

CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2003 *Utilizing Traditional Knowledge to Strive towards Unity*

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Cheryl Cardinal

Introduction

Each year at the CANDO Conference, the Economic Developer of the Year is awarded to those individuals who exemplify what most Aboriginal Communities should be striving for. In some cases, the approach that is taken by each individual, business, or community is different but it seems to work well within the structures that they have in their communities across the country. No one approach is better than another but how each community makes it work is really what makes these awards special. You get the chance to see the approach that communities across Canada are doing to improve the status for their citizens.

In 2003, the Economic Developer of the Year Awards was presented in Whitehorse at the 10th Annual CANDO National Conference & AGM. The Business Category Award was accepted by Bernd Christmas on behalf of the Membertou Corporate in Nova Scotia. The recognition award winner was Air North Charter & Training Ltd & Vuntut Development Corp. Mark Wallace Wedge a member of the

Carcross/Tagish First Nation in the Yukon Territories accepted the Individual Award. The recognition award winner was Richard Alfred Dickson.

The interviews below offer a glimpse of each award winner's strategies concerning Economic Development.

Membertou Corporate Division[†] 2003 Business/Community Economic Developer of the Year

The Membertou Corporate Division, owned by the Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia, have many accomplishments that can be examined. Under the leadership of Chief Terrance Paul and his Council, they were able to take a vision of where they want their community to be and make it a reality. The Membertou Corporate Division has improved accountability issues within First Nations communities and is also the first Aboriginal community to get ISO registration. These high standards set by the Membertou Corporate Division have helped this community move from destitution to a commu-

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[†] Interview conducted by Cheryl Cardinal and Kelly Manyguns on September 25, 2003.

nity that is held in high regard by its members, the Aboriginal community, the various levels of government and the global market. This progressive organization has created a community based on the pillars of sustainability, conservation, innovation and success. This interview was conducted with Bernd Christmas, Chief Executive Officer with the Membertou Corporate Division.

KM: You talk about government funding essentially. Could you talk about that and Membertou's plan to get off of government funding?

Bernd Christmas (BC): Well I see, back again in 1995 a conscious decision was made by the band that had to get rid of dependency on government funding because the government funding is basically tied to agreements, financial services agreements, or financial transfer arrangements, most of these lay out what an Indian band is basically going to do. They tie the social programs, health programs, and all their developments to these agreements. I don't think it takes rocket science, if you get rid of the purse that is basically feeding you and telling you what to do and you get rid of that then low and behold you are free! So that is basically the idea we are going to break away from government funding reliance.

Right now we rely to the tune of seven million dollars on a forty-four and a half million dollar operating budget. We want to get rid of that and live those phrases that I said "self determination" and "self governance". I can honestly tell you what can that government do after that. Other than the usual, you have to follow the law. But from a First Nation government perspective, this is going to allow you to honestly achieve the goals that you want to do as a community.

CC: Who were the main motivators in persuading the community to become self reliant? How did the leadership persuade the community to strive for self reliance?

BC: It goes back to the Chief and Council. Our Chief has been elected twenty straight years and he had that vision for many, many years now. But has always been in the situation where he couldn't get the right people in place to help him with that. He and the Council work extremely well together. It's a democracy. Just because he is the Chief he can't do everything

on his own. He has to listen to what the Council says too. I think that this just shows the maturity of where they are and most of those men and women on our Council have themselves been re-elected ten years on average straight as Councillors so you have this Corporate memory of what it was like way back: how destitute everyone was, no jobs, it was the community against the Council, the community against the administration, the Council against the administration. It was a just terrible situation and nothing was being done.

So, I would really credit Chief Terrance Paul and his Council for taking that bold step. It was a hard political decision to make. To basically say, "No we are not going to do this any more", "no don't come to us for the ball team funding or hockey team funding", we have to start moving our community forward.

KM: Can you talk about global business and where it's at right now?

BC: On global business opportunities, Membertou is involved in quite a few different sectors. Aerospace sector we have partnered with Lockheed Martin to build twenty-eight helicopters to hopefully be supplied to the Canadian military. Their partners along with us include two French companies, one called Talus and another called NH Industries. You saw their corporate structure. They are involved with companies such as Daimler Chrysler, France's Airbus and the list goes on and on. That opportunity is but a six billion dollar contract that we are looking at between Membertou and Lockheed Martin. And it allows us to branch into other things which include the joint straight fighter program in particular its in the trillions of dollars and on the Canadian military side, you are looking at eighteen billion dollars worth of defense contracts that are coming up in the next number of years for various things which goes from retrofitting ships to radar systems and goes on and on and on. Lockheed Martin will have us busy with that.

On the oil and gas sector, we are involved with companies like ATCO, the ATCO Group, Logistics, ATCO Midstream, ATCO Pipeline to explore options on the ground, in the Maritimes, on shore, off shore, Gas development. The Sodex'ho Canada, the world's largest food service company, providing catering services to oil and gas rigs that are located off the shores

of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and been involved in drilling vessels catering to those types of ships; Universities, Acadia, St. Francis Xavier; and whole host of different hospitals that we are looking at doing business with them.

Then on the fishing side, Membertou has partnered with a company called Clearwater whereby we provide and market our food products around the world market under our name.

And, lastly, what we call the financial services with Grant Thornton, we have developed a unique model to try to market our know-how and experiences that we have learned over the last five-six years to go from that terrible situation to where we are now and still growing.

And then that also leads into something else which we have personally developed with our own in house staff is the ISO 9001 2000 registration where we are now actually starting to help other First Nations right across the country to become ISO registered. So there are sort of four sectors that we are involved with.

CC: A lot of the First Nations organizations that I have seen out there are trying to separate band politics from business. You mentioned earlier that your Chief had a role to play in taking the first initial steps to becoming self reliant. Does your Chief have role in the organization and if so, what role does he have?

BC: What we have done is by placing structure which includes the ISO process and management systems and by putting in business structures that normal global companies utilize on a daily basis, we have been able to combine that and increase the education capacity of the government of Membertou, the Chief and Council, so they fully understand how it all works. So they almost take a role where they become the Board of Governors. They are first and foremost "a Band Government" but have adopted Board of Governors type techniques. So the Chief, he plays a major role in ensuring that both on the social side and business side everything is taken care of but he does not venture into social programs, program and services delivery or the business of the band and start micromanaging things.

We have come to understand, and he has come to understand, as the lead political person that there is a whole array of things happening all at once at the band level. By him coming in and potentially creating favouritism for one per-

son, he is going to have a negative effect on the whole system. So, he has to figure out how to engage within the parameters set out; the parameters of budgeting, the parameters of business plans, the parameters of strategies developed for the delivery of services and programs to the community. So that is his role. And the Council again, they get involved in it as well. So our structure is the Chief and Council look over at we'll call it the "30,000 foot level" and the administration, the people that they have hired, such as myself as the CEO, I report directly to them and all of the staff, they all report to me. So it's a typical model that you have seen run everyday in the business world.

CC: ISO Registration. You have indicated that you were helping First Nations achieve ISO certification "free of charge". How many First Nations communities have you helped and has there been an outpouring of communities that have wanted to pursue the ISO registration or have seen the successes of your community and wanted to contact you? Are these communities regional, national or international?

BC: Yeah, it's national right now. Right across the country, from British Columbia, to Saskatchewan, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces have all engaged us somehow. And started to talk to us about that. I think when they talk about free is we will do the initial presentation and all this. We have a business that deals with ISO registration its something that we could never do on a free basis. It doesn't make sense. What I think they meant by that, it's that if people call us up we will give them a presentation on how ISO works generally right and then maybe if they want we'll point them in a certain direction to seek more information. Communities have wanted to engage us and get our templates for ISO Registration. We have very unique templates that are unique to the band and the uniqueness of band governance that are different than business templates that are normally ISO.

CC: And those templates incorporate indigenous values, beliefs, and traditions?

BC: Yes that is what they do. That is why we are in an amazing position because we have been able to figure out and have worked all the scams that go on in First Nations governance. We know them all. So we have been able to

adopt them and most importantly try to figure out how to. We had a serious problem where our language was almost virtually wiped out because of a move by the government to remove our kids in 1964 to off-reserve schools. And we had a school there. And then in 1999–2000, we built a school, brought in our language, now we have a new generation of speakers and you can see the big gap of Mi'kmaw speakers in the younger generation. You incorporate that into the ISO management systems that culture, the language, the history is important and that is not used I can assure you that is not the type of stuff that you will see in the regular ISO templates that are provided or are used to get a business or another government register.

KM: Our last question is a two part question. First, being nominated for this award of Economic Developer of the Year—what does that mean to you? And the second part, what do you think about the CANDO Conference and its focus on economic development?

BC: To be nominated we are obviously very excited about that. It is recognition by our peers for the most part of the work that we have done over the last year, I guess to some extent over the last five—six years, so we are obviously excited about that and our political leadership is happy about that and obviously our team of employees are happy that everything that they have done has basically started to shine through and being recognized by other people. We were never in a position to be at this level before and now it's nice to start to reap the benefits of all that work that is gone.

On the CANDO Conference itself, you have a proactive business approach, a mindset to engaging the global market place and that means also in dealing with governments, domestic governments, like Canada, provincial governments, and almost just as important in engaging other First Nations. We would love other First Nations to start wanting to do business with us, we encourage that and forums like CANDO allow us to let them hear what we are involved in and if they are interested, we would like to do business with them.

Mark Wedge[‡]

2003 Individual Economic Developer of the Year

Mark Wallace Wedge is a member of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation in Yukon. Wedge's formal entry into the realm of economic development occurred in 1984. His focus towards improving his nation utilizing his traditional and cultural values has led him towards the ultimate goal—happiness. Wedge utilizes his traditional values to help his community out of its turmoil into a self-governing nation with a constitution that embodies their traditional values, beliefs and customs and most importantly is supported by the members of his community. Wedge is a Board Member for the Four Mountains Resort project, located in the Carcross/Tagish traditional territory. Wedge also has an upcoming book he co-wrote titled, *Peacemaking Circles: from Crime to Community*. Wedge utilizes his traditional values and beliefs to assist in moving his community from violence into prosperity.

NH: What does De-she-than mean?

Mark Wedge (MW): The De-she-than is our clan and it means the End-of-the-trail-people. Before we were from Angoon. We are Da Ka Tlinget in the Yukon. The Da ka Tlinget intermarried with the Tagish people. That clan De-she-ton came inland with the intermarriage that occurred. Before that it came from Angoon, before that it came from Basket Bay. When they started moving to Angoon. Another name originated. An-goosh-skew is named after that migration—Angoon is the Tlinget capital of the world. When they were moving to Angoon another name originated, named after that migration: Angashoo (Ang=Nation) (Goosh-OO=a large group moving together, like a migration). Angashoo is the name originated when the De-she-than moved from Basket Bay to Angoon—and that was the end of the trail. That name Angashoo as carried through because what we do is our names are carried with the clans, they are clan names. They belong to a clan pool. Mathew Fred who just passed away a couple of years ago but he was at a Potlatch

[‡] Interview conducted by Nicole Hetu on September 25, 2003.

over here and that is when he gave me that name and that was one of his names—he wanted that name to be inland also. So Angashoo is one of my names. That is where the De-she-than and the end-of-the trail a person that is how that name came there.

NH: What other clans are there?

MW: There is a whole number of clans. When you look at the Tlinget clans that are on the coastal area, the Tlinget go from quite far down south and far up north—when the Tlinget moved inland and intermarried with the Tagish people they became Da ka Tlinget. Da ka means people who came up and looked over the mountain and then moved over there. There are a number of communities: Atlin, Teslin, Carcross that form part of this Da ka nation. In our community of Carcross there are six clans. De-she-than is one of them Duckloa.... (Mark listed all of them in their traditional language) which are divided into the wolf and crow inland and eagle and raven on the coast. It is the male and the female. It is the opposites that need each other to survive.

NH: You have animal clans as well?

MW: Each of the clans has crests—those crests are animals that belong to the crests. The de-she-than primarily owns the Beaver. There is a story in that with our national anthem cause our national anthem is also about that. There are crest songs. There is a totem or an icon that is often associated with these animals. We have what we refer to as the “ke do keh ka,” the man behind the damn. There is a great teaching around that. It’s like the Medicine Wheel, in different aspects, there is a huge teaching around it. There is a life long teaching behind it. Same with that the “split tailed beaver” is our crest and using it here.

NH: Is your clan system part of your governance structure?

MW: Governance—What is governance? CANDO is about governance. That is exactly what governance is about: trust. Is it not? According to our clans, this document talks about this. There are three key players. It is called “The prosperity of humankind”, presented in Oslo—the Bahai International Community

presented this paper. There are three protagonists; there is the individual, there is the community (or the collective) and institutions ... Transformation is key and critical. It is what CANDO is about. It is about acquiring knowledge and using spirituality and values. There is an innate sense of right and wrong within every individual that has to be nurtured. That is the transformation that needs to be based on our cultural traditional values, which are the essence of our spirituality. It is that foundation that starts a movement with the individual. If you get a number of individuals that format the community, what tends to happen is you get into conflicts and dispute. In most of our traditions and cultures talks about how to resolve conflict and dispute, justice when taken to the communal level. The purpose of justice is to create unity. Unity, which is critical to the well being of the community—creates the cohesion, starts creating prosperity and well being. What is important then in order to govern—the community puts its collective trust into institutions or groups of people. So when we talk about our clan, there is a system and a process that the trust of the individuals express as a collective clan and it is put into leadership.

One of the questions that you asked was, “What is an Executive Council member?” what we did when we started our self-government, although we don’t have a final agreement we are implementing self-government. That is expressed through our constitution. What we recognize is that the way the Department of Indian Affairs—the Indian Act set up the First Nation’s governance structure was not combatable—it did not reflect our culture values our clan values. What we did as a community (we talked about this) we need to begin to use our traditional values and our traditional governance systems in our modern day governance. Each of those clans asks somebody to hold the clans trust. Whether it is Executive Council, it is like a Chief and Council system.

It is like a chief but we don’t use that word. The word that we use is (in traditional language) Ke-sha-ka dene; literally it means “head-man-standing-up.” Traditionally those roles were male. Now those are problems we are experiencing with contemporary human rights issues with these roles. We know that many other communities are experiencing this. It is important to understand the reciprocity of the role between the female and the male—in

these governance models. We have clan matriarchs that hold a very sacred responsibility as well as an administrative one, it is the ying and yang, the wolf and crow, it is the reciprocity that needs to be held. What happens is men often sit on these as representative for the administrative part of it. The clan mothers are the backbone.

There is a book that my aunt wrote — Angela Sydney with the anthropologist Julia Cruikshank — “My stories are my wealth.” Because she was asked [his aunt] in today’s cultures people will leave their acquisitions to their children — which their accumulated wealth is left to their children. Part of the things that we started DNV is that we recognized that there was not acquired wealth in the Aboriginal community that could be passed on. Acquired wealth that would be transferred on — as a family wealth. As an Aboriginal community we did not have that acquired wealth. Aboriginal Business Canada provided the wealth so that Aboriginal People could access to put Aboriginal people on more of a level playing field. My aunt was asked about this — what would she pass on to her children? She did not have any cash any equity! What will you leave your children? She thought about this and she responded by saying that, “I don’t have a lot of things but my stories are my wealth that is what I will leave them.” Inherent in the stories is a value system again engrained that leads to well being which is prosperity.

NH: How about this new book?

MW: How about it? (laughs). It’s all based on everything. The question about just because it’s spiritual? That is what they did. What they did is they recognized that there were people that influence a whole community perspective that created this huge conflict. And they drew them in and some of them didn’t come but they drew them in. Some of those groups that they put together wouldn’t be in the same room together. Then what they did, they started a training process that talked about how we were going to work together. We did this training, dispute resolution, this is some of the stuff that we do in dispute resolution. But, we couldn’t call it training. They didn’t necessarily want to do training. What was interesting was we actually did it with the school and it was really interesting. We held the training in the school, we had the little chairs and everyone had to sit in the little chairs

in the school. There were elders, children, and their substitutes they were sitting there all together. It was not as if you could train somebody. It was broad training. But what happened from those people, it began a process for people to start working together. That’s about unity. It’s quite impressive.

When they started working with a group, it doesn’t change over night, people would actually get into fights, a couple of times one of them would leave. It’s called a caucus. The caucus would talk about it and say, “oh well we better go and get them back”. So somebody would have to go down and say, “We need you” and brought the person back. And that’s the interesting stuff. When you actually see this stuff being applied, it’s easy to talk about it but harder to do. So when you actually get in the middle of it, it’s hard. It’s not exclusivity and that is the stuff that creates unity.

So, things that we are talking about — this project and the Four Mountain Project that is happening — could not happen if working together didn’t happen. Sure we could do the consultant work to do all of the stuff, but the community process that created unity. Even before we started the whole Four Mountain project, the first thing that we did was we got the whole community together, citizens and everybody, we invited them to a Circle, we passed a feather around to sit. We had already run it through our Elders Council who were supportive of the project. They all sat there, “why did you ask us,” and we told them that it involves you. They asked whether we had the money and we told them that the money is the easy part to get. We can get the money to start a project but if you are not in support with us or working with us here, it will end down the road. So we actually started the community process and that is part of the process of negotiations; this is the process on how you create unity. Without that, you don’t have anything.

We started in our clan structure and our Constitution about fifteen years ago cause our community was literally torn apart. There was violence. That is what people said under the clan system, things like this didn’t happen. So we said, let’s go back to our clan system. And we started asking for it to be prepared with our Constitution. Within a year, the way it happened was that not everyone wanted it, so we said, if it not, then we have to bring something in that will bring us unity.

NH: So how did you get those people to want it?

MW: We kept talking about it and working with it so it was time to bring it up. Some people would say let's use the clan system. Some people kept wanting to go back to their culture and their roots. Trying to realize that, have this dialogue about what the clan system means this and it was actually an on-going consultation on this is what the clan system means. It took about six years to implement the constitution.

NH: I understand things according to the Indian Act. In the Yukon, there are not bands but communities. What was the relationship with DIAND before — how did you go from DIAND to this?

MW: We are an Indian Act Band just like all the others. We still are but we are different. They opened up the Indian Act; they amended it, to say that you can not only have the Indian Act band but a Custom Election and a Constitution. So we moved from a custom election to a Constitution as part of an Indian Act band. We are still an Indian Act band, it's not until we get a final agreement. We are self governing. We will be self-governing, although we have always maintained that we are self-governing anyways.

NH: So as self governing people, an autonomous nation, what does that mean? If you mean, self governing as an autonomous sovereign nation, how do you see that mindset or understanding fitting into a self government agreement that works within the framework?

MW: Our self-government agreement is actually built around the constitution. We have negotiated that backbone of that constitution, is this involvement of the community process of getting the clans. So what we have is an Executive Council that have been asked to represent the De-she tan clan. This is what the six members of the Executive Council do.

The elders appoint of those six council members, a Chief of the Ke-sha-ka dene. Any-one of those Council members can act as the Deputy Chief — they are all deputy chiefs. The Ke-sha-ka dene is the spokesperson for the First Nation — the Chief. Our constitution is actually taking the clan system and adjusting it trying to accommodate things that we talked about like

human rights — to try to make sure we fit in the acceptable perceptions of human rights according to Canada. Canada is signatory to those United Nations covenants. We are negotiating; it's our legal agreements within Canada, the recognized legal agreements, that is why we have had to negotiate in such a manner that was acceptable to our people and acceptable to Canada. That becomes part of the basis of self government.

Self government — these are the types of powers and laws that we have. Moves along similar types of things, it talks about whether the individual laws, law of the individual; these are the land based laws, what are the elected based laws, who has the responsibility, so our constitution basis itself is something like that is a given. Those are all based on traditional values. Our vision statement for the community is our Constitution and we see it as six major areas. Our vision is how we are going to look after the land — we see ourselves as guardians of the land not owners of it.

NH: So you don't have an agreement yet? So what type of relationship would you like to see with the territory and then, the Government of Canada?

MW: Well, I think the first thing is to get to back to where we were talking about prosperity is really where it's at. It's to be a sense of well being in the community, its healing; it's all of these things that we need to feel good about ourselves, just to be happier, that is what ultimately the whole purpose of this thing is to be happy. It's not about money. It's not about dissidence. But we know that in order to be happy to work with other governments, we need a relationship so what we have done is we have changed the way that we conduct things.

Instead of saying, can you give us this money or this type of thing even in our negotiations we have tried to change our approach where we get to the point of we educate and work with governments, and other organizations and individuals to say let's work together. And what they do that because nobody can adamantly expresses anybody's interest unless they feel that they want to or they are part of it.

So that is our strategy, is not to ask for stuff but to create the willingness and desire for other governments to work with us. And it will be their interest and our interest that where we

talk about resort where can there be conflict. Other business organizations were going to follow them in an inclusive manner that will benefit everyone. We know that we don't have enough citizens to fill employment requirements for this resort so we work with other First Nations to say what we want to done is have First Nations to have first opportunity to employ and do that work. We have started resource training. It's the plan.

Summary

Each of the Award Winners has utilized their traditional values to move their community into prosperity. In Membertou, a community vision fostered by Chief Terrance Paul and his Council who wanted to move out of destitution into a thriving community resulted in success. Having his community remain in debt and community members living in destitution is not what the Chief envisioned for the future generations. The leadership wanted more for their people, for their community and with this drive pushed them into one the leading authorities of change. They have revived their culture and their language so that many generations beyond this leadership will know who the Miqmaq people were and are. This vision will carry into the future.

In the second case, Mark Wedge was part of a greater picture. The vision of something better than violence in their community and disparity was a main driving force for happiness and unity. Wedge utilized their cultural and traditional values to strive for community unity that allowed the community to become the driving force guiding community development. In this instance, this is characterized by the community creating a constitution and their proactive work toward establishing self government. Common goals included "working together," and as a community the people created the vision and expressed the drive to work through individual differences so the community could work as one. Mark Wedge exemplifies that working together does not happen over night but when his community worked together, they worked towards unity and happiness.

The approach that each community has taken is different. We have to recognize that each of the Economic Developer of the Year Award Winners have different communities in different parts of the country. But the magic they found was always there—it resided within the communities. The focus of the community and direction given by leadership has led these two Award winners to be recognized by their peers at the 10th Annual CANDO National Conference & AGM in Whitehorse, Yukon.