

# PARTNERING AMONG ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES *Tribal Councils Investment Group (TCIG)*

>> >> >> << << <<

Wanda Wuttunee

In keeping with the goal of sustainability, the First Nations of Manitoba identified a need for an investment vehicle that would allow them to participate in economic initiatives on a larger project-level than could be achieved by individual communities. By working together, they could access the capital necessary to build a capital pool that would then be available for further investment. The profits return to communities for use in whatever way they choose. The vehicle formed to meet these goals is Tribal Councils Investment Group (TCIG).

TCIG is an Aboriginal partnership, unlike any in Canada. Manitoba's seven tribal councils came together in 1990 to form a partnership designed to invest in major projects that were beyond their individual capacities. With a minimal capital investment of \$25,000, several lucrative investments in companies are earning revenue and generating profits. More than \$1.5 million in profits or 100% return on their equity has been distributed to the 55 Aboriginal communities annually, for a total of 92,000 First Nations shareholders. Other investments are being considered and have increased TCIG's balance sheet to between \$25 to \$40 million.

## **A Timely Partnership**

This partnership is noteworthy on a number of fronts. It represents a partnering of seven tribal councils that is without historical precedence. For many years, issues of survival have overwhelmed Aboriginal leaders. For most communities, these issues are still pressing but some breathing space has allowed them to contemplate the means of moving away from dependence on government funding.

TCIG Board Chair, Philip Dorion, has been with TCIG since its inception. He recalls its creation:

Some of us were working together and we were looking to purchase a restaurant. We had made several overtures to people but somehow the deal fell through. Another project came our way while we were talking about the concept of TCIG so we were forced to incorporate TCIG quickly. The project we were considering had employment potential for our people, and at that time, some chiefs supported the idea of TCIG.

We wanted to be in the position to look at opportunities presented by Winnipeg or the province that would make

things better for our people. It might be through employment opportunities or owning a hotel for them to stay when they come into Winnipeg.

Indian Affairs and the tribal councils financed the operations and office setup. We said that we would be self-sufficient in three years. Each tribal council put in an initial amount for investment capital. In the first few years, we didn't pay dividends to the tribal councils. While we are still a long way from the hotel and other kinds of services that we initially talked about, our first investment allowed us to pay our shareholders each year since then.

Meaningful participation in the local economy was part of the drive behind TCIG. The board consists of one member from each tribal council who is appointed by the Tribal Council chief each year and TCIG's President and Chief Executive Officer. Marvin Tiller, holds the position of President and Chief Executive Officer for TCIG and Allan McLeod, is Vice President and assistant to the President and Chief Executive Officer.

The mandate of TCIG is to have long-term involvement in the mainstream economy by becoming a significant member of the investment community. Employment opportunities, transferring technology to shareholders for economic development, earning a reasonable rate of return and creating a capital pool are prioritized in company literature (Tribal Councils Investment Group of Manitoba Ltd, 1997, p. 4). TCIG has been successful in accomplishing many of these elements in its mandate.

As Phil explains, TCIG avoids competing for projects with communities or tribal councils.

When a project comes forward for consideration by the board, then those who have the cash and interest in the project, will invest. Sometimes they can all afford it, sometimes they cannot. Our original concept was that if we identified an investment opportunity then the First Nations located next to the project would have the opportunity to take on the project with our help and advice. That First Nations could decide to refer the project to the tribal council, then the tribal council might decide to develop it or pass it to TCIG because it is too big.

Marv continues:

We don't want to interfere with critical opportunities for community development.

TCIG focuses on the larger opportunities and recognizes that all community members need to contribute to their own economies.

TCIG has a set of investment criteria and philosophy that has allowed them to take roles at the local, regional and national level (p. 10). In particular:

- TCIG does not compete with First Nations communities, economic development groups, or Tribal Councils.
- Our policy is to only get involved in projects beyond the capacity of an individual group.
- When projects of a local or regional nature come to our attention, we automatically forward the information to the appropriate group.
- The local group may pursue the interest solo, request us to partner with them, request our advice on the project, or pass on the opportunity.
- TCIG also accommodates independent bands and private investors in its investment activities.

