

# CANDO 2009 ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS

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## **RECOGNIZE! CELEBRATE! HONOUR!**

Sharing our stories and celebrating our successes will ensure that economic development initiatives continue to grow. In 1995, the CANDO Economic Developer of the Year Award was created to recognize and promote recent or long-standing Aboriginal economic development initiatives throughout Canada. All winners past and present share a common desire to bring their communities forward as each pursues a vision of sustainable economic self sufficiency. Though the paths that each took have been different, all have lead to success. As a former EDO of a small First Nation community I can personally attest to the challenges faced by First Nation communities as they struggle to utilize their strengths to maximize opportunity. Navigating the business world of today with dwindling government resources makes this no easy task!

Three outstanding examples of Aboriginal economic development were awarded for their hard work over the past year. Delegates at the 2009 National Conference celebrated, recognized and honoured winners in three categories: Individual EDO, Community & Aboriginal Private Sector Business. The following are the Economic Developer Award Winners for 2009.

### **GESPE'GEWAQ MI'GMAQ RESOURCE COUNCIL ABORIGINAL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESS AWARD**

**Anita Boyle:** Mark, can you tell us about yourself and share some of your experiences?

**Mark Sark:** My name is Mark Joseph Sark. I am a Mi'gmaq from the community of Gespgapegiag. However, I call all of Mi'gma'gi my home. I am 46 years old, a father of two children (Pasmay and Shaya), and a U.S. veteran having served both with the U.S. Army and the United States Marine Corps. I am also a businessman and strong advocate for Aboriginal and Inherent Treaty Rights.

I have a wide range of life experiences from being a trade's person, a hunter, fishermen, entrepreneur, gas station attendant, short order cook, stock investor, consultant, former band manager and now a CEO of the best natural resource and environmental organization in eastern Canada. I have worked for many different First Nation communities in Atlantic Canada in various capacities. All of my experiences have allowed me to actively participate in my current field of choice.

Looking back, I was lucky to be born during a time when the language and our interaction with the environment played a big role in growing up. We didn't have the distractions like kids have today. We didn't own cell phones, satellite

Mark Sark, Gespe'gewaq Mi'gmaq Resource Council  
 Winner of the Aboriginal Private Sector Business Award (left) and CANDO President Alfred Loon



radio and cable television and the Internet wasn't even invented yet. Despite our lack of technology, I still think our people were much better off. Some of my favourite memories are associated with fishing and hunting and being outdoors. I remember catching my first salmon, and hunting my first moose.

Since returning home and now living and working in Listuguj, I have been able to participate in lots of neat projects and activities where my learning experience relates to life experience and my interactions with Mother Earth. My field of work is deeply intertwined with culture. I was told by an elder many years ago, "We are the land." Mi'gmaq are the original stewards of our traditional territories within Mi'gma'gi. We still have a duty and obligation to protect and use our resources responsibly, which the Creator has given us. Of course this creates differences of opinion when working with government and industry.

I suppose my passions are tangible, which one of the main reasons I love working in the field I do. The great thing about GMRC is that it allows me to further my studies and do

research on the old ways while combining new and innovative ways of doing business. I have the job of a lifetime and I am very thankful to the Creator and my people for giving me the opportunity to serve. Sometimes it's hard to believe that I get paid to do something that I enjoy so much.

**Anita Boyle:** Can you give us a background of your work experience and your business/community history?

**Mark Sark:** Perhaps one of the greatest teachings I received outside of a formal education were my enlistments in the U.S. Armed Forces. The military gave me my foundation and my start in life. I owe them big-time. Starting your own business is not easy. It's a test in patience and perseverance. Only the strong survive. There is not a day that doesn't go by where I don't use what I learned in the service to help me in some way.

My biggest accomplishment in business at least to date has been my work building GMRC. What separates GMRC from others in the business is our unique insight in how we see the

world. It is important to understand that as First Nations our culture, traditions and values differ from that of the westernized world. We see problems associated with changes to the environment, ecosystems, and habitat loss through a different lens. We believe that addressing the problems associated with environmental degradation and natural resource management will require a collaborative approach, if we are to be truly successful in bringing about a new environmental consciousness. Furthermore, we believe that we can all live in balance with Mother Earth if we are prepared to work together.

**Anita Boyle:** Can you provide examples of Aboriginal economic development initiatives you have been apart of and have completed?

