

# CANDO ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECOGNITION AWARDS

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Every year the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) recognizes four outstanding individuals or communities involved in successful Aboriginal economic development initiatives. At the Annual CANDO Conference, delegates vote and select the Economic Developer of the Year. Previous Economic Developer of the Year recipients include the: Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission (1999); Campbell River Indian Band (1998); the Kitsaki Development Corporation (1997); Shuswap Nation Tribal Council (1996); and the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (1995).

In 2000, at the 7th Annual CANDO Conference held in Yellowknife, NWT, three individuals and one organization were recognized. These were:

1. Darrell Beaulieu, CEO of Deton'Cho Corporation (NWT);
2. Chief John Thunder of Buffalo Point, Manitoba;
3. Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band, British Columbia; and
4. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Corporate Circle.

### Darrell Beaulieu, CEO of Deton'Cho Corporation (NWT)



Since 1988, Darrell Beaulieu has worked to further the goals of economic development for the Yellowknives Dene First Nation that has benefited the people of Ndilo and Dettah, communities that are located outside of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. His vision and dedication inspired fellow band members in successfully operating a number of ventures that earn annual revenues of \$7 million while employing 80–150 people throughout the year.

Currently, Darrell is president of Deton'Cho Diamonds Inc, a wholly owned business arm of Deton'Cho Corporation. Beaulieu draws on his experience in the mining industry to direct the business of the company. Employees received European training in cutting and polishing NWT diamonds. His international marketing efforts take him to Europe, Africa, Asia and the United States. For Darrell, business challenges include building human and financial capacity. He states, "It takes time and it's all the small details that count in business. The big things will follow." Other efforts include government contracts, construction, health care projects, catering and housing. He sits on a number of NWT boards and regularly partners with Denendeh Development Corporation.

Darrell is known for his diligence and commitment as a hard-working leader who makes time for employees and band members. He recognizes the need for an economic development officer (EDO) in their communities. The government EDO arrived two years ago and is not involved in Deton'Cho Corporation investments. Instead the EDO focuses on educating people in starting local businesses. He notes:

From a community perspective, I see an EDO being established right in the community. The EDO starts an educational process on what business is, how to start a business and the various elements of business planning including the markets and competition. If people want to pursue a business, that EDO would help them do that. It's important that individuals participate as much as possible in developing their own business plans because that will be the guide that they are going to be using as they manage their business.

Any type of business development involves people of all ages. This is one of the important elements of Darrell's work that highlights the uniquely Aboriginal approach to business. Darrell explains:

One of the things that I am proud of is that we utilize our people in our businesses. We do not set them up to fail but instead try to encourage them in all aspects of our businesses: including financial management, human resources management and general management. Many of our staff are very young. We start them under the age of twenty-five years and give them a lot of responsibility. This gives everybody the experience of jumping in, knowing what our business is and the steps we take in maintaining a foothold in the business world. We encourage them to take training and even give them a few hours off to study so long as the business in the office is completed.

The community is concerned about the impact of development on their environment, and this is an important factor taken into decisions by the corporation. Darrell recognizes the fine line that political leaders and businesspeople walk in pursuing development while protecting the environment. Darrell notes:

There is a fine line where are we are moving from a hunter-gathering society to a contemporary work force. Our Elders remind us on numerous occasions that if there are no more jobs then we have to have backup so we can continue to live off the land to feed our families, provide heat for homes, and provide clothing in the traditional way. They warn us to be careful with the environment because that is where life comes from.

With concern for the people, the environment is balanced with a focus on longevity of

the corporation. Darrell describes their strategy as one where they focus on setting up a lasting corporation regardless of who are the corporate executives. It does not depend on one person to move things. They have established a core ideology and vision that will be maintained as the corporation moves ahead. This corporate philosophy is in keeping with Darrell's philosophy on the larger issue of self-government. He notes that economic development generates wealth that must be managed by the nation and helps build a strong nation for the future.

### Chief John Thunder of Buffalo Point, Manitoba



Recognition Award winner, Chief John Thunder, is proud of the many strides his tiny community of Buffalo Point, Manitoba is making towards independence from government funding as a result of economic development. In the early seventies, chief and council developed a master business plan that included a marina, cabin development, a hotel and golf course. They chose to capitalize on the natural assets of their land that borders on Lake of the Woods in Ontario and Minnesota. Many tourists visit their tiny community and enjoy the fishing and boating experience.

Chief Thunder notes:

We are almost finished following the master plan. The hotel and golf course are our final steps so we are pretty excited about the partnership that we are creating with the Wapiti First Nation. I will say that we are open to any First Nation that would love to come and visit or take a tour of our community. I have done this for many First Nations across the country and basically we give a free tour of our

projects. We also put together all of our leases and regulations, bylaws and all the legal documents that we have spent over the years developing. We can send them home with you so that you can perhaps take bits and pieces of it and learn from what we went through. We have broken a lot of ground here. I have always been a firm believer that we want to help by sending people home with knowledge that has already been developed.