In inviting Marv to assume the position of President and CEO, the board knew that he would open the door to mainstream business for TCIG. His background as President and CEO of The North West Company and Vice-President and General Manager of Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Stores meant the cultivation of extensive business contacts in Manitoba and Canada. He is comfortable and familiar with the world of high finance and managing large investment projects. He is conservative in his approach to investments and absolutely committed to success for TCIG's shareholders.

Marv states:

My sensitivity to the issues of First Nations comes from spending many years in every First Nations community in the country. I watched and became very interested. The first time I was approached for this position, I said no, but when I listened to what they were actually trying to do, I thought that this is really interesting.

First Nations communities are getting involved in the economy and generating some wealth through TCIG. This is the ultimate push to self government or at least to a decent standard of living and a decent level of participation in the community by generating wealth.

In 1993, TCIG approached the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) in order to locate an Aboriginal person to bring into the company. The goal was to have Marv train someone who eventually take over as President. Allan McLeod, a member of Cross Lake First Nations, was a third year medical student at the University of Manitoba. He had begun to examine his attraction to medicine and had found it wanting. Allan was more interested in business so he approached CCAB for the possibility of working with an businessperson. Allan was paired with TCIG and worked his way from Project Manager to Vice President in a matter of six years.

Allan brings an understanding of how the Aboriginal community works. He is able to provide insight into board process that is not immediately clear to Marv. They are a strong team with each bringing unique and complementary strengths. Allan notes:

It is critical to get started with your first investment and to begin building credibility. I think the original board have to be commended for going out into industry and finding a senior executive like Marv. He has a tremendous track record over a number of years in the business. It is his business experience and contacts that enabled us to close the Pepsi deal.

In addition, each brings contacts from board memberships to bear on TCIG's business whenever possible. Most major Manitoba deals that are in the making will come across Marv's or Allan's desk. They are both accepted members of the business community. Their process of screening deals and putting them together is discussed in the next section. Their two major investments in the fields of manufacturing and distribution, and healthcare are also examined.

### **Investment Process and Current Investments**

Under their leadership, TCIG has earned an excellent rate of return for its shareholders and paid the tribal council teams a management fee for all their extra services. TCIG was listed in the top 100 Manitoba companies in 1997 and 1998. Its rate of return is important but TCIG is also linked strongly to the concerns of the shareholders. Job opportunities are important but they also hope to give significant amounts of money

to each tribal council for the benefit of their communities beyond their government funding.

TCIG takes a cautious and conservative approach to investments which tend to be in the services sector. These include food and beverages, transportation, data processing, health care, and financial services. Joint ventures are considered with knowledgeable partners in projects that TCIG can assume a significant ownership position including board membership. Board influence allows TCIG a way of impacting policy, strategy, plans and outcomes (p. 11) in these investments.

TCIG stays away from higher risk start-ups, turnarounds, and bankruptcies. It uses the resources necessary to hire experts in its due diligence process in assessing the risk and return of potential investments. The result has been a number of investments. It is important to understand one surprise TCIG has learned. Marv comments, "There is no amount of money that is too small to pull together at the outset and do something significant with it. We learned we just have to develop a spirit of doing the project right and then leveraging it."

In the early years, the decision was made to be a founding shareholder in Spaceport Canada. This project is to develop the world's first international, commercial, polar rocket launch site at Churchill, Manitoba (p 18). It has potential but is presently on hold.

In 1991, Arctic Beverages, a soft drink bottling plant, was purchased from a family with a small distribution network in Manitoba and a short distance into Saskatchewan. It was a small, 50-year-old company with potential. Marv recalls:

We were attracted to Arctic Beverages because it was a going concern with a history of profit and an opportunity for growth. It was not just distributing soft drinks but it was distributing juice, water and other similar products. It was the kind of a company that would generate a cash flow that would allow us to meet our objective of financial independence.