**Mark Sark:** I took an Entrepreneurial training course in Sydney, Nova Scotia back in the 1980's. During that time I was hooked with the prospect of working for myself. Upon completion of the course, I was awarded \$5,000 towards opening my very first business. Having been involved with the trades as a bricklayer, I decided to open a construction business. It was a logical step for me at that time.

I wish I could say publicly that my first business was a huge success. In truth, my business failed in its second year. I realize that sometimes it's hard not to personalize our failures. Even though sometimes we fail this should never mean that we are failures. "The only time you're a failure is when you stop trying." Since my first business, I have opened several businesses; each one has been more rewarding and challenging than the previous. I even made some money at it.

**Anita Boyle:** Would you describe any aspects of your enterprise as innovative and groundbreaking?

**Mark Sark:** There is nothing as far as my business goes that I consider innovative and groundbreaking. Most of what I learned has already been done somewhere else. There are lots of great companies in Canada and the United States that concentrate their efforts in the fields of environment and natural resource management. It's a big industry driver right now and an area where more of our people should get actively involved in.

As First Nations our relationship with Mother Earth is well noted. The only thing remotely innovative or unique in what we do at GMRC is to use our heritage and culture to our advantage. Being Aboriginal can be a huge competitive advantage when working with the environment.

**Anita Boyle:** What are your challenges?

**Mark Sark:** The biggest challenge right now is to get our communities to see the big picture. Many of our communities have a mindset based solely on waiting for the government to answer all our problems. Looking to government for answers is not always the brightest thing to do in my opinion.

Communities should have their own house in order as well. If your community doesn't have strong financial health it's difficult to convince industry and banks to lend you the capital required to start various economic development undertakings.

**Anita Boyle:** Can you tell us how your initiatives have effected surrounding communities?

**Mark Sark:** The Gespe'gewaq Mi'gmaq Resource Council (GMRC) is a newly designed environmental agency whose purpose is to work on a multitude of issues within the traditional Mi'gmaq district of Gespe'gewa'gi, the seventh and largest district in the Mi'gmaq nation. Our central focus is in the area of resource and oceans management. The organization is federally incorporated under the government of Canada's "Societies Act." GMRC's head office is located in Listuguj, Quebec.

While the agency is considered an infant in terms of its operational life, it is nevertheless growing quickly. We are working hard in establishing ourselves as a leader in the field of natural resources and environmental management. GMRC is founded on the following core principles: delivery, dependability and superior client service. GMRC has ISO 9001-2008 certification. ISO is an international organization of standardization believed to be the first of its kind for a First Nation environmental organization in Canada.

Currently we have 8 full-time staff members. I am extremely proud that they are all First Nation. So the social and economic impact of

GMRC is clearly visible to those within our native communities. It gives me great personal satisfaction knowing the lives of our people and communities are being impacted positively because of GMRC.

Aside from the social and economic impact that GMRC is having in our native communities, we also get to see the positive affect we are making to the environment. Currently we do a lot of contract work for the federal government.

**Anita Boyle:** Describe the nature of your partnerships and the relationships formed?

**Mark Sark:** GMRC actively pursues partnerships. Our fundamental philosophy is based in large part on the need to work together. We face some very serious and complicated problems with our environment and just how resources are managed in this country. Old ways of doing things simply don't work well. Unless we find new solutions and new ways of doing business we can expect further damage and destruction to Mother Earth.

In building partnerships we look to other organizations, which have similar commonalities' and views regarding the importance of living in balance with nature. Organizations we decide to support must have strong core values and most respect our worldview. Good partnerships are a two-way street based on mutual goals and respect.

In order to assist us in doing our part, organizations and agencies need to come together and engage each other not just in dialog but also in action. This is what GMRC is all about. An agency created specifically to foster innovation, improve social and economic conditions in our communities, advance First Nation stewardship and protect natural and cultural resources.

**Anita Boyle:** Describe your contribution to the field of Aboriginal economic development and the impact on the EDO profession?

**Mark Sark:** My involvement in Aboriginal business started in the mid eighties. A lot has changed since then. I think the best way to promote economic development in our communities is to have real working examples in place so people can see for themselves.

Communities can take a lead role in generating and promoting economic development. We

have some good examples in Atlantic Canada where communities are moving forward their agenda. Membertou and Millbrook First Nations are a few good examples.

**Anita Boyle:** What advice would you provide to Aboriginal youth seeking to start a career in Aboriginal economic development?

