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“AN INNOVATIVE ECONOMY IS DRIVEN BY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT”

Honourable Brian Tobin, Minister of Industry

By Mark Gale

Thanks to equal funding support of \$750,000 each from the Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba under the **Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA)**, Manitoba industry will soon have access to a new state-of-the-art **Manitoba Virtual Reality Research and Innovation Centre**.

Funding for the new centre was announced in Winnipeg by the Honourable Brian Tobin, Minister of Industry, and the Honourable Ron J. Duhamel, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of State (Western Economic Diversification) (Francophonie).

“The world is constantly changing, and if we are going to keep up, we must ensure Canadians have the tools they need to compete in the global economy,” said Minister Tobin.

Building on the earlier success of the introduction of advanced computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided engineering (CAE) tools at the Industrial Technology Centre (ITC), the Virtual Reality Centre will provide access to a leading-edge innovation service for small and medium-sized Manitoba companies. The use of visualization technology will help improve product design and significantly reduce production costs.



Left to Right: Unidentified ITC employee, Minister Brian Tobin, Minister Ron J. Duhamel, (in back) Trevor Cornell, Chief Operating Officer, Industrial Technology Centre; Minister MaryAnn Mihychuk, Manitoba Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines; and Perrin Beatty, National President, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

“The ability for engineers to design, test and simulate in an interactive 3D environment will revolutionize manufacturing and planning in the 21st Century,” said Minister Duhamel. “This new technology will not only benefit businesses today, but will be a valuable resource for our future generations. It will ensure that our youth have the tools and skills they will need to compete in the future global economy.”

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The ITC teamed up with Silicon Graphics to establish the Centre which Manitoba firms will be able to access by buying time on a fee-for-service basis. Silicon Graphics will provide the technical expertise and the Centre's super computer system. The company, a global supplier of interactive computing systems, is renowned for its high-performance computers that produced the special effects images in *Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace*, as well as in *Jurassic Park*.

New display technologies are now revolutionizing the means of creating visually immersive environments where product

and process concepts can be modeled, creating virtual environments for designing, testing and exhibiting virtual products and processes, simulation, planning, education and training, research and marketing. This technology will allow industry to simulate a new product before it is built.

Manufacturers can use virtual environment technology to design anything from bus engines to medical equipment with computer images that show how two-dimensional planes will actually look and feel in a three-dimensional world.

The Winnipeg Development Agreement is a five-year, \$75 million commitment by the governments of Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg to the long-term sustainable economic development of the city through labour force development, strategic and sectoral investments, and the development and safety of Winnipeg communities. ♣

ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE HAS “VISION” OF BOOSTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING FROM OTHERS

By Mark Gale

A conference originating as a one-time event to bring practical business experience and advice to Aboriginal communities has evolved into a success story.

Vision Quest Conference Incorporated, which held its first conference in Winnipeg in 1997, has quickly grown from 260 to 480 participants over four years. Vision Quest is now registered as a charity and is pursuing goals beyond planning and hosting an annual conference.

“We are at a crossroads,” says manager Joy Dornian, explaining that the organization is looking at ways it can



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continuously support Aboriginal economic development through training and other development activities. “They say a business has five-year cycles. We are finishing one and embarking on another.”

In 1996, four Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) came together to organize a one-time conference. Their initial goals were modest — to bring together those involved with Aboriginal economic development and rejuvenate the Aboriginal economy.

“The four Community Future groups had a common goal to make Aboriginal economic development a priority,” says Ian Kramer, conference chair and Director of Economic Development for South East Community Futures Corporation. “We wanted to take a practical approach — where those involved in Aboriginal business could meet and learn from success stories.”

The conferences are supported by Aboriginal Business Canada — a program offered by Industry Canada. Each is organized around three themes and includes keynote speakers from across North America, workshops, a trade fair and informal networking opportunities. To date, about 80 per cent of the participants have been Aboriginal, with many of the others employed by or working with Aboriginal communities.

Kramer indicated that some of the greatest challenges for Aboriginal businesses include distance to market, lack of infrastructure and a lack of strong traditional ties to the western economy. Some of the opportunities, he believes, include the potential for the information economy to overcome geographic barriers, tourism and a greater role for Aboriginal communities in managing their natural resources.

The success of the first conference and the enthusiasm of participants convinced the organizing committee to stay together to plan for the next conference.

Five years and four conferences later, Vision Quest has incorporated as a year-round organization, has expanded to include a fifth Community Future Development Corporation, and is in the midst of strategic planning to determine its next steps in building economic development capacity in Aboriginal communities.

“We are looking for opportunities to have a year round impact... there are many needs,” says Dornian, adding that one focus is to be more inclusive of all Aboriginal people.

The success of Vision Quest coincides with a boom in Aboriginal business. Kramer says that while the conference may not be directly responsible, its practical exposure to ideas and success stories has had an indirect benefit. “It may be a matter of timing, but I would like to think that Vision Quest has been part of this boom in some small way.”

In 2001, the conference focused on Success through Tradition, Vision and Spirit. The conference wove the traditional values into three themes — innovation through technology, foundations of community development and the business of arts and entertainment.

Dornian and Kramer agree that Vision Quest has developed a reputation as a quality economic development conference. But neither one will be content standing still. “Maybe our greatest success is yet to come,” Kramer predicts. ♣

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