

# 2012 ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS

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***Recognize! Celebrate! Honour!***

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. Although the path of economic development may vary from one Aboriginal community to another, the goal is always the same. That goal is to improve the wealth, prosperity and quality of life for Aboriginal people.

When the Economic Development of the Year Awards was established in 1995, only one award was given to the community who demonstrated excellence in Aboriginal economic development. Throughout the years, it became apparent that there were businesses and individuals

also deserving of recognition for their contributions to the advancement of Aboriginal economic development. That is why today, Cando grants Economic Development of the Year Awards in three separate categories:

1. Aboriginal Private Sector Business
2. Individual EDO
3. Community Category

Three outstanding examples of Aboriginal economic development were awarded for their hard work over the past year. Delegates at the 2012 Cando 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 2012.

**CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF  
THE YEAR AWARD WINNER  
INDIVIDUAL CATEGORY:**

***EILEEN PAUL***

Eileen Paul is a member of the Mi'kmaq community of Membertou. She is a single mother of three and for the past eight years has held the position of manager of the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre. In 2005, Membertou established a unique partnership with the YMCA of Cape Breton to open an Entrepreneur Centre in Membertou. The centre now provides customized business training and support to interested entrepreneurs in the Membertou community. As manager of the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre, Eileen offers a business development program that includes customized training and workshops as well as one-on-one support for new and existing businesses.

Eileen is currently working towards her certification with the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) and has also been certified in Train the Trainer through Cape Breton University. Eileen works together with Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC), Ulnooweg Development Group and other federal, provincial and community economic development agencies to determine how best to provide investment capital and funding to support new business ventures in Membertou.

In keeping up with the needs of her clients, Eileen maintains memberships in several organizations including the Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Network (AAEDN), the Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce, the Canada–Nova Scotia–Mi'kmaq Tripartite Forum, CANDO, E-Spirit Youth Entrepreneur Program and she is also a member of the Membertou Governance Committee. Eileen has represented Aboriginal women in business by participating in the National Status of Women roundtable discussions held in Ottawa. On International Women's Day, Eileen's hard work was recognized when the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre's Aboriginal Women Balance Success Story was selected as one of the feature profiles and was part of Canada's showcase material and information kit at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). The 65th session of the Commission of the Status of Women took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New

York. The session hosted 5,000 delegates from around the world.

**Balance: Aboriginal Women in  
Business**

Eileen is very involved with her community and is committed to helping Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Recognizing the needs of many Aboriginal women, Eileen developed the "Balance: Aboriginal Women in Business" which was the first initiative that focused on Aboriginal women in the business world.

The Balance initiative includes business forums, workshops, business skills certification programs and research. Aimed at developing business skills, creating networks and establishing peer groups, the initiative supports business start-ups and expansion in Atlantic Canada.

In 2008, Eileen began by coordinating a small business forum in Nova Scotia entitled "Balance — Women in Business". The project was deemed so successful that it developed into a larger scale Atlantic-wide initiative in 2009 and 2010. A total of 400 participants took part in the Balance forums over the three-year period.

In 2010, the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre evaluated the impact of the Balance forums on Aboriginal women in business. The evaluation involved 100 participants and 10 focus group sessions were conducted in Aboriginal communities across the Atlantic Provinces. Results from the evaluation demonstrated that over a three-year period forum participants established, expanded and created long-term partnerships for business. Key recommendations included the need for more networking and more business development training.

Eileen now offers a certificate program comprised of seven courses that will prepare participants for establishing their own business. The participants will gain an understanding of all the components that form a proper business plan. When the participant has finalized the courses, they will be prepared to seek financing and/or funding by using the business plan they have developed throughout this program.

**Importance of Women in Business**

For many years Aboriginal women have not been taken seriously or even recognized in the busi-

ness world. There was no support or programs geared towards Aboriginal women. Taking this into consideration it was imperative to see that this initiative move forward. To create a conference focusing on Aboriginal women, Eileen needed to ensure the funding agencies understood the importance and dedication of this initiative.

One of the major challenges that Eileen had faced throughout the development of her initiatives was securing financial support from different entities. However, building strong and trustworthy relationships with partners is key to success. Accountability is an important aspect in everything you do and with proven success being properly documented it is easier to show that programs and courses being provided to communities are essential in creating an enduring community.

