

Chief LaForme passes the torch in New Credit

By Jim Windle

NEW CREDIT — After 14 years serving the Mississaugas of the New Credit as Elected Chief, Bryan LaForme has decided to “hang it up and let somebody else have a go at it,” as he puts it.

Over the course of those 14 years, LaForme has seen a lot happen in his community, some good and some not-so-good, but he maintains the good times far outweighed the bad.

With this Saturday's elections on the near horizon, LaForme feels bitter-sweet about leaving office after winning seven consecutive mandates from the people, but believes it's the right time to do so.

“I never really planned on serving that long,” he says. “It just kinda happened that way because we were always in the middle of projects that I wanted to see through. It certainly has been a privilege, for me anyway, to represent our community and have the community's support along with that of my family, particularly my wife Liz who always supported what I did and dealt with me being away from home all the time. It kind of puts a strain on a family but she has always been there for me.”

He presently has no ambitions to run for any other office, provincially or nationally, but reserves that consideration for another time, if ever.

“I've been asked to do a few things but I have not decided yet,” he says. “I want to take some time



Mississaugas of the New Credit will soon have a new Chief. Outgoing Chief, Bryan LaForme, has decided to pass the torch to a new generation after 14 years as Chief. One of the many good memories LaForme will be taking with him was his community hosting the Pan/Am Games this past summer. LaForme is pictured here joking back stage with the legendary Buffy St. Marie at the Pan Am Gala. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

off and go where I want to, when I want to for a while and get all that out of my system.”

For 10-years of his term in office, he was in negotiations over the Mississauga land claim which was eventually settled in 2010 to the tune of \$145 million, the largest settlement in Canadian history up until that point.

“You are never going to please everyone,” acknowledges LaForme. “Some think we should have held out longer, but we were faced with a take it or leave it offer and by accepting it, we have secured at least some future for our people through investments.”

Every registered band member also receives an annual interest payment of between \$1500 and

\$3,500, every year just before Christmas, depending on how the investments do on the stock market.

“The high points for me were the Mississauga settlement, which were very tense at times,” he reflects. “The other was to host the Pan Am Games on our traditional territory this past summer. I think the Games really put New Credit on the map as far as recognition goes.”

Despite some disappointments he believes his community's involvement on the Pan Am Games was well worth the hard work and headaches.

“It really let people know who we are,” he says.

LaForme was especially proud of the Pan Am torch run that came through the New Credit

Community in advance of the games and the attention it brought to New Credit.

“It was good that it would come through a First Nations Territory, but it also gave recognition and honour to the ‘Front Runners,’” says LaForme.

The Front Runners, as they have been called, were a group of young boys who, because of their athleticism and feel good photo-ops, were picked to run the torch from Winnipeg into Minnesota, at distance of around 500 miles, back in the 1960s.

“They were residential school boys,” LaForme recalls. “After running it for 500 miles, when they got to the stadium with the torch, they were not allowed to go in. They had

to hand it off to a non-Native to carry the torch in. They were then taken to a restaurant where they were given a pancake breakfast and sent back to residential school.”

The front runners, now elderly men, were on hand at a number of events leading up to and during this year's Pan Am Games.

Any disappointments stemmed from not being included in the planning of the games from the beginning and being forced to play catch-up with a panel of people who did not understand the concept of being a host nation and what that means to First Nations.

Other highlights have to do directly with the People of New Credit.

“We were able to build

more housing,” he says. “We started a sub-division, we got water, even though it is not completed yet. We also have a new Community Centre.”

Sitting at a table at the Country Style Coffee Shop and Bistro at the New Credit Plaza, LaForme looked around with pride in the community obtaining a franchise, the first Native owned Country Style franchise in the chain.

LaForme is also proud of the friends, associates and good relationships he has had opportunity to make during his time as Chief, including National leaders of both Canada and Onkwehonwe Nations across Turtle Island.

At the same time, however, LaForme was pleased with the platform he and all First Nations had to help educate Canadians about the role they have played in the building of Canada.

The most important message he believes was delivered, and the message he always carried to the non-Native world, is the individuality of all 633 First Nations across Canada and the 133 throughout Ontario.

“My message has been that you can't use a cookie cutter approach in dealing with First Nations,” he says. “We are all different.”

This coming election, LaForme doesn't mind revealing whom he will be voting for. His money is on longtime councillor Stacey LaForme to take over his office. Stacey is running against former New Credit Chief, Larry Sault.