

THE CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD

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Jason Gariepy

The CANDO Economic Developer of the Year Award was created to recognize outstanding achievement and to increase awareness of successful Aboriginal economic development initiatives. Each year, CANDO seeks nominations for the Economic Developer of the Year. From the nominations it receives, a committee selects four economic development initiatives to be recognized at the CANDO National Conference. From the four award winners, conference delegates vote to select the Economic Developer of the Year. The following is a description of the four recognition award winners and the Economic Developer of the Year Award winner. To nominate an individual or organization for the Economic Developer of the Year Award, call CANDO at 1-800-463-9300 or download the form at www.edo.ca.

The Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission

The Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission was voted by delegates attending the 1999 CANDO National Conference in Halifax as the Economic Developer of the Year. The Eskasoni reserve, situated on the Bras d'Ors lake, is home to more than 4,000 Aboriginal people. Situated on the Eskasoni reserve in Nova Scotia, the Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission houses a group of fish and wildlife conservationists, con-

ducting environmental studies, conservation and animal studies.

When Georgia Pacific Canada Limited, a gypsum mining company, approached Eskasoni's Fish and Wildlife Commission for consultation on environmental issues, the five Cape Breton chiefs sat down with them to discuss the protection of sacred sites and environmentally safe procedures. According to Charles Dennis, executive director of Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission, "Georgia Pacific already has three gypsum mines in Nova Scotia. They were planning to

start up a third mine. This is the first time that they have ever asked us Aboriginal people for their input, so we were glad that they approached us and that we were able to consult with them on environmental issues.” The Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission recommended where the mine should be, and changes in the location of the mine to ensure that the habitat around the area was respected and protected. “We wanted to make sure that the area the habitat was protected,” says Dennis.

The chiefs went on to sign an agreement with Georgia Pacific, which gave them the right of contract work and a clause that included royalties for the resources that were mined in the area. Out of the Georgia Pacific royalty agreement, Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission will create an institute known as the Unamaki Institute of Natural Resources, which will be the first Aboriginal marine and research and development laboratory. The laboratory has the potential to generate more resources and economic opportunities for the Aboriginal people in the area while also working towards greater environmental protection for the region.

Tribal Councils Investment Group

Pooling investment to give shareholders access to projects that were once beyond their individual reach is the premise behind Tribal Councils Investment Group. The company represents seven tribal councils, 55 bands and more than 92,000 shareholders over a wide geographical area.

Tribal Councils Investment Group has been operating since 1990. Its head office is located on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, and its head operating office is in Winnipeg. The organization was the result of a vision of seven tribal councils to get involved on projects that were beyond the capacity of their individual bands.

Although Tribal Councils Investment Groups looks for high return on investment and have already been able to pay out a considerable sum to their investors, Tribal Councils is not pre-occupied with immediate gain. Harold Harper, board vice-chairman for Tribal Councils Investment Group, says, “The reason we’re doing this is not just for you and your children, but for your children’s children.” Their end goal is to create a sizable and sustainable economic pool that will generate enough self-sufficiency for years to come. In their advertising, Tribal Coun-

cil believes in “taking Aboriginal ownership to new levels with each new investment, providing a secure financial future for Aboriginal investors and people.”

The Arctic Beverage account is an example of their ability to do this. Originally, the group had to overcome a number of obstacles in purchasing the company, most notably, securing hefty financing and to convince Pepsi Co. to award them a franchise agreement. “When we first started out, we had to convince everyone of our credibility,” says Alan McLeod, company vice-president. After convincing Pepsi to award them a franchise agreement and receiving the necessary financing, Tribal Council purchased the Arctic Beverage company. Since their purchase of the Arctic Beverage, they have expanded the market territory for Pepsi products, and been recognized by their peers by winning the Canadian Bottler of the Year Award and first runner-up for the North American Bottler of the Year. Tribal Councils Investment Group shows the economic capacity of Aboriginal peoples when they pool their financial and human resources.

The Council of Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach

The Council of Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach is located on the border of Quebec and Labrador. The First Nation established a company called Naskap Imuun Inc, to market databases for managing housing programs in First Nation communities. There are 106 Naskapi houses that are tracked with the program, with another seven under construction. The software program was developed with support from a software company in Montreal. The first and only software of its kind, the program is capable of issuing confidential statements of accounts to tenants and keeping track of indebtedness. It also collects and tracks requests for home repairs, records cost estimates, issues invoices and purchase orders, tracks inventory, and manages an annual housing budget.

Before the software package, most of housing management work was completed manually and it would take staff members at least a day for the accounting department to report to the housing department and vice versa. But now with the software program, housing management reports can be printed within seconds.

The product has applications for use in other parts of the country. It’s geared for First

Nations' use and is actively being marketed with sales to communities in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia. The product has been displayed at conferences and demonstrated successfully to potential clients. Ideally, the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach would like to expand the software program to handle housing construction equipment and supplies. This would allow for a greater streamline of housing construction on the First Nation community.

Six Nations Economic Development

Six Nations territory is spread over 45,000 acres, or approximately 10 square miles in southern Ontario. More than 19,000 people hold band membership, and 9,600 live on reserve, the hub of which is the village of Ohsweken. As a result, economic development initiatives undertaken in the community have the power to affect many lives. Six Nations Economic Development has been in operation for approximately seven years. Its vision is "to promote and enhance the community's desire for further development of the new economy through business development activity," and its purpose is to establish "programs, objectives, goals, outcomes and results that reflect the progress, structure and character of the community."

One of the projects developed for the benefit of the Six Nations and surrounding area is the Oneida Enterprise Park. The Oneida Enterprise Park is being developed as an industrial park within Six Nations of the Grand River terri-

tory. The initiative takes advantage of the fact that the community is in an ideal industrial location, close to both the Toronto and United States markets.

As the park is located on a reserve, it can offer tax exemption advantages. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses are welcome to build partnerships with the members of the community in order to take advantage of tax benefits.

Oneida Park is unusual in a number of ways. First, it is being developed with the contours of Mother Nature in mind. Unlike most industrial developments, where land is clear-cut and flattened out, this one will attempt to conform to the shape of the land, rather than the other way around.

Available lots vary in size and elevation. The development, which is nearly complete, will prove that industry and nature can co-exist, without spoiling the beauty of the original area. To maintain the healthy surroundings, there will be limitations on the kind of businesses operating in the park. Six Nations Economic Development is advertising for "clean, environmentally friendly manufacturing warehousing businesses and light industries." Another special feature of the project is that it is already providing benefits to the Six Nations community economically, as 81 per cent of park development is being contracted out to community members. When it is completed, Six Nations Economic Development will manage the project on the reserve, where an administration is already in place.