Pepsi Cola had to agree to the transfer of the franchise. Their reaction was long and deep and hard. "Why would we sell a Pepsi Cola franchise to a bunch of Indians from Manitoba?" Well, we put together a pretty impressive business plan and we formed an alliance with the President of the Pepsi Cola franchise on the west coast. It was approved here and

in New York. Today they are very proud of this franchise since it is the only Aboriginal-owned franchise world wide.

Since then TCIG has expanded its distribution territory east into Ontario, west to the Alberta border and north throughout the territories. It distributes its product out of its Flin Flon plant to outlets in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and to three outlets in Manitoba. In 1995, it was nominated for the International Pepsi Bottling Company of the Year Award and placed second overall in Canada and fourth overall in North America (p. 15). It was awarded the fastest growing Pepsi franchise in North America in 1998. This is a noteworthy accomplishment given that less than 20% of the Canadian population is located north of 60°.

Marv describes the active role that the board takes in promoting Arctic Beverages products:

The board was instrumental in the success of Arctic Beverages through what we call the 'tribal council team.' They spend all kinds of time promoting the products and preaching the gospel of ownership at every powwow, Indian days, golf tournament and hockey game. They do great work.

In 1997, First Canadian Health Management Corporation was formed in partnership with Aetna Health, a subsidiary of a billion dollar multi-national company. It successfully bid on a government contract to administer the non-insured health benefits program for Canadian Aboriginal people. It is a five-year contract with annual claims of \$250 million per year. It employs 80 people with many who are Aboriginal. One third employment of Aboriginal people is a contractual obligation that they are pleased to meet and exceed. The contract fell under The Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business (PSAB) and is administered by the federal government to encourage more Aboriginal businesses in successfully contracting with the federal government to supply 3% of its \$14 billion goods and services.

### **Nailing Down the Challenges and Reasons for Success**

Inder Roopra, TCIG board member and Southeast Tribal Council's Director of Finance, is pleased with TCIG's performance. He sees it as the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to get involved in big projects. That is the next

logical step after their years of experience with small projects. There was initial trepidation on the part of community members when the idea of TCIG was first proposed:

People were nervous about getting into business, when we talked about it at the community and board levels. Some predicted that it was not going to be successful. Mainly they were afraid of something new. They said that the number of Aboriginal people is too small and we really can't compete in these businesses. My reply was that you don't have to have big numbers but you have to think big. I use the Jewish people as an example of people who have been very successful in this country mainly because they think big. Aboriginal people can be successful on the same basis.

Southeast Tribal Council has been very supportive of TCIG. Generally, however I believe that Aboriginal people are their own worst enemies. One of the biggest problems is jealousy. People do not accept other successful Aboriginal people. Now that TCIG is successfully paying dividends to shareholders through some investments, we have to balance the need to continue growing, with those who want a quick return or to pay dividends before the business is viable.

This is an on-going educational process. Currently, TCIG's board consists of two or three directors who are chiefs, and others who are economic development officers, and those with finance backgrounds. It gives a good balance but there is some turnover about every two years. This requires that new board members be educated. There is always the pressure from the politicians for more dividends to the shareholders until they understand that a good business needs to grow five or ten years before paying dividends. In about a year's time most of TCIG's debt will be repaid and that money can be used to invest in other projects in Manitoba.

TCIG has a number of criteria for making investment decisions that balance financial with community needs. According to Inder:

When we bought Pepsi, it was a business decision that made economic sense. The numbers looked good. With the insurance company, it helped to be Aboriginal mainly because we had no experience in insurance but we took a partner, Aetna Insurance. It is a deal that really focusses

on Aboriginal people but it was a business decision.

