In support of renewing the
Aboriginal Peoples
Television Network

We’ve survived...
we want to thrive

Submission of the Canadian Media Guild
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Re: Application No. 2004-1036-6

May 18, 2005
The Canadian Media Guild (CMG) represents about half of the employees at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, including videojournalists, researchers, editors, camera operators and studio technicians. The CMG also represents more than 6,000 media workers in Canada, including those who work at the CBC, TVOntario, Reuters and Canadian Press/Broadcast News and VisionTV. Its members include television, radio, print and web journalists, broadcast technicians, and sales and administrative staff.
Summary

We are the journalistic and technical staff at APTN, with the frontline experience building a serious, independent, credible national Aboriginal news service. As the first generation of media workers at APTN, we offer the CRTC our bird's eye view of this initial license period. First Nations, Métis and Inuit now have a national network where they can speak to each other. They are making APTN theirs. We are committed to building on this success. We support APTN's licence renewal, its vision for the future and the ten-cent subscription rate increase needed to realize it.
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Introduction

The Canadian Media Guild intervenes in support of APTN's application for a licence renewal. In particular, we support:

1. Renewal of APTN's licence for the full seven-year term;

2. Conditions of licence requiring the broadcast of a half-hour daily national newscast Monday-Friday, 52 weeks a year, and the addition of the equivalent of another half-hour of daily news by the end of the licence term;

3. Measures to ensure that APTN's channel placement is accessible and reasonable, perhaps by clustering it with other public service broadcasters which seek to be grouped together;

4. Mandatory carriage of APTN so that it is accessible to all communities;

5. An increase of ten cents in APTN's per subscriber monthly fee.

As the members of the Canadian Media Guild working at APTN, we want to tell the CRTC the story of the network's first broadcast licence period from our perspective.

APTN is different from other broadcasters. We are a public-service national network - like CBC/SRC. But we're very unlike CBC/SRC. CBC's broad mandate is to serve all of Canada but its base of support naturally lies within Canada's dominant population groups. We specifically serve Métis, First Nations and Inuit. With APTN, for the first time, Canada's Aboriginal People are

I worked out of my bedroom for the first eight months. That was the Maritime bureau. What’s more, I live on the Indian Brook Reserve, north of Halifax. So I got immediate feedback from my stories.

A dream job for an Aboriginal journalist who wants to cover Aboriginal issues full-time.

- Maureen Googoo
in a position to use television as a national link, to hold a national conversation among Aboriginal Peoples, but one everyone else is invited to watch and join.

We come before you as the first generation of media workers at APTN, full of enthusiasm, passion and idealism. We want to tell you about the steep learning curve we’ve travelled and what we’ve accomplished - staff and management together. Our aim is to illustrate the place APTN has begun to occupy among Aboriginal Peoples and to urge the CRTC to provide a rate increase to enable us to do more and to do it better.

We are the staff who do the news, news specials and current affairs programming of the network and that’s what we focus on in this brief. News and current affairs programming constitute APTN's in-house production. All other programming is commissioned from independent producers or acquired from archives.

APTN has started to create a national television news medium for Aboriginal Peoples. It is a serious, independent journalistic enterprise answerable to the community it serves and conscious of the importance of giving voice to all parts of the community. We bring Aboriginal leadership into closer contact with those they lead. We demand accountability from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal officials. In short, APTN's news and information programming contributes to enhancing democracy within the Aboriginal community and its governing organizations.

From the broadcasting perspective, APTN's news and current affairs programs have impact beyond connecting Aboriginal Peoples to each other and creating an infrastructure for disseminating news. The news programming today anchors the network. It is the basis from which APTN can build attention and audience for its other programming.
A network, not a specialty channel

As APTN points out in its renewal application, the licence it holds from the CRTC is not for a specialty channel. It is for a national television network.

The aim, as the broadcast licence states, is to create a pan-Canadian meeting place for Aboriginal drama, music, variety, culture and current affairs.

We appreciate the CRTC's concern for under-represented Canadian program categories such as drama and music.

However, all programming types are underrepresented on Canadian television if you put Aboriginal in front of the description. That even includes advertisements. And it certainly includes news.

So there is a certain irony in the fact that there is more attention paid to variety, drama, dance and music in the licence than to news. In fact there are no minimum conditions of the licence related to news programming.