Until recently, Chief Thunder worked with his father, past chief, Jim Thunder, and his council members on these projects. Now he has a business manager whose duties include those held by an economic development officer. The details of the feasibility analysis and the nuances of developing and implementing a business plan are critical elements of the business manager's responsibilities. The community can take comfort in knowing that their investments are profitable.

According to Chief Thunder, a master community plan is essential. He states:

Unfortunately, I think a lot of First Nations don't have that master plan and they tend to take the shotgun approach and end up all over the place. I think there can be success with an Economic Development Officer that knows and understands the First Nation lands and the requirements affecting the designation of various land holdings. It is quite a diverse situation in an Indian community than it is in the non-Indian community. We take a step further from just being a business by also looking at the community, resources, land and human resources. As an Economic Developer Officer, you really need to wear numerous hats and focus in on areas that a normal businessperson would not necessarily deal with.

As was mentioned, Buffalo Point developments must balance the needs of business with the needs of the community. This includes being sensitive to the proper place that tradition and culture play in their projects. The community and elders guide the development of projects in this regard. There are some opportunities to share aspects of their culture with tourists, but there are other aspects including ceremonies that have no place in the public domain. They are not something to be sold.

The connection to the land is also respected. Regarding the hotel and golf course project, Chief Thunder notes that their first priority is

safeguarding the environment as it has been with their other projects.

The environment really was our biggest priority from day one. Mother Nature tells us what we can and what we can't do and there is a lot of common sense to that. Our intention has been to develop a world-class destination resort in a wilderness setting and to retain the wildlife. We want to preserve the wilderness setting and I think we have done a really good job at it. We continue to take that approach. To me, we can get the best of both worlds. We can proceed with our development and at the same time be able to enjoy the environment without destroying it.

While there have been disagreements with some band members on the route to take concerning economic development, Chief Thunder and his council have consistently worked to improve the community and to distance itself from government funding. It is a far cry from the community that was closed down due to flooding and then slowly reopened with little assistance from the government. Former chief Jim Thunder was instrumental in putting roads into the community so that families could return to participate in a more prosperous future. The marina was the first project and the other projects followed slowly.

Collecting a tax on items sold on reserve that will benefit reserve residents makes sense to most of the community of Buffalo Point. To that end, it became another step towards independence. They are one of twelve communities across Canada to substitute a government sales tax with a sales tax on certain commodities that is collected for the benefit of the community. Chief Thunder notes:

We are starting to look at our next step, which will be an all-encompassing sales tax that would take in not just the commodities but also anything and everything that is sold on the reserve including products and services. It is a revenue stream that we know has huge potential for our community. I think in time as we implement these new forms of taxation, and as we generate revenues, we will be able to start investing more into the community and become less reliant on the Department of Indian Affairs.

The interesting part about this is that it is a taxation that is being applied to

both First Nations as well as non-Indian people. In our community, because we are in the tourism industry right on the U.S.-Canada border, we have huge numbers of non-Indians that come into our community to use our facilities. The majority of this taxation is going to generate new money. There is a certain amount that will be generated when our own people and other First Nations visit, but I think that as First Nations individuals, we need to start taking responsibility for our communities. If that means that we have to start paying taxes to our communities, so that we as First Nations can survive and prosper, then I think that it is the responsibility of every individual First Nation to take on that responsibility and start putting back into their community.

While the road to independence is rough and rocky, Buffalo Point is prepared to share all of their experience with any community who wants to share stories.

#### **Chief Clarence Louie of the Osoyoos Indian Band, British Columbia**



Chief Clarence Louie has been Chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band of Southern British Columbia for over 15 years. Over that time, Chief Louie has maintained a strong focus on economic and community development that has culminated in his community realizing zero unemployment for those willing to work. Under his leadership, the Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation (OIBDC) has created eight profitable businesses: including Inkameep Vineyards Ltd., Inkameep Forestry Ltd., Inkameep Construction Ltd., Nk'Mip Convenience and Gas

Store Ltd., Nk'Mip Resorts Ltd., Inkameep Canyon Desert Golf Course Ltd., O.I.B. Holdings Ltd., and Oliver Read-Mix. The Osoyoos Indian Band — or NK'MIP as it is known in the Okanagan language — was formed in 1877.

As CEO of the eight Band businesses, Chief Louie spends most of his time in his community, working at business development rather than solving larger political issues.