It is important that community members understand TCIG and its investments. This is a task undertaken by each of the tribal councils. Some, like Southeast, issue annual reports that include a description of TCIG's activities. Inder notes that this is still a challenge since people do not always read the literature nor understand its impact. In any event, Southeast Tribal Council encourages their members to purchase Pepsi and support the ownership even though there are no direct benefits in those communities that are outside their Pepsi distribution territory.

Joe Malcolm, Executive Director of SE Tribal Council, recalls:

When TCIG was formed I was a firm believer in the philosophy behind TCIG. I believe in what the people are trying to do. We are helping our own First Nations in the province get into business partnerships with non-Aboriginal people. That is the way to go. I think it is time that we as Aboriginal people take over and I am a firm believer in TCIG as a good vehicle for very, very successful investments.

Partnerships work very well for TCIG. They had no experience with insurance until they became involved with their partner. It is through partnerships that they are able to bring in the expertise that they lack.

Marv sets out what needs to be in place for successful partnerships:

A proper partner is one that you have checked out and trust. TCIG is always a serious partner who participates on the board of directors. Other partnerships are necessary to get things done. You need to recognize financial banks as capital partners, and you need municipal, provincial, and federal government partners. You have to get these people working to your advantage on lucrative opportunities.

In Marv's opinion, people from all walks of life believe that now is the time to form partnerships with Aboriginal people, to push the Aboriginal situation towards making a positive contribution to the economy. Allan agrees and notes how important the process of building relationships is for their business.

We identify groups that are successful and its not always money. We've done deals where they have had the same attitude

and motivation as us. That is critical. We've had groups with \$100 million on their balance sheet with land claims money and all kinds of great things. These groups will have someone in charge who is suspicious in nature and not very friendly. In terms of our due diligence and looking at partners, we don't care about their money if they have this baggage and don't have the ability to trust. We say 'no deal.'

The process is meeting, greeting, interviewing and it is all a matter of trust and relationships. If we're comfortable with them then we can do deals. We can now do deals in all of Saskatchewan because there are couple of key guys there who we share the same beliefs and values.

Minimizing politics in the operations of the board has contributed to TCIG's success. Phil recalls that chiefs who came to early TCIG meetings became bored with the mundane business discussions and they are now comfortable leaving it in the hands of TCIG's board. There are some chiefs now on the board and their immediate concerns that are influenced by their short terms in office must be balanced with the long term objectives of TCIG, so that everyone is satisfied. The Tribal Council boards are made up of chiefs who appoint the TCIG board member. They tend to appoint people who have some business experience and often these are the executive directors of the tribal councils.

Balancing competing interests is not easy. Marv describes how they stay on track:

We talk regularly about balancing interests but you always have to work on it. In fact, a year ago there was a bit of stuff going on and people were getting a little bit off the track. A board member suggested a retreat for all the board members and other invited guests. We did that in an effort to validate the direction of what we are doing and what we are not doing. We wanted to identify changes or modifications.

It started out pretty tense but it was almost a love-in at the end of the second day. One senior person who was not on the board said that this is not an organization for politicians. Let the politicians operate in the political venues and keep the business here. We have gone a certain distance and it would be a shame to stop. A lot of the politicians recognize that as well. They tell us that TCIG is their company and we are doing a very good job of

managing it. Let us know when you need political help and our support.

The Chairman of the Board has good relationships with directors and TCIG president. He is comfortable in his role and often is able to deal with directors directly to sort out any problems.

TCIG adheres to high standards of best business practices which makes it easier to support. According to Marv:

The best practices in business are followed by many companies and we have to keep those same best practices. Due diligence on potential investments is important. It is important to go in with an open mind, without preconceived ideas and no political agenda. We let the financial analysis evolve and take us where it takes us. If it is a bad deal then we say it. 'No deal' is better than a bad deal.

Accountability to our board and shareholders is critical. It is part of good government so it shows in many ways. We are very fussy about accounting and having proper rules and regulations for spending and harvesting of our shareholders' money. It is important for the peace of mind of the shareholders and the survival of any company. These rules maximize good government and minimize conflicts of interest.