Compare this to that other national network, the CBC/Société Radio-Canada. News has always been front and centre, the core of CBC. That's because news programming provides an indispensable foundation, building both an identity for a national network and a common conversation within the nation - or in our case, nations-- it serves.

So news has rightly developed into the most visible component of APTN.

But what appears obvious in retrospect was not always so.
Staffing APTN News

We are all Aboriginal People and we all came to APTN thrilled to be part of it. More than just wanting jobs in television - as rare as those are for Aboriginal People -- we all came with commitment, youthful commitment. We came with the eagerness you'd expect in people from a population with a history of oppression who get the chance to build something important for the whole community. One of our technicians submitted his CV to the network so many times that the Human Resources department wrote him and asked him to stop.

Of course, we did lack one thing -- experience. There simply isn't a deep pool of Aboriginal broadcasters out there. Some of us came to APTN right out of post-secondary journalism programs. Others came via non-broadcasting jobs, like counselling young Aboriginal fathers or packing ham, because after graduation, we couldn’t find television jobs.

One of our members came from Carleton University via Statistics Canada and signed on at $12.00 an hour, less than half of her civil service salary.

About one-third of us did have journalistic experience. For example, Maureen Googoo had worked at the Halifax Chronicle-Herald and at CBC radio. She took a pay cut. She wasn’t the only experienced journalist who did. She got training in camera work and editing, and became our Maritimes videojournalist. For eight months, she worked out of her bedroom on the Indian Brook Reserve north of Halifax, which served as our Maritime bureau.

In Ottawa, we had office space, but the editing machine sat like an animal with its throat torn out, the wires hanging out all over the place. At first, we had no one who knew how to put it together.

I had been working for a meat packer, making ham, when APTN hired me. I had a broadcasting diploma but couldn’t find a job in TV. I started as a master control operator. Then I worked as a field cameraman and producer. I did a series called “Nice Places to Visit” about Indian Reserves that really were nice to visit. I remember Conne River in Newfoundland. A fishing community on the rugged coast. It was spectacular.

- Allan McKay
We were still thrilled to be at APTN. But we had two big unanswered questions.

How were we going to get the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities across the country to take notice?

How serious were we going to be as a news service? Would we be the mouthpiece of one power elite or another? Or would we be beholden to no one but the First Nations, Métis and Inuit from coast-to-coast-to-coast?

The early days at APTN News

APTN went on air in September 1999. The news started in April 2000, with a weekly half-hour pre-packaged newscast. It became twice weekly in September 2000.

Early on, even though we had an Ottawa correspondent, we didn't cover Parliament Hill. For a year, the Minister of Indian Affairs turned down our requests for an interview.

But then the Assembly of First Nations spoke out against the government's proposed First Nations Governance Act and found its funding slashed. The Act was aimed at revamping the way First Nations govern ourselves (and was eventually withdrawn due to opposition). Although it passed below the radar even for most Canadian "news junkies," it was big news for us and it drew us to Parliament Hill.

But we didn't have Parliamentary experience and didn't know how it was done.

Not only that, the Minister still couldn't be bothered with us. So we looked around to see how our non-Aboriginal colleagues handled these situations. And we started trying to buttonhole the Minister as he came and went from Parliament. It was "hurry up and wait."
We needed the fleeting footage of the Minister to explain that we couldn't get an interview with him on the Act.

But within a couple of weeks, he realized those opposed to the Act were coming on to APTN news, so he'd better do the same.

After that, we had no more problems getting an interview with him.

It quickly became clear to everyone that we were the media outlet following Aboriginal stories most consistently.

For example, on Election Night 2000, we broadcast results from across the country focused on issues and ridings of interest to Aboriginal Peoples.

Soon, people started to leak information to us. In early 2001, Maureen Googoo in Halifax reported on a document one of her sources sent her which outlined the federal-provincial response to the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Donald Marshall, Jr. and the treaty rights to catch and sell fish for a living.

After that, we noticed government officials involved with First Nations started monitoring APTN News. They wanted to track what we were reporting.

Our own political leadership was another matter. The major Inuit, Métis and First Nations organizations are governing bodies for us. What they decide really matters.

