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Bill Rundell

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**Bill Rundell, Denver MS,
Spends One Year
on a Montana Reservation
and Helps...**

The Blackfeet Build Their Future

By ROBERT PARKER / Editor

The two-story office and factory sits on the edge of town amid tall grass, rutted roads, and the stark beginnings of an industrial park. A saw-toothed mountain range looms through the haze like the intangible dream that sustains the people of Browning, Montana.

Who are these people, and what is their dream?

In the office of BIDI, the roster of employees begins the story. It includes names like: Edward Conway, Dale Salois, Frank Harrison, Jr., Ioe Crawford, Merle Trombley...

And: Francis Bull Calf, Aaron Shootsfirst, Clarence White Grass, Irvin Spotted Eagle, Galen Arrowtop...

The story of BIDI (Blackfeet Indian Developers, Inc.), like that of Montana, is the story of red men and white men struggling to earn a living from the northern plains. From the white trappers' invasion of the early 1800s, to the decline of the buffalo and the rise of Indian reservations at the end of the century, and to the Federal programs of today — it is a story at times of conflict, at times of cooperation.

Despite the protestations of the American Indian Movement, the decade of the 70's shows some evidence of be-

Bill Rundell, right, visits BIDI housing site with outgoing general manager Charlie Welch, center, and his replacement, Bob Friel.

coming an era of cooperation. A prime example of this trend is the work being done in Browning by Bill Rundell of the Denver office to help the Blackfeet organize their own construction company and thereby confront two of the major problems facing Indians today: unemployment and inadequate housing.

Eighteen months ago, the BIDI factory was an unkempt warehouse. Today it is producing floors, wall panels and roof trusses for 55 new housing units financed by a \$1.3 million investment by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under its low-rent public housing program.

Eighteen months ago, a large section of open land in the center of Browning was strewn with dilapidated shacks. Today that land has been sectioned by paved roads and BIDI has covered it with piles of lumber, foundation holes, skeleton structures, and finished houses.

Still further evidence of Blackfeet dreams and Bill Rundell's presence among the tribe include:

- ▶ a 49-bed nursing home scheduled to open this fall, entirely funded by the tribe.

- ▶ a new HUD-sponsored 78-unit housing project.
- ▶ a HUD-financed reorganization of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council.
- ▶ an HEW project to train Blackfeet in management know-how.

To a visitor, these Blackfeet projects seem evidence of growing success; but to senior consultant Bill Rundell, they reflect a growing awareness and a deep commitment to Indian needs. "After 18 months here," he says, "I feel very close to all these projects. It is going to be hard to take my hands off them, in fact. But I am not really going to be successful in the long run unless I do let go and let them do the work."

It is a measure of Bill Rundell's success to date — and of the strong backup support he has received from partner William Gilmore and manager John Baumgartner in Denver — that Touche Ross has received a follow-up contract from HUD to monitor and advise the second phase of the BIDI operations. It is a different kind of measure to drive around town with Bill and count the smiles and the hands waving from other cars. This summer, indeed,

when the leaders of Browning learned that Bill was moving his family back to Denver after a year with them on a full-time basis — he will be available one week a month in the future — they offered to put in a good word if it would help his family's staying on another year.

Which is a far cry from his introduction to Browning 18 months earlier.

"The first meetings I went to," Bill recalls, "I offered some ideas and got absolutely no feedback. What was going on, I wondered? I had to learn some things first."

There is a long history of poor communications between red men and white, plus a large reservoir of Indian pride that often inhibits the Indian from accepting the advice of a white man.

"First," says Bill, "I realized I hadn't established my credibility. Second, I didn't understand that an Indian has different values. He considers it discourteous, for example, to respond to what a person has said without first giving the idea some thought. So there are long pauses in their conversation that make an outsider uncomfortable."

But the bigger problem was the matter of Bill's credibility.

"They are used to having consultants fly in one day with a lot of ideas and leave the next. I think the biggest thing I did to establish my credibility was to ask my family to join me at the end of the school year — my wife, Jennie, and my sons, Glen and Chad, now 8 and 2. It showed the commitment I was making to the project."

Bill also realized that only results would prove to these people the value of a suggestion. "I had to show them

something could be done in order to get them to do it." With no organization, no financing, no general manager, not even an agreed-upon site for the houses, he had to become, in turn, general manager, financial manager, and bookkeeper before he could fill his own job as management consultant.