Eileen is easily motivated in this field of work because she enjoys helping community members who have a vision of opening or expanding their own business. The Membertou Entrepreneur Centre has not only encouraged Aboriginal women but various community members to explore the idea of owning and operating their own business. The Entrepreneur Centre offers support, as well as guidance and Eileen often goes above and beyond to help her clients take the next step in achieving their dreams.

**CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER:**

**ABORIGINAL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESS CATEGORY:**

***ABENAKI ASSOCIATES — PARTNERING WITH FIRST NATIONS FOR SUCCESS***

In today's competitive business environment, a company's reputation and market knowledge are precious assets. Nobody appreciates that more than Percy Barnaby of Abenaki Associates.

As an Aboriginal company dealing almost exclusively with First Nations, we have always considered ourselves as partners with our client communities and have built up a strong relationship of trust with them over the 30 years we have worked to promote sound financial management. "Some of our customers have been with us since we formed Abenaki in 1984. When we go to conferences, for example, they'll come to

our booth and literally hug us. Other exhibitors are a little baffled by that but that's who we are. Our clients are also our friends," he says.

Abenaki Associates is owned by Percy, a Mi'kmaq from Eel Ground First Nation, his wife Carol Ann (an Ojibway from Northern Ontario). The couple, along with business partner Michelle Poirier, started the company in their home in Ottawa in 1984. "At the time, there was a lack of information technology on reserves. Percy had the idea of giving a computer course to aboriginal groups and the response was overwhelming. As entrepreneurs, we recognized a great business opportunity," he says. Percy decided to name the business "Abenaki" which means "people of the new dawn" in Micmac. "We thought the name was very appropriate. After all, we saw our company as helping our people evolve with a new technological era," he says.

Twenty-nine years later, it seems that he was right. Abenaki Associates is a highly successful and growing company serving a pan-Canadian market, which includes 625 First Nation communities and a large number of Aboriginal businesses and related organizations all over the country.

"Our information technology and management products and services are tailored to the unique needs of these communities. One of our strengths as an Aboriginal-owned company is that we are sensitive to the cultural needs of these groups and some of the obstacles they face, such as being in remote communities," says Barnaby. In the 1980s, the company established a Business Partner relationship with Computer Associates, who owned Accpac, a financial management software which is used by almost 90% of First Nations. Abenaki was the first company to provide First Nations related financial software training on topics including Financial Reporting, Accounts Receivable and Payable, Payroll, Asset Management, Purchase orders and Commitment Accounting. In the late 1980s they started developing First Nations Management software to integrate with the Accpac system and their product line continues to grow and improve based on recommendations from their clients. Abenaki now has solutions for Income Assistance, Case and Active Measures Management, and the management of other critical programs such as Income Assistance, Child and Family Services, Post Secondary Student Tracking, Safe

Water and Infrastructure, Housing Inspection and Community Human Resources.

One of the keys to building Abenaki has always been establishing partnerships. Not only has their partnership with Sage helped grow the business. In the early days of the firm when they wanted to start classroom style training for their clients, Percy spoke with Eaton's who had labs in all major cities. They agreed to give Abenaki access to the labs as they saw it as a mutually beneficial partnership which also gave them an opportunity to market to the growing Aboriginal market segment. Other long-term partnerships have been formed with companies like Microsoft and Dell. They have also recently reignited an old relationship with CAN-8, a language learning system.

Growing the business has not been without its challenges. "Each time we develop an application our competitors copy it, and sometime even copy our advertising complete with spelling mistakes", Percy remarked. "The other issue in the beginning was access to adequate financing since most financial institutions did not understand the potential of the First Nations market and were afraid that we would not be able to collect receivables because our clients were on reserve. However, possibly the biggest hurdle to overcome was convincing potential clients that an Aboriginal firm could provide a better level of service to them than some of the large national accounting firms that suddenly saw a market for financial management software in the Aboriginal community." In many ways, Abenaki was a pioneer in the establishment of an Aboriginal-owned business.

Finding qualified staff has also been a long-standing issue when it comes to training their clients and providing the top-notch customer support they strive to achieve. It is notable that the newest staff member has been with Abenaki for almost six years.

