

Eric Newell, CEO, President and Chairman of Syncrude (retired)

Few people in Canada have championed the pathway to a fully employed Aboriginal population as powerfully and effectively as Eric Newell.

As the foremost executive of the world's largest oil producer from oilsands, Eric Newell has passionately promoted growing ties to the Aboriginal communities in the Fort McMurray area. He has been an exemplary supporter and developer of Aboriginal businesses. He has vigorously involved his company in multiple ways to ensure an improved education for Aboriginal youth. He has shown how a massive corporation like Syncrude can make Aboriginal inclusion an integral and daily part of doing business.

Mr. Newell's career began with engineering degrees from the University of Birmingham, England, and the University of British Columbia. He has worked for Imperial Oil Ltd. and Esso Petroleum Canada, but he is best known for his years at Syncrude, where he served as the company's Chief Executive Officer from 1989 to 2003. He has also served as Syncrude's Chairman (1994-2003) and president from 1989-1997. He retired from Syncrude in 2003.

Under his leadership, Syncrude became not only the front runner in Canada's race to become a major global player in oil production, it also became a sterling model of corporate social responsibility: in its relations to the environment, to its own workforce, and to its Aboriginal employees, contractors and neighbours.

Some of Mr. Newell's legacy can be seen in the remarkable range of Aboriginal initiatives at Syncrude today; many of these initiatives are briefly described in *The Syncrude Story* in Chapter One of this module.

Mr. Newell was a founder and keen promoter of CAREERS: The Next Generation, an initiative designed to introduce workplaces into classrooms and launch career and trades opportunities for Aboriginal students still in high school. He was also a Co-Chair of the Board of Champions of the AHRC.

He has acknowledged that at the heart of his efforts is a personal commitment. "As a proud and passionate Canadian, I want to think that my country aspires to these very ideals [of Aboriginal inclusion]. And that's why I have made Aboriginal development a personal goal. But no one person or company can do it alone. It's going to take all our efforts to remain on the right track, and move forward as one... one nation with opportunity for all."

Kelly Lendsay, CEO and President of the AHRC, describes Eric Newell as a "one of Canada's most stellar advocates of Aboriginal inclusion. Eric Newell has used every option available to an executive, from union discussions to speeches before CEOs, to advance Aboriginal opportunity. Eric Newell has convinced Syncrude's stakeholders that Aboriginal inclusion is a long-term effort and deserves long-term investment. He has also demonstrated extraordinary leadership by challenging other CEOs to improve their efforts in Aboriginal inclusion. Eric Newell's leadership commitment to Aboriginal inclusion has set the very highest standards, not only in Canada, but almost certainly anywhere."

Advice of a Change Master:

“Now let me just briefly say that we regard every single one of our Aboriginal initiatives as a sound investment in our own prosperity. By putting something in, like human or financial resources for Aboriginal business development, employment or education, we get something back out.”

-- Eric Newell at the Public Policy Forum Testimonial Dinner, Toronto, March 29, 2001