

# Friends United excelling with work on reconciliation through multiple projects

by **Drake Lowthers** *The Reporter*  
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CLEVELAND: The founder of Friends United says having meetings with local representatives with the provincial government is taking a direct approach on reconciliation.

Former Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald, Deputy Premier Allan MacMaster, Richmond MLA Trevor Boudreau, Minister of Health and Wellness Michelle Thompson, and Minister of Agriculture Greg Morrow enjoyed a one-hour tour of the facility, and were given a presentation which covered new project initiatives that are planned for the coming year.

“One thing they all have in their heart is reconciliation,” Friends United Founder Rolf Bouman told The Reporter. “I want to underline, we understand reconciliation doesn’t always start with the government, it starts with us private citizens.”

He suggested he doesn’t care who’s in power, if they understand that only with healthy, constructive and mutual respectful collaboration with other parties we can create a better future together for the next generation.

Before the most recent provincial election in 2021, Progressive Conservative Party Leader Tim Houston visited the Friends United International Convention Centre in Cleveland and during his visit, he asked Bouman, to keep them informed about significant developments with their organization.

Recently, approximately 18 months after that visit, Bouman and Elena Paul met again with Premier Houston to discuss new projects of the Friends United Initiative, including reconciliation-themed camera talks, and the many new venues across Nova Scotia where the artists’ work is now on display.

At the request of Town of Port Hawkesbury Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton, a collaboration between Friends United and the Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre will now see the building be home to 30-plus canvases located in the entrance hall.

“We’re trying to raise awareness as to what can be done,” Bouman said. “We’re here to work together with people to listen, and to make peace.”

One major partnership Friends United focuses their attention on is through the education system.

Bouman indicated after donating artwork to schools in St. Peter’s and Potlotek, they were asked to hang artwork in upwards of 20 schools across Cape Breton and the mainland.

“This will take us several years to do, and we already met with the school in East Tracadie for the next collaboration. The artwork is being received very well by students and the public at all locations,” he said. “Also, we will be dropping off artwork for SAERC next week, and we hope that they will have time to hang it before the summer break.”

Hollywood actor who is best known for his role as Chingachgook’s son Uncas in The Last of the Mohicans and Inuit carver Eric Schweig has been in Cape Breton for the past four months creating artwork

“He has carved four contemporary masks for us and one six-foot sculpture display with whales,” Bouman said. “All can be viewed at our centre. They are very unique.”

Touching on another ongoing project, he explained, the first three second annual reconciliation talks with Nancy Regan have been released on their website <https://www.friends-united.ca/interviews>.

“First one features Nancy Regan interviewing Hereditary Chief Stephen Augustine and retired Membertou Senator Dan Christmas. Second one features Nancy Regan and former Premiers Rodney MacDonald and Iain Rankin,”

Bouman said. “Third one is Nancy Regan and Salish totem pole carver Gerry Sheena and [myself].”

A long-standing project that originated a decade ago with the Port Hawkesbury Rotary Club, when Patrick Lamey reached out to Bouman on assistance to build a playground has evolved into an art auction in support of local and emerging Indigenous artists.

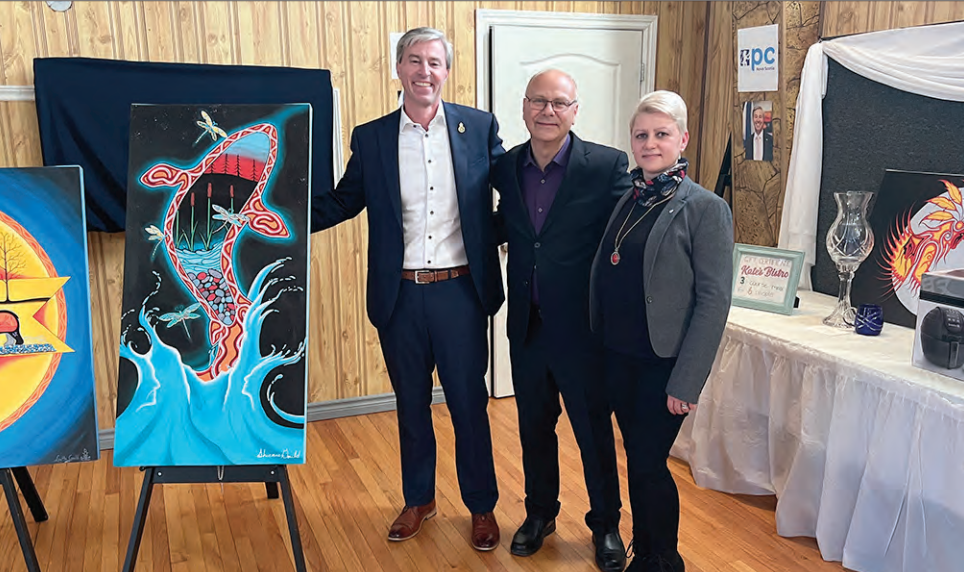
“The money raised can then help us to fund more artists,” he said. “The funds will be used to purchase high-quality art supplies. This art can help eliminate misconceptions, prejudice and equality, peace and mutual respect among all people.”