Today, Abenaki continues to explore new ways of marketing and growing their business. Most of their products are now cloud based, and clients enjoy the benefit of very efficient remote support when they encounter a technical issue, thanks to the use of secure web-based technology. Many services that used to require a trip to the other side of the country can now be performed using remote access tools.

## **CANDO ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER**

### **COMMUNITY CATEGORY:**

#### ***MEMBERTOU: A MI'KMAW COMMUNITY***

Named after the Grand Chief Membertou (1510–1611) the community of Membertou belongs to the greater tribal group of the Mi'kmaq Nation. Membertou is situated 3 kilometers from the city of Sydney, Nova Scotia. It is one of five Mi'kmaq communities in Cape Breton, and one of thirteen in the Province of Nova Scotia. Membertou is an urban First Nation community consisting of over 1260 people.

Membertou was not always situated at its present location. Many years ago, Membertou (formally known as the Kings Road Reserve) was located just off of Kings Road, along the Sydney Harbour. In 1916, the Exchequer Court of Canada ordered the relocation of the 125 Mi'kmaq; the first time an Aboriginal community had been legally forced through the courts to relocate in Canadian history. In 1926, the Membertou community was officially moved to its present day location.

In 1995 the Membertou Band had 37 employees, was operating on a \$4 million dollar budget while dealing with a \$1 million dollar annual operating deficit. The community was poor with low morale and a high unemployment rate. It was then that Chief Terrance Paul decided it was time for a major change. With great determination he and the council recruited band members that had left the reserve years prior to pursue their education and were employed throughout the country.

This new formed leadership decided that an unprecedented approach for Membertou was needed and that it would start by putting its financial house in order while embracing transparency and accountability. While this task required sacrifice it also generated a renewed sense of accomplishment and discipline that quickly earned the respect of external parties in government and industry. Over the past decade, Membertou's budget and number of employees has grown exponentially. There are many new internal departments and businesses now located within Membertou.

## **ISO Certification**

Membertou has developed many economic development initiatives over the years. Developing and maintaining numerous partnerships Membertou has grown and succeeded in many business endeavors. In January of 2002 Membertou received official notification of its ISO status, making Membertou the first Aboriginal government in the world to have many of its departments ISO 9001 certified. The purpose of ISO 9001:2008 compliance is to further enhance Membertou's economy based on the pillars of sustainability, conservation, innovation and success. The ISO designation allows Membertou to position itself as a very credible player in the global market economy.

## **Membertou and the Indian Act**

Membertou has accomplished several incredible successes and has proven that effective governance can be instrumental in overcoming many of the traditional obstacles to commercial development on reserve. However, overcoming these obstacles had come with a price. Much time and energy had gone into overcoming these barriers concerning the Indian Act.

Membertou had entered into the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management with Canada on February 12, 1996. The agreement was amended and approved on behalf of the Government of Canada which declared that Membertou govern its reserve lands and resources, rather than having it managed under the Indian Act.

Membertou created a Governance Committee and is now creating a land code which will have to be approved by the community and Chief and Council. Once approved, this land code will become the land law of Membertou. It will replace the land management provisions of the Indian Act. Membertou wishes to preserve

and protect its relationship with the land as well as to ensure sustainability for future generations. Creating this land code will allow Membertou to have more control over what is developed on their land and the right to make laws in respect of Membertou lands and resource.

## **Level Playing Field**

In 2012 Membertou First Nation had become the first Aboriginal government to secure long term financing through the First Nation Finance Authority (FNFA). The FNFA is an Aboriginal not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide low-rate loans, investment options, and capital planning advice to First Nation governments. After completing the requirements in the Fiscal and Statistical Management Act, Membertou was approved for a \$10 million dollar repayable loan to build new infrastructure within the community.

Like most First Nation governments, Membertou only had one option and that was high interest/high risk borrowing. Now that the FNFA funded Membertou's loan request through its Interim Long Term Financing program Membertou stands on a level playing field with the global business community experiencing fewer barriers and restrictions.

## **Creating an Enduring Community**

Membertou has taken on many economic development initiatives to better the community as a whole. These business and infrastructure ventures have not only brought capital and employment to Membertou, but to the surrounding communities including Sydney. Membertou has created a very strong community within a community. Membertou has proven it is possible to progress while still staying true to your culture and heritage.