

Editors' Introduction

From the perspective of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), the most extensive and expensive commission in Canadian history and the most comprehensive and credible account of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, there is an urgent need to support self-government and community-based initiatives that help the rebuilding of Aboriginal economies:

Self-government without a significant economic base would be an exercise in illusion and futility.... What measures need to be taken to rebuild Aboriginal economies that have been severely disrupted over time, marginalized, and largely stripped of their land and natural resource base? ... Under current conditions and approaches to economic development, we could see little prospect for a better future.... [A]chieving a more self-reliant economic base for Aboriginal communities and nations will require significant, even radical departures from business as usual.¹

In this section, we find that not only are significant and radical departures occurring from business as usual in Aboriginal communities across Canada, but that the trend was taking place well before the Royal Commission made its recommendations in 1996.

In the first piece, Wendy Featherstone documents the value of Aboriginal partnerships in her overview of Northern Resource Trucking (NRT) and the Northern Resource Trucking Limited Partnership (NRTLTP). The NRTLTP was signed in 1994, but was initially a partnership that involved Kitsaki (the economic development arm of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band) and Trimac Transportation. Northern Resource Trucking, which is now 71% Aboriginal and Northern Saskatchewan community-owned, focuses on training and employing Aboriginal peoples in northern Saskatchewan. The success of NRT, Featherstone argues, is based on its competitive approach to business and the importance of realizing profits. NRT's approach, in turn, fuels training and employment and contributes to

community development in meaningful and beneficial ways. The NRTLTP is a partnership model other industries located in or near Aboriginal communities should consider.

Following the NRT piece, Gaye Hanson shares an interview she did with her father, Bill Hanson. In the interview, Mr. Hanson — an honoured “leader and trailblazer of Cree ancestry” — provides his insight, ideas and vision on Aboriginal economic development he gained over decades of work in the field, including 30 years in a leadership position with the Inter-Provincial Association of Native Employment (IANE). Bill is particularly interested in understanding better the differences between members of the Aboriginal community who want to maintain a traditional lifestyle and individuals and organizations that have opted for acculturation into ‘modern-day’ society.

As is the tradition in previous issues of JAED, this section then honours the winners of CANDO’s nationally recognized Economic Developer of the Year awards. In the two back-to-back articles that build on interesting and intimate interviews with the award winners, three authors profile the 2003 and 2004 recipients. In the first piece, Cheryl Cardinal highlights the 2003 winners, including the Membertou Corporate Division, owned by the Membertou First Nation, Nova Scotia (Business Category), and Mark Wedge (Individual Category), a visionary leader who was presented with the Individual Award for the work he did in the Yukon and across Canada as a member of the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Yukon Territories. The Membertou Corporate Division interview was conducted with organizational representative Bernd Christmas. The 2004 winners, profiled by Teresa Callihoo and Sara Cardinal, include Piikuni Wind Power (Business Category), based out of the Piikuni First Nation, Alberta, and Chief Lawrence Paul (Individual Category) of the Millbrook First Nation, Nova Scotia.

The articles in this section show in no uncertain terms that the leaders and community businesses and organizations profiled are involved in anything but ‘business as usual’. While business must be run in effective and profitable ways, and leaders must manage the affairs of their institutions and organizations in a professional and responsible manner, it is clear that innovation and creativity is an important key to the success of Aboriginal partnerships and community ventures that impact the communities and people involved in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the stories reinforce the feeling for many of us involved in Aboriginal economic development that consistency and commitment are necessary requirements if we hope to impact change for the communities in ways that are meaningful, beneficial, and successful.

If you have any stories you would like to share with us about your organization, or a leader, manager or community change agent that is making a significant — even radical — difference in the field of Aboriginal community and economic development, we would like to hear from you!

Note

1. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), *Final Report*. Vol. 2. Part 2. *Restructuring the Relationship* (Ottawa: Minister of Supplies and Services, 1996), p. 775.