The Blackfeet, like all Indians, are a proud tribe. Originally from the Great Lakes region, they migrated west in the 1500's and 200 years later dominated much of what is now Montana and Alberta, Canada. They were named for the black moccasins they wore. Since the vanishing of the buffalo, they have been dependent to varying degrees on the U.S. Government, but since the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, they have been self-governed by the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, now composed of 9 enrolled members of the tribe elected to two-year terms.

The current chairman of the Council is Earl Old Person, a dynamic full-blooded Indian, who recognizes that jobs and housing will long be a problem for the Blackfeet, but who resents those who "state time after time that the Indian people will never make a success of the industries they become engaged in. People who say this are people who like to see our efforts unsuccessful." The Blackfeet people, he says, "must be involved in building their own housing, because our goal is to be economically self-sustaining."

Between trips to Washington, D.C., in behalf of the tribe, Earl presides over reservation affairs from the Tribal Council building, which also houses the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It was here that the Blackfeet decided to establish

An MS Diary

What were some of the milestones Bill Rundell passed during his first eight months when he helped set up the Blackfeet Indian Developers, Inc.? These excerpts from an informal diary tell the story.

March 28—I have not yet been accepted as a working member of the construction committee. I am still operating on the outside and am attempting to gain confidence through a one-on-one approach. I maintain a very low profile in meetings.

A BIDI foreman explains carpentry work on building site, where prefabricated walls and roofing frames are joined.

Powdered lubricant is poured into mud drilling mix. This new rig will drill wells for housing, can go to depth of 2,000 feet.

a construction company over which they would have full control and which would provide employment to their people.

The BIDI construction firm was organized with interim financial needs of \$300,000 to get construction started. The Blackfeet local housing authority agreed to pay BIDI \$1.3 million for building the homes, receiving this money in turn as an investment from HUD. The authority will pay back HUD from rentals it receives from the low-income housing. HUD, meanwhile, backed up its investment by contracting with Touche Ross to provide consulting expertise to help assure that BIDI becomes a viable company and completes the homes.

Papers for the construction company were drawn up by Blackfeet lawyer Philip Roy, who visited the housing site recently with Bill Rundell. Sprinklers sprayed the earth in front of newly occupied homes, while a half block away earth movers churned up dust, carpenters set up prefabricated wall panels and roof trusses, and painters swarmed

over earth-colored exteriors.

Inside a completed four-bedroom house, two Indian women were cleaning the windows as the men entered. A blue interior wall, a formica kitchen with a range and refrigerator installed, and tiled 1½ baths helped to create an attractive interior for any American family.

"This is tremendous, Bill," Phil Roy said. "These houses fill a critical need. There's been a lot of money spent on poor people in the name of consulting with questionable results. And we still don't have the know-how at BIDI to call ourselves a corporation, but to see something tangible, to think of the vacuum this housing will fill must give you as much satisfaction as it gives us."

Words like Phil's help make up for the frustrations. "I've been very emotional about this project," says Bill. "I have real down days, while other days I feel real high. It got to a point where for a while I might have quit my job at Touche Ross, if somehow it could have saved BIDI. Now, I am more objective about it. I accept the possi-

May 25—To date, the major problem has been a shortage of time. Not enough time has been allowed to solve all the problems of starting a new company, preparing a development program, and all the things necessary to begin a million dollar project.

May 30—Mr. Welch is doing a good job in spreading information regarding the company throughout the community. Various prospective suppliers and work crews are starting to call up and drop by to inquire about the project. Other plants in the area are beginning to show concern as their employees show interest in working for this company.

July 4—The past three days were spent developing, reviewing, and summarizing a manpower construction plan, a construc-

tion schedule, a project profit plan, and a cash forecast to develop the basic information they need for these planning tools. After many tries, I have decided to prepare these plans myself and through demonstration show their value.

July 25—We are still awaiting replies from various lending institutions regarding our application for \$300,000 of interim financing. Banks contacted so far are in Kalispell, Helena, and Butte, Montana, Cheyenne, Wyoming, and San Francisco.

August 11—Today I visited the site and discovered a 5-foot elevation error in excavation for the first three living units. This will require approximately two days to backfill and correct.