I don't travel much, I leave the political and native issues side of things to our tribal counsel. There are other people, including Chiefs, within our tribe, whose passion is to fight for Aboriginal rights. Their passion requires a lot of travel time. I sometimes get criticized for that, but I like concentrating on business. That's my area, so I stay close to home where the businesses are located.<sup>1</sup>

In the early years, the Band was involved in ranching, trading and operating small farms. Today, huge vineyards sprawl across Osoyoos Band lands, and business are being invited to operate in the community. The Band manages in excess of \$14 million and administers its own health, social, educational and municipal services.

The Osoyoos Indian Band is presently in negotiations to develop and operate a Destination Casino on Band land. The location is ideal, as the community is located on major transportation links to Alberta, Washington, and Vancouver markets. The South Okanagan has great weather. In addition, tourism-oriented communities in the surrounding areas such as Oliver, offer parks, walking and bike trails, lake swimming, arenas, curling clubs, golf courses, downhill and Nordic skiing. The region heralds endless backcountry terrain that features historic trails, lakes and streams, and forestry roads for summer, fall, winter and spring activities. The Band is also in the final stages of designating a 100-acre parcel of land to an Industrial Park to be located on Highway 97, just north of the town of Oliver. This area would include fully serviced building sites that are accessible to commercial activities in the South Okanagan. The Osoyoos Indian Band also has local taxation authority and can establish favourable tax rates for businesses located on reserve.

The Mission Statement of the Osoyoos Indian Band is:

The Osoyoos Indian Band is committed to achieving economic self-sufficiency within

its businesses by the year 2005. This will be achieved through the training and education of our people which ensures that Pride of heritage will guide us in developing our resources optimally both in socio-economic terms and for the benefit of future generations.

Several Goals of the Osoyoos Indian Band support this mission and aim to:

- Increase the level of education in the following areas: academic, athletic, vocational and cultural — and that the Band, parents and students will share this responsibility.
- Decrease the dependency on government funding through increased level of self-generated income, joint ventures, leasing, land and resource development so that economically we can one day be self-sufficient.
- Develop programs that reduce dependency and create community involvement that brings back the traditional Indian concepts of honour, caring, sharing and respect.
- Promote a well-disciplined organization that will reduce the political influence within the Band and its agencies.
- Increase standard of living opportunity for every Osoyoos Indian Band Member.

Under the direction of Chief Louie, the Osoyoos Indian band has developed a broad mix of eight different businesses. However, this development has brought with it an array of complex management and leadership challenges, including: matching the skills of labour residing in the community with employer demands; creating realizable expectations of profitability within each company; providing timely and accurate financial statements for each business; the financing of large capital requisitions; developing an attitude of "professionalism" amongst the managers of the businesses; training band managers; and, being competitive with adjacent non-Aboriginal communities and businesses. Chief Louie argues that although these businesses are successful and employ people, they still have a long way to go.

We need to analyze our existing businesses, develop growth within the existing businesses we have, and develop more businesses opportunities. You know it might look impressive, eight band businesses, when most bands don't even have one. But none of our businesses are doing extremely well. They are all just floating;

they are all making a profit, but not near the amount of profit they should be making. We should be able to compete with the tax advantages we have. We should be able to compete and do better than non-native businesses in our area in the same business, and we're not. We need to raise the bar.

Above all else, Chief Louie demands excellence in all that he and his managers and staff do in the eight businesses.

Chief Louie's direction and motivation are based on solid personal beliefs. In relation to Aboriginal economic development, he states:

There's no sense beating around the bush, economic development, job creation and revenue creation is the direction First Nations and Aboriginal organizations have to go. This relates to the funding of our social programs, among other things. There is a lot of dysfunction in our Aboriginal communities and those social challenges need proper care and attention. But everything cost money. That's the bottom line. Everything costs money. I don't care if you're working in social programs or you're talking language and culture, to put on any event costs money. You have got to have the financial ability to organize things and establish programs that meet the real needs of our people.

We need to strike a balance. We need more people on the revenue-producing side because if you don't have people on the revenue-producing side then you are subject to and dependent on government funding and federal grant transfers. The writing is on the wall and people should know that program cut backs are occurring. People have to wake up and start producing their own revenue and creating their own income. We can no longer depend on the old Indian Agent. Those days are over and they should be over. Welfare was the worst thing that the federal government ever brought to Indian reserves. If you look back, on most Indian reserves, our best workers are the old people. It's funny, the best workers are people are 60 and over because they came from an era where there was no welfare or Unemployment Insurance Coverage on the reserves. The older generation grew up during a time period where they had to provide for themselves. They had to provide for their family and put food on the table. Those people show up for work every day. They don't come to the band

and ask for help every time their door latch breaks or something goes wrong with their house. They are self-supporting people. That's how they grew up. It is an ongoing process trying to get the younger people thinking the same way.

