

'Collective pride'

Metis man becomes Crown prosecutor thanks to scholarship fund



ANDREW HANON

Usually, when a courtroom is jam-packed, it's a tense, sombre situation.

But on Thursday, Room 612 of the Court of Queen's Bench in downtown Edmonton felt more like a party.

Fifty of Shaun Emes's family and friends crammed the gallery to see the 31-year-old called to the bar and become a Crown prosecutor.

He's the first member of his family, whose roots in Alberta go back 250 years, to become a lawyer.

"It was collective pride," explained Emes, whose Metis ancestors settled at Lac St. Anne, 20 km west of Edmonton.

"A lot of the people there were from Lac St. Anne."

Several in the crowd wore traditional Metis leather jackets. One woman clutched a small blue flag bearing the infinity symbol, the flag of the Metis nation.

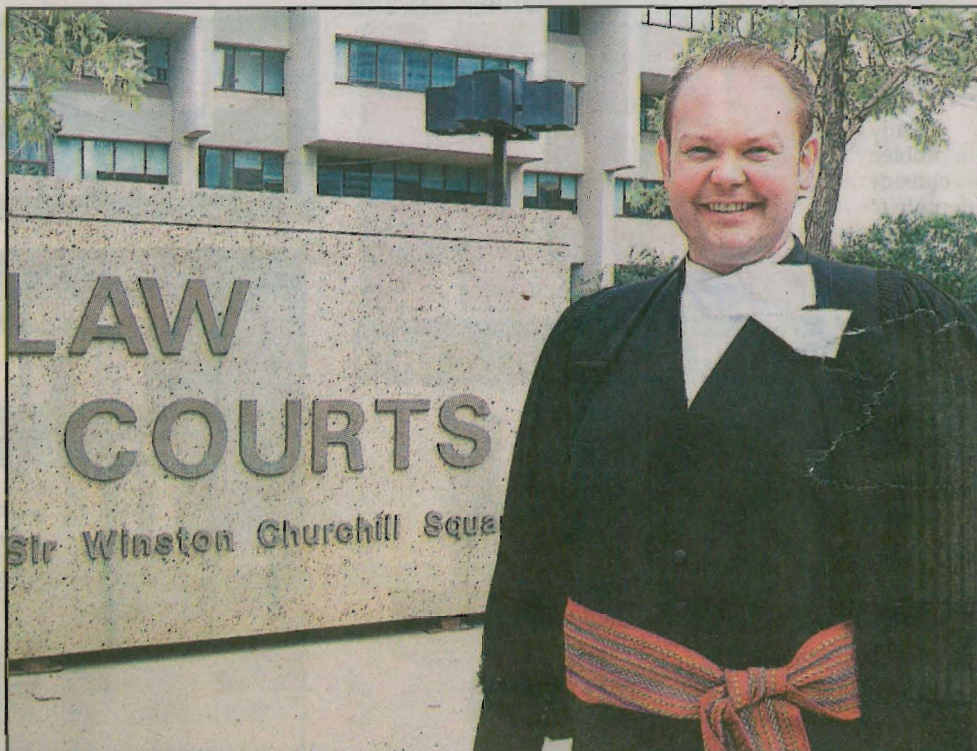
But no one in the room was happier than Emes's mother, Diana.

"I couldn't begin to tell you how proud I am," she said, beaming. "He worked so hard."

And to think, Emes faced dropping out of law school because he'd run out of money and was about to reach his credit limit for student loans.

That's where Georges Brosseau and Orval and Herb Belcourt came in.

Brosseau, a prominent local lawyer, Herb, a successful businessman, and Orval, a social worker and advocate, have for years been helping young Metis achieve their



DOREEN THUNDER/EDMONTON SUN

Shaun Emes, 31, stands outside the Law Courts building Friday prior to being called to the bar to become a Crown prosecutor thanks to a scholarship fund offered to young Metis.

goals through a scholarship fund.

All they ask in return is that recipients encourage other Metis to work hard and give back to their communities.

Since 2001, the Belcourt Brosseau Metis Awards have given out more than \$3.3 million and helped more than 600 people.

The program receives no government funding.

It began in 1971, when the trio founded Canative Housing Corporation, which provided affordable rental homes for Metis people in Edmonton and Calgary.

"But as time went by," Brosseau recently told me, "other organizations began to fill that need and we started looking for other areas where we could help our people."

Education — the biggest single key to lifting people out of poverty — was an obvious choice. They dissolved the corporation and put all its assets into an endowment fund for scholarships, administered by the Edmonton Community Foundation.

Emes grew up in Edmonton but always had a strong connection to Lac St. Anne, which was settled by Metis in the 18th century, where they caught fish to supply European settlers in Edmonton and St. Albert.

That tradition continued right up to Emes's late father, Frank, who had a commercial fishing licence and supplied whitefish to the city's Jewish and Chinese communities.

But it was harder and harder to make a living at it.

"My father always wanted me to seek higher education," Emes said. "He saw the writing on the wall."

He decided to be a Crown prosecutor because it will be the best way he can help his people.

"Everyone knows that aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system," he said. "But what doesn't get said is that they're also over-represented when it comes to being victims of crime."

Emes adds: "And I doubt I'd be in the position I am today if it wasn't for the (Belcourt Brosseau Metis) awards."

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