August 17—Apparently the board of di-

rectors and the Tribal Business Council have been impressed with the planning, forecasting, and performance measurement employed by BIDI. They are dissatisfied with the way tribal business affairs are being conducted and plan to create a second consulting position for the Tribal Business Council. I believe they may be interested in Touche Ross services.

August 25—Based on the current cash balance and cash flow forecasts, Mr. Welch has decided to shut the job down until interim financing is secured. At this point, the first two footings have been completed.

September 6—Today I talked to a prospective bonding company. By the time our discussion ended, I was convinced that

bonding (necessary for interim financing) will take at least an additional two to four weeks . . . The Council began questioning their wisdom in establishing a company, and started to consider employing an independent contractor to build the houses. But further discussion reminded them of their unhappy experiences in the past. They reviewed their reasons for starting this company: 1) to bring quality houses to the reservation, 2) to eliminate some unemployment on the reservation, 3) to train craftsmen so they could seek employment outside the reservation, and 4) to prove the Blackfeet were capable of running a business enterprise.

September 15—The financing conditions offered by the Great Falls National Bank are the most favorable we have. The bank

indicated that it was pleased with the Touche Ross involvement as set forth in the contract with HUD.

September 27—Yesterday it snowed 8 inches in East Glacier and close to 5 inches in Browning. Field work was curtailed. Today it remained quite cold and field work was again curtailed.

October 2—Today I worked on finalizing the short form chart of accounts and account explanation sections. The purchase order system is breaking down and I will hold a training session tomorrow. There are approximately 18 construction workers now on the payroll and 6 in the office. Today floor joists were placed on two foundations and wall paneling operations began.

October 7—Here is the typical employee attitude: they have not developed a proprietary attitude toward the job. They do not think, 'If I don't do it, it will not get done.' They rely on me to develop the work and outline job responsibilities. . . . Charlie Welch has prepared his bid for the nursing home. It includes a construction program plan, cash forecasts, manpower plans, material takeoff and costed, and a subcontract schedule. He made this bid without any help from Touche Ross. I consider this a significant breakthrough in the planning and controlling area.

October 13—The Tribal Business Council awarded the contract for the nursing home to an outside contractor after Charlie Welch submitted his resignation. Charlie reacted by talking to the men in the field

LEFT: Ruben Douglas, left, and Jerry Show, plant foreman, check truss machine at BIDI factory; houses are prefabricated to speed construction and reduce basic carpentry work. TOP RIGHT: Leo Kennerly, Jr., right, and Merle McCee, center, meet Bill Rundell in front of new nursing home. BOTTOM: Tribal attorney Philip Roy, right, visits housing site with Bill Rundell.

bility that the company can fail."

Failure has always been waiting in the wings at Browning, with Bill Rundell trying to train his cast to keep one cue ahead. During TEMPO's visit, Bill was breaking in a new general manager to replace Charles Welch, a Blackfeet Indian with 40 years of construction experience.

If there is a local hero to this story of Blackfeet housing, it has to be Charlie Welch. This easy-going man whose face is creased by 40 years of working in the sun got BIDI started in the field. He hired the men. He handled the tribal politics. He got the nursing home started when a lack of financing held up the housing. With patience, tact, and a little push, he held to long-range goals.

"What we are looking for in BIDI is a sound economic foundation for the tribe," he says. "We want to put the town on its feet, create jobs as well as homes, and as soon as profits start coming in, we want BIDI to do jobs off the reservation, anywhere in the state."

Charlie's successor is Bob Friel, another construction veteran but a white man. So Bill Rundell's job has been to educate him in the ways of the Indians as well as in the problems of the job.

"As I see it," Bob said, "I have three problems: completing the 55 housing units this year, finishing the nursing home, and beginning the 78 new housing units so that when winter comes we can be doing work inside."

"You have three members of the tribal council on the BIDI board of directors, plus two citizens at large," said Bill. "It's their confidence you have to win if you plan to lay all 78 foundations at the same time this fall to save

them money. Once you do, getting the go-ahead and the funds will be no problem.

"Now what I need to do," Bill continued, "is set up a three-month cash forecast, and for this I need your construction schedule. What will be your planned construction costs and sales? Completed houses and sales are going to be what the board is looking for you to give them, too."

Bill Rundell follows one of the basic norms of consulting: keeping a low profile. It is particularly effective among the Blackfeet, who have a heightened sense of pride.

"I'm not a missionary," he says. "I'm not here to save them. I'm here because there is a job to be done. We have been through a lot together."

