

A Glass of Success at Nk'Mip Cellars

North America's first Aboriginal owned and operated winery by Osoyoos Indian Band

Overlooking the picturesque Osoyoos Lake in British Columbia is Nk'Mip Cellars (pronounced *Inkameep*), North America's first Aboriginal owned and operated winery. This award-winning winery consistently ranks in the top tier of Canadian wines for their world-class products. In addition to being ranked the second best winery in BC in 2014, Nk'Mip also represents the success that economic development has had for Osoyoos Indian Band. But it has not always been that way.



History

Nk'Mip Vineyards were originally established in 1968 by the Government of Canada's Department of Aboriginal Affairs as an economic development venture but throughout the decade, it remained the only vineyard in the Okanagan region that did not make a profit. At the time, Osoyoos Band was plagued with problems of poverty and addiction; there were few jobs and opportunities for development were scarce. By the early 1980s, the band had been declared bankrupt and was being managed by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The vineyard had accumulated significant debt from unpaid loans and the project appeared to be a failure. However change was just on the horizon.

Band Takes Over Operation of Nk'Mip Vineyards

In 1984, Clarence Louie was elected as Chief of Osoyoos Indian Band and set out as a priority the management of Nk'Mip Vineyards. A new era of strict financial controls and accountability measures was instituted, and a new manager was hired for

Nk'Mip Vineyards. Within two years Nk'Mip Vineyards made money for the first time in its history. The Band focused on developing business opportunities that would create long-term employment opportunities for band members and bring revenue into the community.

Nk'Mip Cellars Opens in 2001

More than one-fifth of BC's vineyards are located on the Osoyoos Indian Band. This was an opportunity for development that the band could not pass up. In 2001, Osoyoos partnered with Vincer (now Constellation, the world's leading wine producer) in a joint-partnership to build the Nk'Mip winery. Osoyoos has remained the majority owner of the winery. The success of the business has been demonstrated by its productivity and has demonstrated the Band's ability to create economic development opportunities on reserve.

"Jobs and economic development are the way forward. We need to return to the working culture of our ancestors."

Chief Clarence Louie

Economic Development Today

Through strong leadership and strategic partnerships, the 450-member Osoyoos Indian Band has created a tourism business generating annual revenues in excess of \$ 40 million and employing 1,200 people. The Band operates ten businesses in total, including the internationally-renowned Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa. It also administers its own health, social, education, and municipal services. With more jobs on-reserve than members, the Osoyoos Indian Band is employing people from many First Nations in BC, the Yukon and the Prairies to fill the demand.