Other rules help. We have not had any problems of nepotism because our board is so committed to best practices. We try to find the best people for our operation. They have got to meet the standards and do the job. If you cannot meet standards then you should not be here or you should get yourself prepared so you can.

Another example is how we handle cheques. We report to the board on all the cheques that are written. Our vice-chairman co-signs all cheques. Twice a month we list the cheques for him that we propose writing and get his okay. He says no when he is uncomfortable so it is a protection issue. All of this activity is reported to the Board once a month.

The leadership provides direction and things have really worked out in that sense. They have taken a long term perspective to their investments. Marv likens it to a goose that lays golden eggs:

It kicks out a golden egg every year. Some might want to kill the goose now and dig out the last seven eggs. We urge everyone

to consider what will happen if we just nurture the goose and let it grow its family. Soon we will have 100 golden geese giving an egg each per year which is a lot better than just seven now. So our vision is very long term for TCIG but we have to keep this perspective in the minds of community members and new people who are unfamiliar with our goals.

This long term vision applies to employment of Aboriginal people in key TCIG positions. It takes time for educated people to acquire the expertise and industry experience that is required in the managerial positions. The foundation is being laid right now and more opportunities are becoming available to build a pool of talent. This talent will be ready to assume leadership roles in the future.

Protecting the credibility of TCIG's name with the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities is critical to their on-going success. They do not want to be viewed as another Aboriginal company that failed. Marv and Allan protect TCIG's credibility and integrity with great dedication and view it as essential to being in business for the long term. Another significant plan for TCIG is the plan for Allan to take up the presidency. This is an incredible opportunity on a personal level but also an extraordinary signal to other young Aboriginal people. Allan is breaking trail for the next generation of Aboriginal businesspeople. It has been planned for and his grooming is underway.

### Grooming the Next Generation

Allan is cognizant of his value as a role model to Aboriginal youth. He carries an Aboriginal Youth Achievement award with pride. He takes the learning required for the position that he is being groomed for in stride. He wants the best for his family and his community and is willing to put in long hours apprenticing with Marv. It has been an outstanding experience for which Allan is grateful. He points to the same tools to overcome obstacles in his personal life as standing him in good stead while he takes on the challenges of TCIG.

Allan spent his early years in Cross Lake, Manitoba where he travelled to school by boat. His family moved to Winnipeg when he was young where he ended up being the only Aboriginal student. This did not bother him as he was proud of his Aboriginal heritage. He excelled

in sports and was elected class president each year. In his senior years, he began to lose a grip on that pride. He looked to name brand jeans and sunglasses for validation as a worthy person and to make him feel better inside. He endured this shaken identity until he was invited to attend several workshops. Allan describes the experience:

I had a real awakening when I was 18 years old. I took a program called Discovering The Power Within and another called Flying On Your Own. What I picked up was that it doesn't matter what happens out there, if I change me and how I interpret the world then I can still be happy. That has been the most valuable lesson I have received to date. I'm comfortable in new situations in the business world and have been successful because I have that tool.

These programs came out of Alkali Lake, BC where they had a 95% alcoholism rate and moved to a 95% sobriety rate within 10 years. I also learned about maintenance. If you have a lawn during summertime and it is full of dandelions, the program taught us those dandelions represent issues. The program was like a lawnmower that cuts everything down and makes it look nice. In a week the dandelions are back with the nice hot weather so it's a constant process of always and going back there. I credit that for being able to see, feel and touch what it is like to live with a lawn without dandelions.

The next step in my growth was to examine the root cause of all of these issues. I had to pull the roots out of the dandelions so that they don't grow back. If one or two grow back, it doesn't take much energy to go and pick them out. I got rid of the baggage that would lead to failure.