But we know there's a lot of distrust of the media within Aboriginal organizations. We understand why. The mainstream media becomes interested when something erupts, like when Aboriginal Peoples block a logging road. Combined with that, Aboriginal organizations don't have a lot of experience with intense television coverage. That's understandable, too. In the past television cameras might show up as the Assembly of First Nations began its meetings, to

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I was a reporter and you can really say that I became a videojournalist on the job. I had gone with a cameraman to a community 4 hours away by road, including very bad road. Of course, cellphones didn't work en route. When we arrived, a message awaited our cameraman: a family member had been hospitalized and he had to return to Ottawa. I said, no problem, just show me how to work the camera.

- Karyn Pugliese
get some "colour." But no cameras ever wanted to stick around.

When we showed up at the General Assembly of the AFN in 2000, the AFN leadership thought we'd do our report and leave as they went behind closed doors. What a surprise for them when we announced that as they were elected chiefs meeting as an Assembly, we planned to stay and cover the whole thing. We expected the deliberations to be open.

It's hard to believe that was only five years ago. Because once the meetings were opened up and we started covering them, it quickly became clear that we were the link to the community. So instead of running away, everyone now wants to be on television.

At the AFN General Assembly in 2003, we were there gavel-to-gavel, providing reports for APTN news. For the election of the National Chief by the assembled chiefs, the network went live.

We had a similar experience with the Métis National Council. In 2002, they kicked APTN out of their meeting.

How things have changed. By 2005, their meeting was open. They even arranged a sound board, to ensure that we'd get proper audio.

Those experiences signalled to Aboriginal People that APTN intended to provide independent, serious and credible journalism.

But sometimes that point was driven home to us in smaller ways, too.

For example, our Ottawa correspondent Karyn Pugliese went to an isolated community and interviewed people unhappy with what the local leadership had done. The local chief found out and contacted APTN. "How dare you come to my community without my knowledge and speak to people without my permission," he demanded to know?
Our news director was clear. He told him that we didn't ask the mayor of Toronto if we could interview people on Toronto streets. So we weren't going to ask his permission to interview people in his community, either.

Our difficult year

As journalists, we are story tellers. And every story requires adversity. Ours coincided with 9/11, a backdrop which of course served to heighten tensions.

What happened is that the news director who had mentored us left APTN. News staff was gathered together and told that news was costing too much money. There were no conditions related to news in the broadcast licence, we were told, and everything was under review. We understood that there was a possibility that news would be cancelled.

Budgets were frozen. Our reporter who had just moved halfway across the country to work for APTN as a videojournalist was informed that she wouldn't be getting the camera she needed to do her job.

The work atmosphere darkened and became anxious. Relations between management and news staffers turned very sour. Were we about to throw away what news had built in terms of contacts, respect and trust among Aboriginal Peoples? Were we about to throw away the institutional memory and expertise we'd built in the year and a half on the air?

It began to look like something we'd seen before: an Aboriginal project finds funding, gets itself up and running, makes progress in whatever its area - education, alcohol treatment, whatever -- then wham, funding dries up and the whole thing fizzles.

On the same trip that I ended up working the camera because the cameraman had to return home for an emergency, I also had to find my own way back to Ottawa. The cameraman had to take our vehicle. So after I finished the shoot, I found someone on his way to the next settlement. When I got there, he found someone else going to the next settlement. And so on. And so on. It had taken four hours going in. It took 12 hours to get back to Ottawa.

- Karyn Pugliese
We felt powerless. Many of us started doing our CVs and a critical mass of the original staff started to talk about leaving.

But, still full of the enthusiasm and commitment that had brought us to APTN in the first place, we realized we could look for other jobs or we could fight to preserve the jobs we had. We considered how far the network news had already come, the mark we had started to make on the community and how much we wanted to stay at APTN. So we decided to fight.

We contacted the Canadian Media Guild and we formed a union.

Several months later, the editorial employees were certified. In 2004, the technical staff became members, too. All in all, the CMG represents 40 staffers at APTN, almost half of everyone who works there.

In our view, the arrival of the CMG stabilized the work environment. The union was a vehicle for bringing the staff together and as a group insisting that the workplace be organized along procedures and rules that both employees and managers could abide by.

In short, we believe our unionization was a step in the professionalization of APTN.

The result was that people stayed on and what APTN had started to create in news and current affairs programming survived.

