO recently spoke with Chief Dan Miskokomon and James Jenkins, Policy Analyst for WIFN to discuss the community's past, present, and upcoming strategic initiatives in economic development. Chief Miskokomon notes that as a business, "we've had proven development since the 1970s," offering potential industry partners a legacy of practice in business. "We have been a best practice for other First Nations when it comes to developing commerce."

Chief explains that diversity is key to growing the community and providing sustainable economic benefits. "We've been moving towards commercial activities with our ferry, which has

traditionally only carried passengers," he says. "We are looking towards diversifying which includes servicing some of our partner tribes in the U.S. There are world-class wetlands here and many natural benefits to our environment."

NEW PROJECTS AND MOTIVED PEOPLE

Jenkins notes that the Nation is looking towards long-term partnerships in business. "We want return on our investment and to utilize our resources: humans, land, and location. We work within the traditional territories to make sure we can provide jobs to our members and ensure we're profitable."

The membership of



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WIFN is quite young: “we are young and motivated and educated, as is our council, so we want to seize opportunities that will benefit our future,” he says. Chief Miskokomon adds that industry partnerships and strategic projects will “give our people a chance. We have the knowledge base and experience and I for one am honoured to be part of a great team.”

One of the most significant and promising projects to date is a wind energy project with Northland Power. In June, the Aamjiwnaang First Nation and WIFN announced that the 100 megawatt Grand Bend Wind Farm achieved commercial operation in April. The project is on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario and is a 50/50 partnership between Northland and Giiwedin Noodin FN

Energy Corporation, which according to public sources was created to hold the equity interest of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation and Bkejwanong Territory (Walpole Island First Nation) in the project.

More recently, WIFN is involved in two large wind power projects that are being developed in our traditional

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territory. The first project is a 100 MW wind power project called the Belle River Wind and it is being developed with Pattern Renewable Energy Holdings Canada ULC and Samsung Renewable Energy Inc. The second is part of a recent competitive procurement and WIFN was successful in its co-application for a 50 MW wind power project in partnership with Renewable Energy Systems Canada (RES) and Boralex Inc.. The project is one of five wind farm projects approved by the Ontario government as part of a recent procurement in 2016 and will include up to 20 wind turbines and is planned to be in operation by 2020. "We are pleased to have the assistance of our legal team, Cherie Brant and Michael Atlas, of Dickinson Wright LLP to assist us to navigate the compet-

itive procurement processes and assist Walpole Island to secure opportunities to participate and earn revenues from these large infrastructure projects" said James Jenkins.

THE FUTURE IS PROMISING

Though many projects and initiatives are still under wraps, the key for WIFN is working with partners who are able to contribute to the Nation's future. This includes partners assisting with economic development strategy and those on the professional side of development.

"We are changing the way we do business, so we have been dealing with our existing debt as a commu-





nity but looking at new types of businesses, including in energy, manufacturing, merchandizing and service,” Chief explains. “That means we need to control our own outcomes and this applies to partnerships, and we also need to cultivate a market for our products.” Once of the ways WIFN is adapting to changing times and developing its own markets is by using e-commerce to sell its members’ products. “We are getting away from the idea that someone else controls our economic growth,” Chief adds.

“In essence, we are separating political involvement from our business initiatives and moving away from micromanagement.” The Nation is developing an

internal process that includes capacity building and becoming more economically viable (including managing existing debt). “We have the puzzle pieces, it’s just a matter of putting them together. We need to always be doing our due diligence,” Chief Miskokomon comments.

The communities within WIFN have the people, the resources, and the power to move forward. Now, it is just a matter of lining up the right opportunities and working with the right partners. “Our doors are open, we are ready to create wealth for our community and a future for our youth.”

For more information on WIFN and business opportunities visit www.walpoleislandfirstnation.ca.