With this training, Allan was able to accept the internship offer with TCIG. He has a lot to learn but he is very comfortable in his position after eight years. When he first accepted the internship offer it was to be for three to six months. He believes that he will continue to learn for several more years before taking on the position as president. He recalls his first six months when he was almost ready to pack it in:

My first six months were rough. We were moving to the Commodity Exchange Tower and I didn't know where it was. I walked in and the gold elevator doors

closed. At some point during that first six months I said I don't belong here and I began to question whether I should stay. What really helped was a conference I went to in Toronto with my mentor, Marv.

When I saw Bay Street, the wealth and the Royal Bank building with real gold in the windows, I thought that this is where you make big money. It was a turning point that helped me, when I came back to Winnipeg. I thought this is nothing but bush league. This helped me get over the gold doors. I now knew that there was something bigger and better out there. This is really just a stepping stone and something I could handle.

Another important aspect of his life that gives Allan strength is his culture. After the Alkali Lake training, he began to reclaim his culture. He participated in sweatlodge ceremonies where he received the spiritual training he had as he was growing up but which he had dismissed and that had made him feel ashamed. Allan recalls:

It wasn't okay until I was okay with myself and I was okay in being Aboriginal and understanding more clearly what our culture has to offer. I have my Indian name now and I was presented with a pipe before I was married five years ago. There was a feather on the top of the stem.

After my Alkali Lake training I would always talk about the feather. There is one path down the middle and there are these side paths. I shared what I learned—there are many paths to get off the right road. Others told me that there are many short ones and you can easily get back on the right track and they are all interconnected. They have been great teachings for me. It was truly amazing that the pipe I was presented with had that feather.

What my culture has really done is that it has allowed me to be comfortable with who I am and what it means in the real world, what the teachings have to offer. I have been able to use them in the business world. I respect people and it may be 'a dog eat dog world' but if you carry yourself with dignity and respect and you can treat others like that then they in turn will treat you that way. It has really allowed me to be totally comfortable with who I am, have a clear mind and know what I have to do for my family in the other world of business, is to bring balance and harmony.

In contemplating his message to Aboriginal youth, Allan wishes he would have earned his Masters in Business Administration early on in his education career in conjunction with his personal healing. His personal healing gives him his emotional intelligence — attitude and positive motivation. He also likes to share the following story with young people at every opportunity.

Somewhere along the lines, I don't know when it happened but I started having these limiting beliefs. I can't do this, natives can't do that, I could never make money, money is evil — all kinds limiting beliefs. Out of my Alkali Lake training they said Allan, just remember your community is like this bucket of crabs and what you've learned here is that you're in this bucket and you're going to try to get out. One will climb on another and get his hook over the edge attempting to pull himself out and another will come and grab him by the tail and pull him back in. You'll never get out and remember that is how your communities are. I believed that for awhile.

A non-Aboriginal person told me another more appropriate story to what's really going on with our communities. He said do you know how to train these little fleas to stay in that coffee cup? These things can jump many hundreds of times their body length, from here to the wall or ceiling. Tons of potential. For us to jump one or two body lengths you have to have big legs. You can train these fleas to stay in a cup. You gather them up and put them in the cup and cover them up. What you'll hear is the rat tat tat tat and that's them jumping. It hurts because every time they jump they hit their heads and they fall down. After awhile they will settle down and they will start walking around the bottom again. You get them all excited by shaking them up. Rat tat tat and you go through this process for a period time until when you shake them up, you won't hear anything.

At that point they are trained. They are smart and know that if they jump too high they hit their head, they hurt and they fall down. Now they only jump to the rim. It is comfortable there, no pain. Now you can take the lid off and try to let them go. They won't leave. They have taken the physical barrier and internalized into a limiting belief. No one else can see it or understand it. Then you get a flea who has broken this belief but the

other ones still won't come along. That's a good analogy for what's happened to us as Aboriginal people.

We're this cup of fleas and we say — if only we had more schools, money, or jobs it would be better. It reminds me of my own experience of if only the outside world was different then I would be better. It's not until we can get past our own limiting beliefs and say it doesn't matter, what is important is that I feel great about myself and reclaim my personal power and abilities to start jumping out of the cup and using the potential we all have. I've been able to go into the past and see who I am and clear out all the root causes of all of these issues.