**Contributed photos**  
FU 1 – Photo from 2021 pictures Conservative Party Leader Tim Houston, Richmond County Warden Amanda Mombourquette, Friends United Founder Rolf Bouman, and conservative MLA Trevor Boudreau.



**Contributed photos**  
FU 3 - Pictured at a recent meeting at the Friends United International Convention Centre are former Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald, Minister of Finance and Deputy Premier Allan MacMaster, MLA Trevor Boudreau, Minister of Health Michelle Thompson, and Minister of Agriculture Greg Morrow. Also present were Adam Rodgers and Rolf Bouman.



**Contributed photos**  
FU 2 - Pictured after recent meeting with Premier Houston is Rolf Bouman and Elena Paul of the Friends United Initiative.



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# Origin of the Friends United Initiative

In 1988 Rolf Bouman immigrated from Europe to Canada. Like many Europeans, he grew up with a deep respect for First Nations people, and was astonished to realize that many First Nations peoples were impoverished and underappreciated. After witnessing many unfortunate and preventable incidences of friction between First Nations peoples and other North Americans, he was inspired to do something to help create change.

Rolf, along with a team of many professionals, has been working for more than three decades to help eliminate prejudice and to focus the world’s attention on First Nations of the North American continent in a positive way. This includes celebrating the important and unique skills, cultural heritage and history of the people in collaboration with communities and leadership. Working in strong partnership with First Nations, Rolf’s goal is to emphasize that First Nations have been and are contributing significantly to the fabric of today’s society and the world. With their highly valued insights, unique knowledge and important experiences First Nations do provide a powerful worldview and perspective that will help guide our world to a better future.



From the left: Hereditary Chief Stephen Augustine and Friends United founder Rolf Bouman



National Chief Perry Bellegarde (until 2021) and Friends United artist Loretta Gould

After researching for many years and working to ensure long term funding, Rolf eventually founded the Friends United initiative in 2009. This is a forum where First Nations are gaining increasing international exposure and recognition by sharing their valuable culture through various forms of artistic expression. Many of the Friends United artists have grown to become role models in their communities as successful entrepreneurs through the business education, guidance and funding which they received through the Friends United initiative.

In 2010, former Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald joined the initiative as a guiding board member, as did in subsequent years hereditary Mi’kmaq chief and Mi’kmaq Grand Council member and Keptin Stephen Augustine, who spent his teenage years in Germany, where his family resided. Together they have been promoting and assisting many First Nations artists to become increasingly cultural ambassadors for Indigenous peoples and Canada and were able to construct bridges of friendship, reconciliation and hope by promoting dialogue, equality, and inclusion.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE  
ROTARY CLUB OF PORT HAWKESBURY



The Friends United Initiative is a non-governmental initiative completely operated without financial government assistance and has absolutely no affiliation with any political parties. The Friends United initiative is being funded by the Canadian / Nova Scotian Bouman group of companies.



Hon. Rodney MacDonald NS premier (2006-2009) , Rolf Bouman Friends United founder , Hon. Stephen McNeil NS premier (2013-2021) , Hon. John Hamm NS premier (1999-2006) , Hon. Darrel Dexter NS premier (2009-2013)



Friends United at Rotary International Convention in Germany



Rolf Bouman, National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Hon. Rodney MacDonald

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