We tell this story not to dredge up family secrets. We tell it to emphasize that staff and management have experienced both the exhilaration and pain of putting to air a network aimed at a population that through its difficult history and geographic dispersal is one of the toughest to serve. We have faced the problems head-on and worked to overcome them.

Today the employees are strongly behind the vision of the future as presented by APTN to the CRTC.
APTN today: news thrives

After the crisis of 2001, news did not disappear from APTN. On the contrary, APTN made the courageous decision to expand news. In September 2002, we went daily, airing a live half-hour national newscast every weekday.

And we did it with no increase in staff.

In addition, we've been doing more and more news specials. Each time, we've learned lessons as individual broadcasters and as a network, enhancing our ability to do better the next time.

Our national election debates

In the federal election in 2004, we built on our election coverage of 2000. We did riding profiles where there are large concentrations of Aboriginal People. Many of the candidates had not even bothered to step foot in the large Aboriginal communities they represented. We visited these Métis, Inuit and First Nations communities, learned their issues and brought these issues to the candidates.

We also initiated two debates. One was an Indian Affairs debate, with the Minister of Indian Affairs and those in the Aboriginal portfolio from opposition parties.

The other was a debate with Aboriginal candidates from each party. We spent a lot of effort figuring out the format for the debates. Unlike the national-party leaders' debate, we didn't have any "free-for-all" exchanges between the candidates. Based on viewer feedback, the audience liked hearing the candidates speak rather than hearing them bicker and compete to be heard.

We believe that our federal election coverage helped promote accountability from the political

We did a live town hall on the MacKenzie Pipeline from Yellowknife. It was February. We laid cable from the mobile truck into the Legislature, which we were using as the location. The cable got so cold that when we tried to roll it back up, it snapped. So we had to bring the cable inside the Legislature to warm it up.

- Russell Wells
parties to our viewers and enhanced voter interest.

It's important for us to play the same role when it comes to our national organizations.

Before the last Assembly of First Nations election, we invited the incumbent and candidates for National Chief to debate. Just hours before broadcast the incumbent pulled out and then so did the other two candidates. We scrambled and were able to air an alternate program where panelists debated the issues, noted the positions of the candidates and frequently lambasted them for cancelling.

Viewers expect us to demand accountability from our leadership. You can be sure that this experience will only strengthen our resolve in the future.

The core audience

We have outlined how the news service has matured in its relationship with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal officials.

But it's our relationship with our core audience, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, which is crucial. That's deepened over time, too.

Initially we found that when we showed up as APTN crews in Aboriginal communities, people were often star struck. For most, it was the first time that they'd had an opportunity to see people up close whom they'd seen on television - and people who looked just like them!

We'd go to places where, as soon as we spoke to one person, the whole community was on the lookout for us and even though our vehicle had no APTN markings, people waved as we passed.

Then we noticed something else: more and more people started coming up to us to tell us what they think APTN should be doing, what they want APTN covering. It reminds us of what a president of that other national network once said:

Aboriginal People don't talk in TV sound bites.
Sometimes when I’m trying to tighten a story, I try to cut the clips of the ordinary folks I’ve interviewed. But often I find that I cannot. If someone has something to say, I believe that we have to let them say it. Especially since so many of the problems First Nations people face have a David and Goliath nature to them. It’s different for politicians and officials. Many of them have media training and they’ve mastered the 10 second sound bite.

- Gregory Taylor
"Everyone in Canada has two lives, one their own and the other, running the CBC." Aboriginal Peoples across Canada are starting to act like APTN is theirs, like they own it -- and we think that's exactly the way it should be.

One of the central ways our audience has connected directly with APTN is through our weekly talk show, Contact, hosted by Rick Harp since it went on air in April 2000. You could call it our version of Larry King Live, with studio guests and phone-in callers (but without the budget!).

We never suffer for calls. Over the years, as we've improved the production values, we've successfully incorporated the internet into the program.* We have an email list of thousands of people who’ve signed up for advance notice of our weekly topic. People react even before the broadcast, helping us to shape our show and its question.

The program has dealt with all issues relevant to Aboriginal Peoples, including residential schools, housing, health care, as well as the war in Iraq and gay marriage.

We've noticed that we get the highest response rate when we deal with faith and spirituality in the 21st century. Should we record sacred ceremonies? Should we write books about them? Should women be permitted to drum? Sacred ceremonies - no non-natives allowed? These kinds of questions elicit passionate debate.