A year plus in Montana has also helped Bill Rundell to focus his interests and his future.

"I've learned I can relate to these people. I think I would like to become a specialist in the business problems of Indians and other minorities. I would like to become the best in this field and develop a national program. This is going to be a big area of government activity for the next 10 years."

It is already happening in Browning. During TEMPO's visit, the highway through the center of town was being widened and resurfaced, a modern junior high was going up on the edge of town, and a livestock sales center was being built. This is in addition to the housing and nursing home being built by BIDI and a day care center, pencil factory, and camping ground already completed.

Browning is not your dirty, two-bit Indian town, said

and in the shop. He suggested this would discriminate against BIDI and Indian workers. Next the hardhats from the field and the shop left their jobs and met with key Council members. I am not sure what took place but by 11:00 the Council reversed its decision . . . I believe Mr. Welch's letter of resignation was submitted with no intention on his part of leaving the company. I believe after his conditions have been met he will agree to stay.

October 25—Mr. Welch informed me he intends to continue as general manager until the first project is completed.

October 31—I learned the financial manager is becoming unhappy with the amount of overtime. This has probably followed my attempts to demonstrate a

high level of commitment that is essential for success. I have emphasized career dedication, which often accompanies family sacrifice. I will attempt to counteract this by demonstrating the value of being a successful husband and father as well.

November 1—Today the Great Falls National Bank and the Small Business Administration finalized all closing papers for the interim loan. Present were Charles Welch, Earl Old Person, Roland Kennerly, and George Shelhammer of BIA . . . We anticipate we shall complete 6 dwelling units by December 31, which is prior to the normal winter shutdown.

November 12—Current cash forecasts indicate a need for funds by next week.

Cash management could become a serious problem for BIDI in the future, but plans go ahead for the opening of the first house this week.

November 17—The Blackfeet Indian Developers, Inc., hosted a successful open house today. At the dedication ceremonies for the first house were 150 persons, including five persons from HUD, and representatives from the BIA, SBA, Touche Ross and the Blackfeet tribe, as well as many newspapermen. It is one of the few times an Indian construction company has successfully built its own houses. The final success of the company is not yet certain but it is a giant step forward in Indian business history. The future of BIDI will depend on the dedication these people give to their company.

one of its citizens. With the oil, gas, minerals, water, and recreational facilities on the reservation, its natural resources may one day prove to be worth billions, he said.

Already Glacier National Park, which adjoins the reservation, has offered the Blackfeet the opportunity to take over park concessions, which would require a \$10-million investment. And Touche Ross has already been asked by the tribe to do a feasibility study if money is appropriated by Congress.

But, the dream of becoming self-sufficient approaches reality at the Blackfeet's own pace.

"As soon as you push too much," says Bill, "you can see a blank look come over their face. That's it. They will still be courteous, but you are tuned out."

A final story may illustrate this. Bill Rundell had done considerable groundwork, prior to TEMPO's arrival, on

the Blackfeet Management Training Program. Under the program, to be financed by HEW, about 20 select Blackfeet will receive the training in management techniques that is sorely needed on the reservation.

Twice in the past, the school board has not acted on the Touche Ross proposal because of the lack of a quorum. Finally, a third presentation was arranged, and Bill spoke beforehand to key board members who were in favor of the project.

But, when Bill walked into the meeting, he brought along the TEMPO editor to take photographs of him making his presentation. Suddenly, the board became non-committal and put off action until their next meeting.

Bill shook his head afterward. What happened? He sighed. He didn't want to talk about it. "You get used to it. It's part of what makes the job here such a challenge."

"They didn't know what to do with me at first," she says, "but finally they asked if I would like to teach a sex-education class to young Indian girls. It was quite an experience for someone brought up in the protective atmosphere of Boise," she says. "What I discovered I had to teach these girls was not sex but connecting what they knew to love. I found it very difficult to relate to them at first. And today, I still don't know if I understand people better as a result, or if I have just learned to accept others more."

The year has given both Jennie and Bill a different perspective on life.

"I was very career-oriented," says Bill. "I did a lot of overtime, and it was understood that my job came first, my family second. But these people put work in a different perspective and have given me a different set of values. I used to feel guilty when I didn't spend a weekend working. Now I'm still career-oriented, of course, but I spend a lot more time with Jennie and the boys—picnicking, camping, hiking these mountains... I've just learned to relate to people more."

