Since it was within the St. Eugene Mission School that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, it should be within that building that it is returned ***Elder Mary Paul***

CALGARY HERALD SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2026 PAGE E5

ST. EUGENE STRIKES BALANCE BETWEEN DIFFICULT PAST AND BRIGHT FUTURE

Cranbrook-area resort rewards visitors with exceptional golf, dining and backstory

MICHELE JARVIE



The historic building towers over the golf course at St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino. *PHOTOS: MICHELE JARVIE*



This photo of the last graduating class at St. Eugene Mission is in the interpretive centre, run by the tkamnin'tik Children's Truth and Reconciliation Society.

Silhouetted by the setting sun, the white teepee in the meadow surrounded by bunkers puts an exclamation mark on the round: This is no ordinary golf resort.

From the beautiful but imposing main building to the small interpretive centre, St. Eugene Golf Resort & Casino, north of Cranbrook, B.C., showcases its Indigenous roots for guests flocking to the championship course.

It's impossible not to know you're on First Nations land when you tee up your ball. Historic signs scattered around the property indicate its past as a former residential school. From 1912 to 1970, the Kootenay Industrial School operated a large farm and housed 5,000 children who had been removed from their families on Ktunaxa, Secwepmc, Syilx, and Blackfoot nations. It was one of 130 schools founded across the nation as part of a federal government policy to assimilate Indigenous people and deny their language and culture. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has since called the policy and actions at this time "cultural genocide."

After the property closed, it sat abandoned for 22 years. But some were determined that wouldn't be the end of their story.

"Since it was within the St. Eugene Mission School that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, it should be within that building that it is returned," advised community Elder Mary Paul during debate over what to do with the property.

Her words are now memorialized on a plaque in the lobby.

Former chief Sophie Pierre, a former student of the school, was inspired by those words and, a century after opening, the local Ktunaxa people took back the building.

In doing so, they reclaimed their culture and turned a tragic story into a powerful economic one. In June 2017, St. Eugene Resort became solely owned by four area Ktunaxa bands and the Shuswap Indian Band.

"What got passed down from generation to generation is one of the backdrops of how they determined their traditional territory," says Cindy Currie, events and booking co-ordinator with tkamnin'tik Children's Truth and Reconciliation Society. "So when you look at the Creation Story, they had names for all the places already, all the way to Yellowhead Pass down to Missoula."

An interpretive centre in the lower level of the mission building houses displays of early tools, baskets, furs, and black-and-white photographs of children in uniforms. A documentary running in a side room tells former students' stories, and occasionally an elder will be there to speak about the mission and help guests understand what happened there.

Today, the property has been repurposed with 125 guest rooms: 25 in the mission building and the rest in a newer lodge building. The mission rooms have historic touches such as original brick walls, antique furniture and penny tile in bathrooms. The stained glass window in the Chief David meeting room is original from when it was the mission's chapel.

The main floor of the mission building houses the breakfast room and a cosy dining room, Numa, which means 'thunder' in the Ktunaxa language. A large bar and fireplace at one end provide a warm atmosphere, and the menu is Indigenous-inspired with bison meatballs, wild mushroom ravioli, cedar plank salmon and steaks.

A special culinary event is returning to Numa late this fall with the popular Winemaker's Dinner on Saturday, Nov. 21. It will feature a chef-inspired, five-course dinner, with wine pairings. Tickets will be available at steugene.ca and through OpenTable.

The golf course pro shop and 19th Hole restaurant are housed in the original barn from the mission era. Incredibly, the barn's upper level once held an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

The Casino of the Rockies opened in September 2002, and the entry is tucked in beside the reception desk. While filled with bright lights and neon-lit slot machines, it is remarkably quiet. You wouldn't realize it's there unless you're looking for it.

The resort expanded in 2018 to add an RV park.

Most guests at St. Eugene come for one reason: the Les Furber-designed championship 18-hole golf course that opened in 2000. Almost half of visiting golfers hail from Alberta, with a sprinkling from other provinces and the U.S. With mostly wide, tree-lined fairways that sometimes skirt St. Mary's River, it's accessible for both novice and expert golfers, although it does have several plus-500-yard holes. Flat screens in the new GPS-equipped golf carts display a layout of each hole with yardage. With its many hills and sand traps, it'll definitely school even low handicappers.

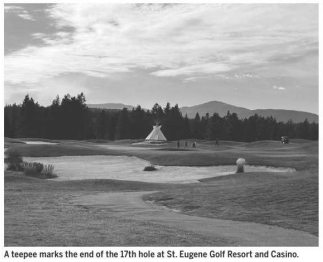
But don't miss the lessons to be learned inside the resort as well.

While the focus here may be on golf, there's much to learn about Canada's past from the treatment of First Nations children in places like St. Eugene Mission.

As Cindy Currie put it, "In order to heal, we have to keep talking about it."



With a historic stone mission building anchoring the property, St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino is a tucked-away resort with a peaceful vibe.



A teepee marks the end of the 17th hole at St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino.