

# CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2004

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Teresa Callihoo and Sara Cardinal

## Introduction

The 2004 Economic Developer of the Year Awards were presented in Fredericton at the 11th Annual CANDO National Conference & AGM. Both award recipients demonstrated the importance on capitalizing on resources found within the community. The Business/Community Category Award was accepted by William Big Bull on behalf of Piikuni Wind Power. Chief Lawrence Paul of Millbrook First Nation in Nova Scotia accepted the Individual Award.

## Business Category Winner<sup>†</sup>

### William Big Bull, Piikuni Wind Power

The Weather Dancer I is the culmination of many years of research, hard work and determination. It is also a tribute to the Piikuni Nations' ability to utilize their natural resources, in this case wind power. The Weather Dancer I, which officially opened in October 2001, is a single 900 KW turbine producing 2,960 megawatt hours of electricity each year, with the ability to meet the electrical needs of 450 households. This environmentally conscious project has built on the capacity of the Nations Utilities Corporation, balancing their desire for economic growth with traditional concerns for nature. William Big Bull, Energy Manager, discusses the development.

**TC:** The Weather Dancer I was built in partnership with Epcor. Can you explain why you decided to partner with Epcor? How was this partnership formed?

**William Big Bull (WBB):** When we started there weren't a lot of people in the wind power industry. We had spoken with some main people but we got a lukewarm response, they didn't seem interested in working with us. When we spoke with Epcor they were the most receptive to our ideas and to the project, which made them the best fit. They were also interested in a green power contract, as they needed to extend their services to include green power. We were able to negotiate with them and ended up with a joint venture.

**TC:** The turbine seems to be an excellent example of balancing the use of natural resources with sustainability, how important is that?

**WBB:** The focus was to establish a change in our way of thinking. We wanted to utilize traditional and technical knowledge while maintaining the least amount of impact on the land. We are not a resource rich nation, but we do have a lot of wind. Therefore, we could tap into a resource that was readily available to us, using the wind seemed like a natural fit.

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<sup>†</sup> Interview conducted on June 22, 2005 by Teresa Callihoo, Education and Research Advisor at Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

**TC:** Can you explain the cultural significance of the name Weather Dancer?

**WBB:** The name comes from our Sundance ceremony. On the last day of the ceremony, the medicine people break fast after four days and build a lodge. Because it is a part of ceremony, it represents our traditional and spiritual ways. The centre pole of the lodge is like the turbine, looking to the natural elements for support, guidance and prosperity.

**TC:** What were some of the key components in this development?

**WBB:** There were three main components. The first is capacity to use the land base by creating less imposing developments. The turbine itself doesn't take a very big footprint to stand on and creates a lot of use for a very small piece of land. Secondly, we were able to use technical land instruments to create access to the land, through section 28.2 [of the Indian Act]. And lastly, the strongest feature is that it is a renewable energy generator. We already have our own Rural Electrification Association (REA) called Peigan REA. The Weather Dancer added generation to our system; it increased the value of our system and improved the profile of our company. It gives us the capacity to deliver energy to our customers.

**TC:** What was the biggest lesson learned in this development?

**WBB:** The strongest lesson learned was that these things can work but there is a proper way to go about development. It has taken us ten years to appreciate the complexities of this project. I would recommend that people do their homework and know all the facts. The project does not just develop on its own, so you have to be prepared for the long haul.

**TC:** What are the future development plans?

**WBB:** We are currently discussing a 300-mega watt project.

**TC:** What does being a CANDO Economic Developer of the Year Award Winner mean to you?

**WBB:** It means that people are listening and that we've done a good job. I was really humbled by it, for our office it proves that as First Nations we can step out front and use something from the natural world. It shows our people that there is opportunity. It was a very good feeling to be recognized.

**TC:** Do you have any other comments?

**WBB:** A lot of First Nations want to get into the business but we need organization and advocacy to help them, to empower communities when projects come and to show that there is support in government, in communities and in leadership to let projects move ahead away from political institutions. I would encourage anyone working on a renewable energy project to have strength and perseverance.

#### **Individual Category Winner<sup>‡</sup> Chief Lawrence Paul, Chief of the Millbrook First Nation**

Chief Lawrence Paul has been the leader of his community for almost 22 years. During his tenure as the leader of the Millbrook First Nation, he has assisted in the growth of the community economically. The community is prospering with future plans for economic development. Chief Paul discusses how the community has changed over the years and tried to work towards the eventual goal of economic self-sufficiency. Chief Paul discusses these developments, the necessity of them and the future plans of the Millbrook First Nation.

**SC:** Ok, what made you decide to get into politics and economic development?

**Chief Lawrence Paul (LP):** Before that I used to work for the Federal Government, I was a Band Councillor from 1969 to 1973. I worked for the Department of Indian Affairs starting in 1975 and I was in economic development. But, I saw a lot of problems with the whole program

<sup>‡</sup> Interview conducted on June 28, 2005 by Sara Cardinal, Education and Research Advisor at Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers.

at that time. There wasn't the follow up that was required, or feasibility studies. So when I was done, I worked for the Union of Nova Scotia Indians for five years in the field of economic development and pretty well had the same problems there with assisting Native business people in Nova Scotia to get started on a business. There was a lot of information that was lacking, for the kind of business they wanted to go into. I used to tell them that, you have to have the location, you have to have a population, and you have to have so much competition of the sort of business you're going into. There are many, many pieces of the puzzle you got to put together when you go into business. You have to have feasibility studies. A lot of that was lacking.

So, in 1984, I decided to go after Chief of the Millbrook First Nation because we were stagnating. You see, in the Atlantic here, First Nations weren't going anywhere, and I decided at that time that I would start working towards putting things in place for starting the development of the highway. We had a lot of work to do and feasibility studies were done, we asked other people in different parts of the country how they did it and then we put together our economic development committee, there were four councillors on that, an accountant and our lawyer. So we used to do the negotiating for our prospective tenants. But we had to designate land for lease. Millbrook was the first band in the Atlantic to make land for lease. Then of course, we had to go through the education process with our prospective clients, to tell them that the land that we had for lease on the Millbrook First Nation and the lease you signed with us was just as binding legally as if you signed it with anybody from Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver, downtown Halifax or with any non-Indian. Our leases are just as binding; you have to do the education process on that so that they have nothing to worry about putting their money into businesses on First Nations. So it was a long process.

**SC:** Yes, it sounds like it. How close are you to accomplishing the dream of having an economically self-sufficient community?

**LP:** I'd say we're quite a few years down the road yet. We just got the small toll road now. The band ourselves, we have probably invested about 8 million dollars in projects on the

Millbrook First Nation, and our satellite First Nation in Cole Harbour. Of course we invested a lot of money and what I find; it is very difficult for our prospective clients to build their own buildings. Usually, they want the band to build the building and they sign a long term lease with us. But, we get lease money for our land and rent for our building and our tax breaks. It's a good investment for the future. But it strings you out kind of thin. It is part of the financial concern when you have to build the buildings. I don't know how other First Nations fair out in other parts of Canada but I know down here in the Atlantic, it seems to me that they want the First Nations to build the buildings. The leases they enter into are 40-year leases, 50-year leases up to 99 years. But, it gets your planning kind of thin when you have to build building after building.

Of course, we're in partnership with General Dynamics on the helicopter projects, in 2006 we're going to build a seven or eight million dollar building down in our satellite First Nation in Cole Harbour which is at the Halifax municipality and that is another thing we have to build, then we lease the building and the land to General Dynamics Sikorsky. So it's a good venture for the future, but it's hard, it takes quite a bit of your money to finance these buildings. You know as I said it is a good investment for the future after everything is paid for. All the money is cream of the crop.

**SC:** Okay, how many economic initiatives are ongoing in your community at this time?

**LP:** How many economic ventures? Right now we are building an interpretive centre there down there, with a museum we want to have a gift shop, mini theatre and tracing the history back of the Mi'kmaq Nation back to time immortal. We are going to have a forty-foot statue of our legend Glooscap out in to power centre site with a flaming torch in his hand and we will have the illusion being fire coming out of the torch. And we feel that would be a major tourist draw, not only for the Millbrook First Nation but the Tourist Association. In our partnership with them, they're going to manage the buildings for us, the interpretive centre because they're experts at it. So we will have a mini theatre there and we're going to the government to promote all the tourist attractions in the province of Nova Scotia, including the other twelve First

Nations what they have to offer. So we think it's going to be a major draw for tourism because we're located along one of the busiest highways, I think it's the busiest highway in Nova Scotia. All the tourists are going to pass our site, and they'll be able to come in and see all the tourist attractions as they pass through Nova Scotia. The gift shop is not only going to sell Native handicrafts, it will sell all handicrafts from all segments of society in Nova Scotia. One of the main ones is the Bluenose. It is not just going to be just native crafts; it is going to be all handicrafts that are native to Nova Scotia.

**SC:** What have been the keys to success for your communities' ability to establish viable businesses?

**LP:** Well the keys to our success are our Economic Development Committee, my band council and most important of all, the support of my people, of what we're doing. They realize what we're trying to do, we're trying to plan for the future of our people. But the problem was, over the years a lot of First Nations never did that and they never planned for the future of their people but the non-Indians did. They planned for what things to leave to their children, their grandchildren, things like this. But we as Native people never did that and we were stagnating by a certain time. We entered into economic development, free enterprise and going for the almighty dollar, same as everybody else. We get a little flack from the municipality governments because they feel that we're taking clientele away from them and billions of dollars out of their pocketbooks, municipality and municipal people. We've always said, "get used to us", we're in the field of economic development, of free enterprise, we're here to stay, we're not going to go away so get used to us, because we're going to be here.

**SC:** And, what are future development plans for the Millbrook First Nation?

**LP:** Well, the next thing we're looking at after this is a mall. We have some interested clients we have to talk to now because we need an anchor store. We have several small businesses I want to locate up there but they don't want to have stand alone buildings, they want to be in the mall. But, construction of the mall is sometime in the future. Not too distant future I

hope. At first before you construct the mall, you have to have potential clients, at least a feasibility study, got to make sure your getting enough money per square footage to pay off what you borrowed and make a small profit at the same time.

**SC:** What does winning the CANDO Economic Developer of the Year Award mean to you and your community?

**LP:** I was very proud to receive the CANDO award, not only for myself, but also for the Millbrook First Nation as a whole and for the other people of the Mi'kmaq Nation. Because, for the simple reason, as it's always been said, you know you can lead by example. That Millbrook started, and then Membertou started, down there in Cape Breton. Now other bands in Cape Breton are kind of looking at what we did and their going forward and doing the same thing we did, leasing land and going in the field of economic development. So, our First Nations are flexing their muscles down here in the Atlantic looking at what Millbrook accomplished, what Membertou accomplished and what other bands in New Brunswick are starting to accomplish now, the Woodstock Band and other bands down here in Nova Scotia are looking very closely at economic development, free enterprise. I think its good, to have some successes, when you do things yourself as Native people. Before we always were told what to do and this is how to do it. And usually most of these projects went belly up. When we're doing it our self now, we're having success, as long as we don't leave any stones overturned before we sign the agreements. Then we're going to make a profit.

**SC:** And one last question. What advice would you have for communities trying to get into economic development?

**LP:** Well, advice that I have for communities trying to get into economic development, they have to have a location, they have to have a very progressive economic development committee, they have to have legal advice, they have to have accountant advice and they usually have to have a feasibility study. They have to look at the population of the area, probably 40 or 50 mile area. The major highways are important, railroads are not so important now, because a lot

of them are shutting down but I mean locality, I think there's more things in economic development when you go forward. One is apply, the other one is market, and the other one is location and the other one is advertising. Very important components of an economic development venture. You have to have that, to promote. You have to let people know what you have.

**SC:** Well, that concludes all of my questions. Thank you Chief Paul.

*End Note:* I spoke with Chief Paul after we completed the interview, and he said something that really struck me. He told me that there is a great sense of accomplishment for those that are involved in these economic development ventures. They were proud that they could not only help their people but that they could also help society in general by creating jobs for everyone. That was what seemed to me, to be the most important aspect of the economic development, the ability to help your people, and the pride in knowing that you were apart of planning for your community's future. For First Nations to succeed in economic development, they need leaders that believe in what their doing, communities that believe in their leaders. Millbrook First Nation is a prime example of a community that believes in its leadership and a leadership that is trying to help their community and plan for its future.

## Summary

Being that the Piikuni community was not as resource rich as some First Nations, they had to try a different approach to economic development. The result was a partnership with Epcor to develop a wind power source. The community has also recently partnered with ATCO to work on a joint dam project to produce hydroelectric power along the Old Man River in Alberta.

Chief Lawrence Paul saw that there was a lot missing in their approach to economic development. When he got involved in politics and economic development it was to help his community and as well share in doing something that would have a lasting impact. The decision to lease their land to try and foster growth has allowed the community to grow and prosper and continue to work towards the goal of self-sufficiency.

Both of these winners have shown what can be achieved when partnerships are formed, the use of the resources of the community when the communities believe in their leadership and they have a strong drive to succeed. The ingenuity of harnessing the wind to generate power and profit is something that must be recognized. Economic development has always been an avenue through which First Nations people can become self-sufficient and work towards being self-reliant. The steps that have been taken by Chief Lawrence Paul and the Millbrook First Nation as well as William Big Bull of Piikuni Wind Power have started moving them towards having economically self-sufficient communities. As well, they have gained the knowledge that they are planning for their communities' future, helping their communities achieve something and as well, leaving their communities a legacy to follow.