"We learned how to slow down and relax, I think," said Jennie. "I never felt so comfortable before about simply wasting time."

Was a lot of it wasted in the Montana winter?

"We like the solitude in the park after the tourists have gone," says Bill. "We would drive in after a snowfall and track deer with the children."

"I'm a loner myself, anyway" adds Jennie. "I kind of like the quiet of snowbound winter days."

Jennie serves friends at picnic.

Glen, top, and Chad.

A "Reservation" Family

It is not unusual for Bill Rundell to find himself in one of the emptier corners of the North American continent. Married to his wife Jennie at age 18 in their native Boise, he financed his college education by joining road construction gangs in Alaska. (His oldest son Glen was born there.)

Committed to the reservation for a year, Bill bought a trailer home on the fringes of Glacier National Park. From there, he commuted the 13 miles to Browning in his four-wheel drive station wagon that handled the rutted roads in summer and the 12-foot snow drifts in winter. From their pleasant but cramped quarters, Glen went off to an Indian school, while Jennie broke up a winter of caring for Chad with volunteer work.

AIM leader Russell Means, left, and Assistant U.S. Attorney General Kent Frizze sign preliminary settlement at Wounded Knee.

Touche Ross Takes a Look at Wounded Knee

What is the future of Indian reservations?

"Is the ultimate aim to terminate reservation life by enabling Indians to compete in (and be assimilated into) the nation's general society? Is the aim to perpetuate the tribe as a sovereign, cultural entity? And if the latter, is it to be economically self-sufficient or perpetually subsidized?"

During the occupation of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the spring of this year, the Department of Interior asked Touche Ross to review the financial and management functions of the Oglala Sioux tribal government and the Pine Ridge (South Dakota) Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (The Oglala live on the Pine Ridge Reservation where Wounded Knee is located.) The Department of Interior was under pressure from many quarters, including Congress, to have an independent evaluation made of both the Oglala Sioux tribe and the Agency which was responsible for the area. The engagement was signed while AIM was negotiating its withdrawal with government representatives, and Touche Ross was asked to investigate AIM's allegations of tribal and government misconduct when they came within the scope of the evaluation and were verifiable.

The evaluation was completed and a report issued at the end of July. According to the report, the Oglala and the Agency were in general compliance with federal and tribal regulations. However, there were recurring weaknesses in internal controls in all tribal accounting functions—no trial balance, no reconciling of bank statements, and no records of purchase orders and payments. Touche Ross recommended the appointment of a professional administrative manager to train Oglala people in management practices as well as to be the tribal administrator. It further recommended that the Bureau of Indian Affairs give high priority to training the Oglala in administrative skills, increasing the education budget, and

augmenting social services. Some of the issues paralleled those encountered by Bill Rundell among the Blackfeet in Montana.

The report supported none of AIM's allegations. That is, impropriety, personal gain, or misuse of funds could not be proven. Fundamental to the recommendations contained in the report was the following statement: "The maintenance of the traditional Indian life style in the midst of a modern society is only possible by sheltering the Indians from having to compete in that society. Further, the sheltering perpetuates the inability to compete. This has been compounded historically by certain normal human tendencies, which are summed up in the cycle: (a) the Indians demand control of an activity; (b) the Agency gives them the control and little help; (c) the Indians fail; (d) the Agency resumes control. Whatever the policy, the breaking of this cycle is essential."

The Touche Ross survey was a joint operation of three offices: Minneapolis, Denver, and Washington. Both audit and MS personnel visited the Pine Ridge reservation, talked to Richard Wilson, president of the Oglala Sioux, and tribal officials Lloyd Eagle Bull, Emma Nelson, and Leo Vocu, as well as other Sioux and key BIA officials. In addition to Bill Rundell, other Touche Ross people were Joe Buchan, Walt Kofski, Chuck Fox, Ken Hagstrom, Jim Ochs, and Fred Froelich of Minneapolis and Herb McLure of Washington.

When the Touche Ross report was released toward the end of July, long after the Wounded Knee crisis had faded from the newspapers, it did not attract much public attention. In the words of one of the staff participants, "The report contains ideas that will be very helpful to the tribe if they are implemented. The question is, with public pressure now gone, will Interior, the BIA, and the tribe forget these suggestions or will they put them to use?"