In my extensive travels across Ontario, previously as the Chair of the PCMNO and now as MNO President, I have always been struck by the entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen of our people. This ‘can do’ attitude and ability to spot and fill ‘opportunities in the marketplace’ is a part of who we are as a people. From the days of the fur trade, our people have been fundamental to Canada’s economic engine. We have and continue to take great pride in our entrepreneurial roots.

Flowing from this proud heritage, we see Métis entrepreneurs and businesses participating in almost every sector of the economy. From our historic Métis commercial fishing operations to modern day technology companies run by young Métis entrepreneurs, our people are fundamental to the economies of Ontario and Canada. When Métis entrepreneurs and businesses do well, Ontario and Canada do well too through job creation and economic growth.

Unfortunately, over the last 18 years, the MNO has not been able to offer adequate support to our Métis entrepreneurs and businesses. While we built impressive program and service capacities in the areas of training, education, housing and healing and wellness, we could never secure the funding to really address economic development. I have always believed the MNO needed to take a targeted and focused approach to in order to achieve real results in this area.

When I was elected as MNO President in May 2008, I set out the goal of expanding the MNO’s programs and services in the economic development sector as a major priority for my mandate. Similarly, the newly elected PCMNO was united in wanting to see real progress in enhancing Métis economic development – not just more talk about economic development.

Based on this direction, we have focused our efforts on getting “real results” in the economic development sector. As everyone will appreciate, simply saying you want something doesn’t make it happen, especially when dealing with other governments. It takes time, commitment, hard
work and a concerted effort to even get a foot in
the door. Over the last three years, your leader-
ship and our staff and advisors have spent thou-
sands of hours working with both the provincial
and federal governments on getting something
tangible in place for Métis entrepreneurs and
businesses. These discussions have taken place
under the commitments in the MNO-Ontario
Framework Agreement and our tripartite
process with Ontario and Canada.

Also, as a part of this overall process, the
MNO consulted extensively with citizens on
what you saw as priorities in economic develop-
ment. The results from these consultations
were captured in the MNO’s Economic Develop-
ment Strategy, entitled, An Agenda for Self-Reliance
and Sustainability. This Strategy was unani-
mously adopted by the 2009 MNO Annual
General Assembly. In the Strategy, the creation
of an Ontario Métis capital corporation was iden-
tified as a key recommendation. Notably, these
types of Métis capital corporations have been
successful in assisting Métis entrepreneurs and
businesses in western Canada for many years,
but Ontario Métis did not have any such entity
to assist them.¹

Based on this approved Strategy, and after
lengthy negotiations with Ontario, the MNO
successfully concluded both a Memorandum of
Understanding (MOU) with Ontario on
Economic Development, and, more importantly,
a 10 year funding agreement worth $30 million
for the creation of the Métis Voyageur
Development Fund (“MVDF”). These negotia-
tions were confidential at the request of our
partners and at the end, time sensitive because
any agreement had to be finalized prior to the
end of that session of Parliament. It is worthy to
note that Ontario’s commitment to the MVDF
represents the second largest funding agree-
ment, the MNO has ever negotiated with
another level of government (second only to our
5 year agreement with Canada for the delivery
of Employment and Training services).

On June 20th, 2011, I had the pleasure of
formally signing the MOU with Minister Bentley,
Ontario Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and
making the public announcement on the
creation of the MVDF and Ontario’s financial
commitment to it. A copy of the press release as
well as the signed MOU is available on the
MNO’s website at www.metisnation.org. It was
truly an exciting day to finally see so many years

¹ The existing Métis capital corporations in western Canada include: Louis Riel Capital Corporation (Manitoba), Saskatchewan Métis Economic
Development Corporation and Clarence Campeau Development Fund Inc. (Saskatchewan), Apeetogosan Métis Development Inc. (Alberta).

I also want to enhance the MNO’s ability to further assist Métis people in areas of mental health, justice, education, child and
family services, housing, culture and heritage, as well as economic development …

Currently, the MNO does not have all of the tools and supports our
citizens need from their govern-
ment. I am committed to expanding
discussions with the provincial and
federal governments to assume
Métis jurisdiction in areas which
are essential to improving the
quality of life of Métis people
in the province.

-- Gary Lipinski
MNO President
May 2008

pursuant to the terms of the negotiated
arrangement, an initial 3 person Interim Board
of Directors incorporated the MVDF on June
3rd, 2011. The Interim Directors of the MVDF

are: Paul Devillers (lawyer, MNO citizen and former Member of Parliament for Simcoe North), Karen Drake (lawyer and MNO citizen living in Thunder Bay) and Clint Davis (President and CEO of Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business). Full biographies for these individuals are also available on the MNO’s website.

This Interim MVDF Board of Directors is now undertaking an open, province-wide call for additional MVDF Directors. They are also hiring a full-time Chief Executive Officer for the MVDF. The deadlines for these posting are in September 2011. These postings have been sent out to the PCMNO and all Community Councils. They are also available on the MNO’s website.

I encourage those MNO citizens who are interested in assisting Métis entrepreneurs and businesses, to consider applying to be a Director of the MVDF. All of the MVDF’s Directors will be selected based on skill and ability to contribute to the objective and goals of the MVDF, regardless of whether they are Métis, non-Aboriginal or citizens of the MNO. We want to have the best MVDF Board of Directors possible, so if there are non-Aboriginal business people you believe could positively contribute to the MVDF Board, please forward these postings to them.

Based on this open call, in the Fall of 2011, the Interim Board of Directors will make recommendations to the PCMNO on additional appointments to the MVDF Directors. The PCMNO has the responsibility to ratify all Directors to the MVDF Permanent Board of Directors. Further, all Directors must meet the requirements for Directors pursuant to the Ontario Corporations Act and the criteria set out in the MVDF’s by-laws and policies.

Since the Permanent Board of Directors will not be in place and the Chief Executive Officer and staff for MVDF will not be hired until the Fall of 2011, 2011/2012 will be a developmental year for the MVDF. It is very likely that an initial call for applications and funding will not be made available to Métis entrepreneurs and businesses until 2012. It is important that MNO citizens and communities be aware of these time-frames in order to manage expectations.

One other point that it is important for MNO citizens and communities to be aware of is that Ontario’s financial commitment is only available to Métis businesses involved in the resource sector (i.e., mining, energy, forestry, etc.) or businesses that provide services and support to the resource sector. For example, a Métis catering company that provides services to a mine would be eligible. Also, a hydro project that is partially owned by the MNO or a MNO Community Council is eligible. However, this funding would not be able to be used to open a hair salon or buy a building.

It is the ultimate goal of the MNO to secure additional financial commitments for MVDF from both levels of government in order to expand the Fund’s services and funding to all Métis businesses. However, this initial commitment from Ontario to resource sector businesses was seen as an important starting point from which we can build. For example, over the next few months, the MNO’s leadership will also continue to work in an attempt to leverage a federal government commitment to the MVDF, which will allow MVDF to increase the funding available to Métis entrepreneurs and businesses.

I remain optimistic that the federal government will ultimately decide to make an investment in the MVDF, similar to how it has made investments in the Métis capital corporations in Western Canada. As outlined in our MOU with Ontario, the provincial government is committed to working with the MNO on this issue. The MNO’s leadership will continue to provide regular updates to MNO citizens on its efforts to secure a federal government commitment.

In closing, I look forward to this new era of finally being able to assist our entrepreneurs and businesses. I want to thank the PCMNO, MNO staff and all of those MNO citizens who have continued to advocate for this issue over the years. Once again, we have proven anything is possible when we work – together. ∞