With regard to the future of Aboriginal economic development in Canada, Chief Louie feels that:

It looks a lot better than it did 10 years ago, I think most tribes are starting to wake up and realize that they have to become more business minded. They know that they have to have business minded people at the Chief and Counsel level, and they see that they have to involve advisors and business people in their activities. Business people that work in their band or tribe are just as important as those that work in social services activities. It takes a long time and a lot of work to get a business started. You just can't create a business. You have to spend time and effort toward getting and including business-minded people. And it doesn't matter what colour they are.

### **The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Corporate Circle**

If you surf the Internet to its website, you will find that the FSIN Corporate Circle is a place where Saskatchewan business leaders can meet with FSIN Chiefs to discuss new and innovative ways to provide increased economic, employment and educational opportunities for First Nations people in Saskatchewan. As the governing body

for First Nations people in the province, the FSIN created the Corporate Circle April 8, 1999, as a means for encouraging new and expanded employment and business opportunities for Saskatchewan First Nations people.

Corporate Circle managers and members are initiating programs tailored to the business needs of the participating companies, that include creating:

- Employment opportunities;
- Training opportunities;
- Investment opportunities by FSIN or First Nations in existing First Nations companies;
- Investment partnership or joint venture opportunities in new or existing businesses; and
- Opportunities for First Nations businesses to become suppliers to new or existing companies.

It is the belief of those involved that the Corporate Circle is a place where business leaders and Aboriginal leaders can openly and constructively talk about the future of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships in the province. Participants feel strongly that this dialogue is critical in bringing together the people of Saskatchewan, in a collective effort, so as to overcome the current gaps that exist in economic, employment and educational opportunities for First Nations people.

Perry Bellegarde, Chief of the FSIN and Corporate Circle co-chair, reiterates this vision stating, "I believe we all want the same things — the best possible education and training opportunities for our children, jobs for our families, good health care, strong families and strong communities." Mark Olson, Vice President of Rawlco Communications Inc., and FSIN Corporate Circle Co-Chair adds that "Saskatchewan is one of the best places in the world to live, work and raise a family, and the main reason why is our cooperative community spirit. Saskatchewan people know that we can accomplish so much more working together, than we ever could working alone." Managers of businesses and corporations in Saskatchewan realize that initiatives such as the Corporate Circle are critical for the economic survival of the province. Don Ching, CEO of SaskTel, clarifies this concern by stating "We've all heard the predictions. Statistics Canada says that about 36 per cent of Canada's total Aboriginal population in 1991 was under the age of 15. During the next 10 to 15 years, Canada will experience a dramatic increase in the size of

the Aboriginal working age population. In Saskatchewan, it is estimated that 50% of the new entrants to the work force will be Aboriginal."

According to Robert Merasty, Executive Director of the FSIN Corporate Circle, membership in the Corporate Circle is open to any business with significant operations within the province that is prepared to work with the FSIN to improve the economic, employment and educational opportunities for First Nations people in Saskatchewan. He believes that there are many different ways in which Saskatchewan businesses can use the FSIN Corporate Circle to help meet these important FSIN objectives. For example, Merasty suggests that corporate members can provide direct employment. Alternatively, corporate members can provide indirect employment through purchasing and contracting initiatives, or through open recruitment practices that ensure First Nations people are included in the pool of candidates from which hiring decisions are made. Increased training and apprenticeship opportunities that are culturally adapted to enhance career advancement opportunities for First Nations employees, or the creation of procurement policies that encourage the purchase of goods and services from First Nations businesses, are other ways corporate members can improve opportunities for First Nations people in the province.

Corporate partners and businesses in turn benefit from being a part of the Corporate Circle. Their participation allows them avenues to build relationships with First Nations customers and workers; develop meaningful partnerships with First Nations businesses, organizations, individuals and communities, and; develop an attractive and meaningful leadership image for their businesses. The FSIN believes that through the Corporate Circle Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders and corporate managers can "build a better Saskatchewan," while providing a partnership approach that can be duplicated in other parts of the country.

At present approximately 40 CEO's of the top corporations in Saskatchewan are involved in the Corporate Circle. They meet with over 29 representatives of First Nations communities, organizations and businesses in the Circle on a regular basis. One of the key events of the Corporate Circle is its Annual Job Fair. The first Job Fair was a huge success for the 1100 students and the 60 corporate organizations that participated. The students came with resumes and were entertained by corporate representa-

tives looking to fill full-time, part-time, summer, permanent and casual jobs. This and other Corporate Circle initiatives provide ways for employers to realize that they have a strong labour pool from which to choose right here in the province. They do not have to spend time and money recruiting outside of the province.

**NOTE**

1. An in-depth interview with Chief Louie regarding his views on business and politics will be published in the next issue of the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*.