**Mark Sark:** I am not a big believer in handing out advice. However, I would say to those interested in getting into business for themselves, "find something you feel passionate about and incorporate those feelings and values into a sound business idea." With some hard work, determination and a little luck the sky can be your only limit. By getting involved with something that you enjoy all those extra hours spent making your business grow will seem effortless.

Don't be afraid to read some books from some of the masters in business. Donald Trump, Warren Buffet, Jim Cramer, Jack Welch, etc. They didn't get to the top of their profession simply by accident. You can learn a great deal from them and pick up some tricks, which will help you in the future. Business, business, business....

Perhaps the most important thing is to have fun! Life is too short to be caught up in something you're not enjoying. Not everyone is cut out in getting into business because it's not your typical 9-5 gig.

But if you're anything like me being in business for yourself is one of the most rewarding things you can do in life.

### **ENOCH CREE NATION (ECN) ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER — COMMUNITY CATEGORY**

Enoch Cree Nation (ECN) has been a leader in the gaming industry of First Nations as well as in Alberta. The Enoch Cree Nation Economic Development's Department mission is to actively seek, promote and secure economic initiatives that will enhance the quality of life for a prosperous First Nation's community.

The Enoch Cree Nation (Enoch) is a Sovereign Government pursuant to Treaty 6, which was signed by Cree leaders in 1876 and 1877, and has traditionally used and occupied lands in

Enoch Cree Nation — Winner of the Community Economic Developer Award  
 (Left to right) Councillors Lorne Morin, Nola Wanuch, Pearl Cardinal, Cody Hodgson,  
 Chief Harry Sharphead and CANDO President Alfred Loon



and around what is known today as the Central Alberta Region.

The Enoch Government is recognized by the Federal Government of Canada under the authority given to Enoch through the Treaty, the Canadian Constitution, and the *Indian Act*. The Enoch Cree Nation today consists of 12,933.5 acres, or 20.21 square miles, located west of Edmonton. The current Enoch population includes 1,776 members, with approximately 1,400 living on the reserve and the remaining members living off (primarily in Edmonton).

Enoch functions as a unique, sovereign social democratic society, governed by the leadership of the Chief and nine councillors elected by secret ballot. Enoch has been assessing and forecasting the future civic needs of the Nation and identifying on-reserve economic opportunities that could potentially fund those civic needs.

Overall, the emphasis has been centred on economic development projects that could potentially generate meaningful job creation and opportunities for advancement of Enoch members. It was determined that economic self-

sufficiency for the Enoch Nation could only come from feasible, market-driven economic activities that attracted the attention and support of the Greater Edmonton market.

The River Cree Resort and Casino destination resort is number one in Alberta: hospitality, food and beverage recreation, entertainment and gaming. Along with the Enoch Cree Nation stores and golf course.

It took seven years to aggressively pursue the River Cree Resort and Casino project with partners — New Buffalo and Paragon Gaming — along with many high profile meetings with the City of Edmonton for Infrastructure purposes.

The project faces many challenges, including the following:

- Other casinos did not want a First Nation in the gaming business. Enoch Cree Nation had to meet with the Minister of Gaming, Ron Stevens, and had to hire political liaisons to help obtain AGLC (Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission) approval for a First Nation Casino in Enoch.

- Ongoing meetings with their partners, Paragon Gaming, to continue their support through the long negotiation process with: AGLC, City of Edmonton, Alberta Chiefs, and INAC, along with other surrounding communities.
- Securing financing and meeting AGLC's 8-step process.
- Structuring a First Nation Gaming board.
- Developing Mechet Charities.
- Preparing the community to develop business plans for meeting future expenditure, to meet our charity needs once the funds started to flow to Enoch Cree Nation.
- Assisting with the development of Host FN Charitable Handbook with AGLC.
- Developing the First Nations Development Fund (FNDF) for all non-host First Nations.

Due to ECN's initiative with First Nations Development Fund, the Alberta non-host First Nations have received in excess of \$185 million, which had contributed to their economic and social needs in their communities. ECN secured partnership with Paragon Gaming, and together sought financing needs, along with meeting many obstacles put forth to develop a successful part-

nership in gaming. ECN fought hard to have what it has today, not only for its people, but for all FN communities. They are now 5 Alberta FN in the gaming business today. ECN has been a key player in the industry and has always shared its struggles and successful business strategy with many.