We also see it as our job to stir controversy. We did a program asking, Is it time to stop blaming 'Whitey'? We had two guests, a conservative non-Aboriginal talk-show host focused on individual rights and an Aboriginal commentator focused on

*How connected are First Nations, Métis and Inuit to the Web? It depends on the community. In our view, the internet is a form of infrastructure. Communities with good infrastructures, like water and sewage, have better rates of connection. There's not a high rate of high-speed in private homes. Generally, however, community centres and workplaces are connected.
issues of group membership. It was provocative television and we like that, too.

Interestingly, some of our highest-rated programs have the fewest calls -- episodes on Aboriginal suicide, Aboriginal women in prison, and Aboriginal youth in the sex trade.

As the program evolved, we decided that we wanted the question to be solution based. So instead of asking, why do so many Aboriginal People commit suicide, we asked, what can be done to make suicide less likely?

We have also started to do live "town hall" meetings, including one in Yellowknife on the Mackenzie Pipeline, another in Vancouver on Treaty Rights and one in Saskatoon on Aboriginal Peoples' relationship with the police and the RCMP. The town hall on residential schools originated live from four locations-Winnipeg, Vancouver, Ottawa and Yellowknife.

To launch the 2003-2004 season, we held a live town hall in Halifax on the fourth anniversary of the Marshall Decision on Aboriginal Peoples fishing rights.

The mood in the audience is serious and impassioned. It is also celebratory. Not because the topics are happy ones, but because the event itself, an APTN town hall, validates and celebrates our national conversation. It's the same feeling as at a CBC town hall with Peter Mansbridge, though there are two differences. First, we rely more on audience participation and less on experts. And, second, for Aboriginal communities, this is all new.

Contact has used the innate power of television to convey emotion; to enable First Nations, Métis and Inuit to speak across a television signal to people who look like themselves; and to validate Aboriginal experience by showing that those who might have felt that they alone have a certain problem see that others have it too. This sort of
public on-air exchange has fewer roots among Aboriginal Peoples. We know how to talk, we've just never had an independent vehicle of this scale and scope before. *Contact* is an element in an entire population finding its voice.

It comes as an unprecedented opportunity, very much like APTN itself.

We have many non-Aboriginal viewers, too. Some watch (and call in) because they are fascinated to be part of the Aboriginal conversation. Others just want to tell us to stop complaining.

Not everything is serious. Halloween has taken hold among Aboriginal Peoples. So we did a Halloween show where host Rick Harp dressed up as a banana (why a banana? we're still not sure) and asked for the silliest and scariest Halloween stories, many of which, it turns out, have their origins in traditional tales.

At Christmastime for several years we've asked, what's your best animal call? Hunters and trappers phone in with everything from bird to seal to moose and elk calls.

Every year some people call in with cat and chicken calls, until, every year, we have to ban domesticated-animal calls. That's part of the fun.

We've also had fun asking, what's your best rez car story? Some people reacted negatively. They thought we were suggesting that there were no decent cars on reserves. But we figured most everyone has had a beater at some point. And we got a program full of hilarious (and hair-raising) stories that showed people's ingenuity in keeping cars alive long after their reasonable lifetime.

**The future**

As we noted, we launched a daily newscast with no increase in staff. It was appropriate expansion for APTN. We continue to expand. But
realistically, we need more resources. So we strongly endorse APTN's application for a ten cent a month subscription increase.

**Measuring the audience**

We want to expand because we are successful. Aboriginal Peoples are tuning in, assuming a sense of ownership of their television network.

But we can't measure that success with the usual tool. As APTN points out in its renewal application, our audience is hard to measure and we agree that it is under measured in ratings.

We believe a better barometer of APTN's success is the sheer number of communities where Aboriginal Peoples are watching us.

Our core audience is scattered in 600 communities, many of them small, many of them at the end of the road or beyond the road.

In contrast to European settlers of the last century, who might have chosen to homestead remote locales, these communities are not outposts. When settled by our ancestors before Europeans arrived, many of these communities were no more remote than anywhere else. And many of the other places Aboriginal People live, our ancestors didn't settle willingly. They were reserves, when our families were forced to live, prevented by Canadian law from leaving without a permit from the Indian Agent.

Until the arrival of APTN, these communities had no media outlet aimed directly at their national political institutions and their local concerns.