Now I am out here where there are tons of opportunities for kids.

### The Future

The future is bright for TCIG. A partnership with Saskatchewan and Yukon Aboriginal groups recently marked a new page in building partnerships with other Aboriginal Groups. TCIG took a leadership role in forming Rupertsland Holdings Inc. a consortium of western-based Aboriginal groups. They purchased 450,000 units in The North West Company, a northern-based retail operation. This purchase makes them one of the largest shareholders in a company that has done business with Aboriginal people for hundreds of years. Keith Martell, Chairman of Rupertsland Holdings, notes in the Winnipeg Free Press (July 15, 2000):

First and foremost this a good investment.... The company has a long history of good earnings, good dividend yields and its stores are an integral part of many first nations communities. This investment also represents the next step in aboriginal self-determination.... This represents some control of our economic future. We'll now have something to say about where it's going.

Partnerships with other Aboriginal groups will breed opportunities to share the wealth and expertise and ensuing benefits for Aboriginal peoples.

Allan is optimistic about all the opportunities to partner with people as he meets more people interested in doing business.

I have a running joke that our guys have a lot of bullet holes in their shoes because they shoot themselves in the foot and the



deal falls apart. I don't mean it in a derogatory sense but it is just my interpretation of what goes on. We tend to fight over the profit before we nurture the business and allow it to grow and build.

I would rather have a percentage of a growing, healthy business than 100% of a negative, no-win deal type of company. The more people we get in senior positions where we can trust them, who are confident in who they are and what they can do, then the possibilities are limitless.

TCIG promises to be a source of income beyond what the government gives to Aboriginal communities. Taxation issues will be addressed in the future. TCIG's profits directly benefit Aboriginal people, so it should be exempt from taxation in the same ways that municipalities, provinces, and crown corporations are exempt. In any event, Inder predicts that TCIG will be 10 times bigger in 10 years, owning services such as airlines, hotels, and health services: "Someone with a prescription in a remote northern community might call TCIG who would deliver it from our pharmacy on our airlines."

In conclusion, TCIG is an outstanding example of an Aboriginal-owned company making a difference in the mainstream economy. It operates with a clear vision that is shared by its board of directors who represent approximately 75% of Aboriginal people in Manitoba. The philosophy is driven by business and shareholder objectives. It balances political pressures with "best practices" business principles. Dividends from their activities flow to the communities and ensure their needs are met including their own Aboriginal cultural goals.

The management team utilizes its expertise to capitalize on opportunities in the mainstream

economy and within Aboriginal communities. Marv's connection to the non-Aboriginal business world and his expertise balances Allan's insight into the Aboriginal community. The mentorship aspect of their relationship is building a solid foundation for TCIG's continued success. Bringing young leaders into a position of readiness characterizes the strategies of many successful businesses, but there are not as many examples as there could be in Aboriginal communities and organizations.

TCIG's attitude is to act in respect, with integrity, and to build credibility as reliable business partners. Marv enjoys developing relationships with new people and working in a company with steady positive growth. Allan is thrilled to watch an Aboriginal company's fast growth and the opportunity to work with top business leaders. He is taking an active role in decisions that will impact future generations of Aboriginal children.

Current investments are providing solid cash flows and employment opportunities. They are also facilitating the health needs of First Nations people. TCIG is reaching out to Aboriginal groups and forging new partnerships which will benefit Aboriginal people beyond Manitoba. The future is radiant for TCIG and the Manitoba First Nations community is enriched in many ways by their existence.

#### REFERENCES

- Cash, M. 2000 "Best customers are owners now: Aboriginal consortium buys piece of North West Company." *Winnipeg Free Press* (July 15) B1.
- Tribal Councils Investment Group of Manitoba Ltd.* 1997. Annual report. Winnipeg, Manitoba.