

## The Blood Reserve revitalizes its sluggish economy

Leaders of the Blood Indians are looking to potatoes, jewels and houses to invigorate the stagnant economy on Canada's largest reserve.

The Blood Reserve, which covers 1,600 square kilometres southwest of Lethbridge, Alberta is home to 5,400 Indians. Although it is considered one of the more progressive in the country and has made strides in economic development, more than half its residents are on welfare and in winter the unemployment rate climbs to 85 per cent.

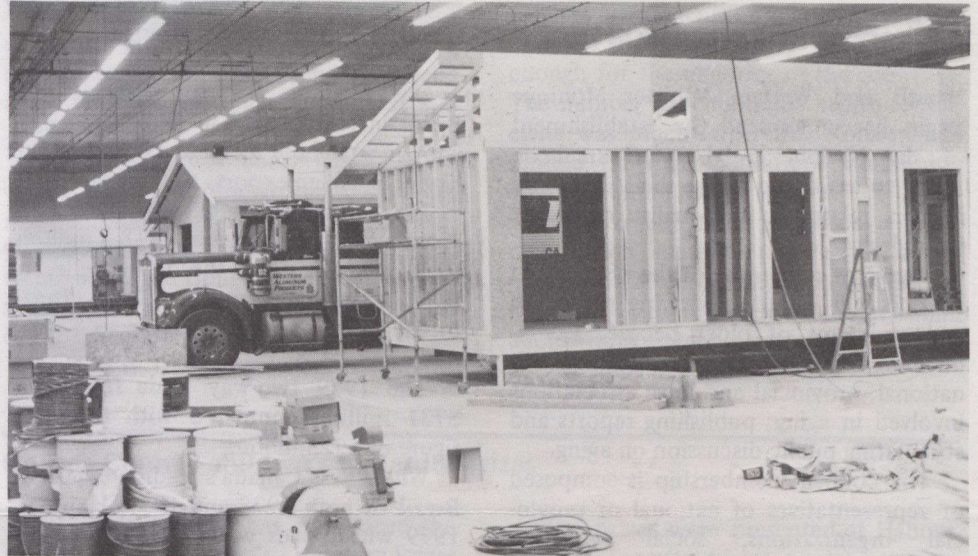


*Blood reserve resident works in modular home plant.*

Gerri Ehli, the band's co-ordinator of economic development, says agriculture is the key to future growth. Already about 35 residents are employed growing potatoes commercially on 300 acres (120 hectares) and there are plans to double the area under cultivation. Another 20 residents work on a 6,000-acre (2,400 hectares) farm and about 18 on a 1,000-head cattle ranch.

Farming, however, is largely seasonal and many of the employees find themselves out of work in winter. Band leaders hope the agriculture industry will eventually expand enough to support a year-round food processing plant and a supply industry.

The Environment Council of Alberta says there are 25,000 acres (10,000 hectares) of potential farm land on the reserve. Much of that is currently leased to non-Indian farmers. The agriculture



*The modular home plant, Kainai Industries, one of the largest in Western Canada.*

projects are all operated by Indians with band funds.

### Home industry

Figuring highly in the band economy is the band-owned Kainai Industries Ltd., a modular home plant that employs about 75 Indians in one of the largest operations of its kind in Western Canada. Comptroller Alan Barnard says the company has contributed \$8.5 million into the band economy through wages in the ten years of its operation.

### Jewelry and supermarket

On a smaller scale are a band-owned supermarket and cafeteria, both housed in a modern administration building.

The latest venture is a jewelry plant

expected to employ about 20 persons when it reaches full operation. The project began after the discovery on the reserve of aragonite, a semi-precious stone resembling opal.

The band also receives oil and natural gas revenues. Royalties from production on the reserve has amounted to \$3-\$4 million in each of the last three years. Heavy bidding by oil companies on petroleum exploration rights last August led to a windfall revenue of \$22 million, half of which must go to the band's capital account in Ottawa.

The residents forced a referendum on the spending of the other half and voted in December to divide it equally among all band members; it meant an extra \$2,000 for every man, woman and child.



*The band-owned supermarket on the Blood Reserve.*