So if in a community of 120 households, ten of them now tune into APTN news, that means an entire community has a core of people connected in a new way to the wider Aboriginal community.

And if the same thing has happened in 100 or 200 communities since APTN went on air, this is
far bigger sign of success than another 1000 or 2000 viewers added in Toronto, or Regina.

If you want to look at numbers, then what you should look at is the number of communities that have been enfranchised with access to a mass-medium free press through the arrival of APTN.

In fact, in our opinion, the sheer number of communities where people are tuning in to a directly relevant national media - and the possibility of local coverage - has grown more through APTN’s first licence period than at any time since CBC first went on the air.

**Putting news in the Broadcast Licence**

We urge the CRTC to grant APTN the ten cent increase and to insert as a condition of licence a half-hour daily national newscast Monday-Friday, 52 weeks a year, with the addition of the equivalent of another half-hour of daily news by the end of the licence term.

APTN has indicated that it can agree to this, if it gets the rate increase.

It has explained that it will use a portion of the proposed increase on news and current affairs.

We can give you our frontline sense of how some of that money will be spent.

**Additional bureaus and regional feeds**

A national network needs regional input. We've been very fortunate to have the CTV benefit money in helping us build the six news bureaus (Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Saskatoon, Yellowknife and Vancouver) outside our national newsroom in Winnipeg. We know the bureaus' value in shaping a national newscast and creating a critical mass of understanding of Aboriginal Peoples everywhere.

We understand the need to have bureaus in the Prairies, Yukon and Nunavut. We need and want to increase our coverage of the North.

*In our Halifax office now, my colleague and I research stories, travel to the location, shoot the tape, return to Halifax, review the tape, write, record narration and edit. Then we drive over to ATV for the feed to Winnipeg. I also take care of the office’s administration which includes ordering supplies from Staples and taking care of petty cash and tape supply.*

- Maureen Googoo

Canadian Media Guild  In support of APTN’s licence renewal  May 2005
More than that, a fuller network of bureaus will enable us to produce regional news breaks, which will be the basis for increasing the amount of news on the network.

The new bureaus also dovetail with the plan to split broadcast from the current two feeds (North and South) to three, North, East and West. Right now, the news is broadcast at one time across the country -- 8.30 pm in Halifax, but 4.30 pm in Vancouver.

Offering the news at appropriate times and offering more regional news will make it easier for more people to use APTN as their source of information.

For the moment, the news is all in English. We know we need more French and Aboriginal language news programming. Since September our Montreal correspondent has produced her reports in French and they run on our newscast in French with English subtitles. It's a start.

We realize that this is an important issue, one that takes more resources, one that we look forward to addressing. We look forward to diversifying the language reach of the news.

We are pleased that overall APTN plans more investment in French-language programming, programming in Aboriginal languages, SAP and versioning.

**Investigative journalism**

We hope to start an investigative program with the added resources. We already have experience in breaking stories to build on.

For example, we broke the story of Raven Thundersky of Poplar River First Nations, whose family members are dying from exposure to zonolite insulation. It turns out zonolite is laced with asbestos and scientists have known this for years. Many Natives in federally-built housing are ill and dying because of zonolite.
We broke that story and then did follow up stories as money was spent to tear down contaminated homes -- but the dangerous materials were left lying on the ground.

We also broke a story on Health Canada's attempts to coax status Indians into signing a consent form that would permit the government to collect personal health information and use it as it liked. After persistent follow-up stories, Health Canada dropped the consent form.

And we also did a story on Garden Hill, Manitoba where a new renal health centre has provided the region with dialysis machines so that people in the area needn't travel hundreds of miles to get treatment. What we revealed is that the community doesn't have the water pressure and sewage system needed to make full use of the equipment.

Each time we've done such stories we've received calls from other people with more stories. Seeking redress through the media is time-honoured in most of North America. It hasn't been in our community. The appropriate voice has not existed - until APTN.

**Sports unit**

Another area APTN seeks to expand is sports. We all have vivid memories of the APTN broadcast of the North American Indigenous Games in 2002. It was a gargantuan effort and involved taking the news off the air for several weeks while everyone worked on the Games effort.