### **PAULETTE FLAMOND INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER**

Ms. Flamond is a Métis originally from North Battleford, Saskatchewan. Her family tree travels back to the Red River Settlement. Paulette is a graduate of Grant McEwen College and is currently completing her university degree in Psychology. Ms. Flamond is the Executive Director of the Northeast Aboriginal Business and Wellness Centre in Fort St. John and has many years experience as a small business owner/operator. Paulette coordinated the first Petroleum Employment Training Project for the Doig River First Nation and was Chair of *Walk in Balance* the first wellness conference in Northeastern BC in April.

Paulette Flamond, Winner of the Individual Economic Developer Award, and CANDO President Alfred Loon



Paulette currently sits on the board of the Aboriginal Business Service Network and the Fort St. John Métis Society. Since 2003, Paulette has been a driving force of Aboriginal Economic Development in the Fort St. John/Peace River region of BC she is the founding Executive Director of the Northeast Aboriginal Business & Wellness Centre (NEABWC). NEABWC was established with a mandate of providing advisory and support services such as business planning, financial forecasting, community economic development, market research, aftercare and access to business financing.

Paulette Flamond has true entrepreneurial spirit. As an experienced small business owner and operator, she has also worked over 15 years providing economic development value to her community. Paulette projects strong leadership and ethical values. Through her work, she has been successful at increasing capacity among Aboriginal communities; this has resulted in many Aboriginal individuals starting small business ventures in competitive markets. Paulette shares the vision of economic development that is modelled around community values. She has been instrumental in encouraging individual wellness and strong personal values within her community and she has presented wellness initiatives to community members as a way to maintain a balanced lifestyle.

Prior to opening of the Northeast Aboriginal Business and Wellness Centre Society in 2003 there was limited access available to Aboriginal business clients in the BC Northeast. Approximately 60,000 people live in the Northeastern region of BC; more than 7,000 are Aboriginal. Fort St. John is considered the “hub” service area of the region, which has an oil and gas industry that produces an estimated \$1.4 billion per year. Until NEABWC’s opening in 2003 there was limited assistance to help Aboriginal people to enter the local urban economy. Since opening there has been a substantial increase in economic activity for Aboriginal people. In addition to direct business start-ups or expansions, NEABWC has developed the capacity to support other organizations and individuals working in the area of economic development. NEABWC has enhanced the Aboriginal economic environment in the North East region and has increased the number of successful joint ventures and contracting arrangements between the

Aboriginal community and oil and gas companies through Paulette’s leadership and vision.

Paulette considers it a privilege to work with entrepreneurs and to share in the experience of helping them to build or grow their businesses. Her passion towards entrepreneurship is contagious. Her staff work diligently with their clients because they believe that through business development Aboriginal people will become equal partners with industry, government and the private sector.

Paulette thinks of Economic Development as a collective whole and enjoys playing her part in helping to better communities, families and Nations. “It is a necessary tool for the betterment of our people and I am happy to play my part in the “Entrepreneurial Revolution”, taking place in beautiful British Columbia. There is no work like it. I believe that my life’s work is one of service. I do the work because I love witnessing people succeed knowing that, in some way, my support has helped them to achieve their dreams.

Paulette’s work experience and contributions as an advisory resource are summarized as follows:

- Eight years experience in an Aboriginal organization assisting entrepreneurs.
- Fifteen years of management experience
- Established and managed three successful business ventures
- Produced four documentaries highlighting Aboriginal culture and entrepreneurship in the North East region of British Columbia
- Created the first ever wellness conference hosted in 2004 (Walk in Balance) as well as subsequent conferences held in 2007 & 2009 attracting over 700 Aboriginal participants.
- Appointed by Premier Gordon Campbell to the Northern Development Initiative Trust 2007.
- Currently serving 3rd term Native Economic Development Advisory Board.
- Currently serving on the Executive of the Aboriginal Business Service Network Society.

Paulette’s advice to Aboriginal youth seeking a career in Aboriginal economic development is to find their true passion. Also vital is to continue to develop your skills sets, so keep learning and most important love to help others. If you

love what you are doing it is not work but simply pure joy!

Increasing Economic development activities in our communities is challenging but offers many rewards. Successful communities have drawn on the often limited resources available to them and capitalized on the opportunities. Building and nurturing healthy partnerships with government along with joint venturing with the

private sector can often define the level of success that can be achieved. At the same time, communities must be able to sustain the growth they achieve; this is where integrated community and strategic planning are vital. Economic development that is truly successful builds capacity in communities, and puts Aboriginal people to work!