We didn't only air beginning-to-end coverage of the Games for APTN. We were also the host broadcaster, providing image and sound from more than a dozen venues around Winnipeg. It might not have been the Olympics. But then we didn't have an Olympic sized budget. The coverage involved all our resources, several

*Other media outlets have covered the story of zonolite and Raven Thundersky, based partly on what APTN did.*

That’s been important to raising the profile of the issue. But for APTN, this is not one story. It’s an ongoing series of stories.

We reported on the clean-up which left asbestos-laced zonolite scattered on the ground. And we looked at whether the government’s support for finding markets for Canada’s asbestos industry puts it in a conflict of interest when it comes to the dangers of asbestos.

Meanwhile, seven of nine of Raven’s family members have diseases related to the asbestos that was in the zonolite used in construction of their home. Two are dead.

*It hits home at APTN: Raven could be someone’s mother, or aunt or cousin.*

- Cheryl MacKenzie
camera crews hired just for the Games and an enthusiastic crowd of broadcast students who pitched in.

It gave us more than experience in sports-event coverage. It also gave us close up contact with the array of Aboriginal sports and the competitors who play them. And it gave us and our audience a keen interest in sustained sports coverage.

Youth unit

The youth unit will have a double purpose. In addition to providing reports from a youth perspective on youth issues, it will be a training ground. We all feel that we have benefited from training. And we know that despite APTN, the pool of Aboriginal broadcasters is too small. This initiative will help.

Unique challenges

It’s a big country

As the journalists and crew who venture into the field for newsgathering, we have day-to-day experience with the challenges newsgathering at APTN faces.

Covering the whole country is one of them. Canada’s sheer size makes this a problem for all national broadcasters.

But as with the difficulty of measuring our audience noted above, our situation is unique. While half of Aboriginal People live in southern urban centres, that still leaves half living elsewhere - including in scattered, sparsely populated settlements and reserves.

We have to be able to cover them and that means a lot of travel for a small network.

No matter how many urban centres we locate bureaus in, we will always be far from many Aboriginal communities. Many are only fly-in and
even then only with difficulty. Even more complicated is that we have to go and come back the same day because unless there's extra space in the nursing unit, or someone has friends, there's no place to stay. Most of us have stayed over in communities and slept on the floor or wherever else a stop was found. But that's not always possible and depending on the story, not always appropriate.

We generally don't fly anywhere unless there's no option. That means we spend a lot of time on the road, although sometimes calling what we travel on "the road" is generous. Past secondary and tertiary roads, going 100 kilometres can take hours.

Even where the roads are good, the distances can be long. Since January, our Maritimes correspondent has driven to Truro four times and to the Miramichi in New Brunswick, to Sydney in Cape Breton, to Yarmouth, to Fredericton and St. Stevens and back to Fredericton. Last fall, when she went to Newfoundland, she drove to Cape Breton and took the ferry over.

If we were able to increase our travel budget and fly instead of drive, we would be able to produce more stories in more communities.

**Channel placement**

Money is not everything. Channel placement, as APTN's renewal application notes, makes a big difference. We know this issue goes beyond APTN. We urge the CRTC to consider creating a space, in a reasonable setting on the dial, where it could group together all public-service broadcasters interested in being placed together.

**Access to APTN**

The CRTC has recognized the need for mandatory carriage of APTN. Unfortunately, many aboriginals still can't get us. For example, in
the Maritimes, much of our core audience lives off reserves and outside urban centres. In rural communities, they are served by small cable operators who do not carry APTN. It means that the Aboriginal fishermen we interviewed around Digby and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia couldn't see their own story. We urge the CRTC to make carriage mandatory everywhere so that all Aboriginal People can receive APTN.

**Attracting a non-Aboriginal audience**

This submission has focused on APTN's core audience of First Nations, Métis and Inuit. We know that we have non-Aboriginal viewers and we'd like to increase those numbers. We are aware that the mainstreaming of the network will come partly through such audience expansion, as will the opportunity for more advertising revenue.

Our experience on the talk show Contact demonstrates that making our news and current affairs relevant to our core Aboriginal audience is what will produce distinctive programming that will interest non-Aboriginal people.

**Conclusion**

We were mainly neophytes when APTN launched news five years ago. Today, we have built up solid experience as a television news service. News anchors the network. But we remain APTN's first generation of news journalists and crews and what hasn't changed is the idealism that brought us to the network, the commitment to expand service to our community and the enthusiasm which lets us believe that we will be able to so.