



# Building Aboriginal and Northern Economies

## Peace Hills Trust

# Investing in the Future

by Richard Landis

**"S**trength through self-reliance" is more than a motto for the Samson Cree Nation — it's a rallying call for sustainable economic development.

Some 5,000 members of the Samson Cree Nation live in and around Hobbema, Alberta. With the financial resources from their land's oil and gas, the First Nation set out to protect, employ and educate its members. Over the years, the Samson Cree have invested in a number of sustainable development projects. Unique among these is Peace Hills Trust, which had humble beginnings in the early 1980s when the Samson Cree established their own financial institution. Their goal? To deliver financial services throughout Canada — services aimed at First Nations and their members, corporations, institutions and associations, both on- and off-reserve.

Although assets have increased steadily over the years, reaching some \$800 million in 2001, "profits were never the driving force behind



Peace Hills Trust works with  
First Nations to create economic  
development opportunities.

creating the company," says Peace Hills Trust president and CEO **Warren Hannay**. "The Samson Cree were looking for an economic development project that would service the financial and employment needs of the Band." The result, he adds, is that "there's still no other institution like it in Canada: a federal trust company that's 100 percent First Nation-owned."

Warren has seen a lot of changes at Peace Hills Trust since joining the company in 1988. The number of regional offices

throughout Canada has grown from three to eight, most of which are on-reserve. The largest portfolio involves First Nations community financing, which includes infrastructure, housing and on- and off-reserve economic development projects.

Over the years, the number of employees has more than doubled to 130. Nearly half are

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February-March 2003

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## Accessing Capital

New and growing businesses need access to capital in order to flourish. Aboriginal entrepreneurs are finding new ways to build business through loan and investment capital.

Visit our Aboriginal success stories database at [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca) (Click on "News Room").

Canada

# Capital Idea Means Healthy Teeth

by Raymond Lawrence

A joint venture at Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation is giving local people a lot to smile about.

Until recently, people from the Lake Huron community had to drive at least 30 minutes for dental services, and up to 90 minutes for special dental care.

A transportation shortage meant proper dental care was too often left neglected.

Then **Dr. Gord Alexiuk**, who had a successful dental practice in Espanola, Ont., approached the First Nation's corporate entity, **Saulteaux Enterprises**, in hopes of starting a joint-venture, on-reserve dental clinic. The North Shore Dental Clinic, which opened in June 2001, now provides dental services to First Nation members and to people from nearby communities.

But before they opened their doors to the public, they went out in search of capital to establish the business. The First Nation was able to invest its own dollars



A new clinic means members of the Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation have better access to dental care.

in the business and then secured matching funds from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Opportunities Fund. They also obtained capital through Industry Canada, money which allowed them to create a suitable clinic space — which includes a business office, dentist and hygienists

offices, an x-ray room, and an area to sterilize instruments.

Once the clinic was up and running, it accessed additional capital through the Northern Ontario Heritage Corporation to buy dental equipment.

The clinic has taken an innovative approach towards promoting the business and its much-needed services.

"During the first year of operations, the hygienist went out to the daycare and school (Grades 1 through 8) and did an assessment," says **Stephanie Allen**, Saulteaux Enterprises' General Management. This provided the dental clinic with information on the community's dental habits — and helped raise awareness of the new clinic.

The operation currently employs one community member as the clinic administrator. It is hoped that community members will eventually fill the other positions.

For information, call Saulteaux Enterprises at 705-865-1134. ✱

*Raymond Lawrence is a freelance writer of Ojibway and European ancestry.*

## "Peace Hills Trust" continued from page 1

First Nations members, representing some 40 First Nations from across Canada.

"Peace Hills Trust is a terrific success story," says Warren. "It's a case of First Nations working together to help themselves and to create viable, economic development opportunities. Peace Hills Trust also has helped non-Native lending institutions understand that there are ways to lend to First Nations on a profitable basis. I like to think that this has helped all First Nations communities across Canada to realize some of their dreams."

Peace Hills Trust is also the program administrator for the "Access-to Capital" element for the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative. Funding for the "Access to Capital" program comes from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and through allocations from Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada program, the Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development – Quebec and Western Economic Diversification Canada.

For more information, visit [www.peacehills.com](http://www.peacehills.com) ✱

# Mohawk International Lacrosse Company Scores Internationally

by Owen Roberts

**T**he bond between today's arena-filling, rabble-raising sport of professional indoor lacrosse and its 500-year-old predecessor is its essential piece of equipment: the stick.

First Nations craftspeople started making lacrosse sticks back in the 1500s, when the game was invented as a way to settle disputes. Today, the star players of the National Lacrosse League (NLL) continue to choose First Nation-made sticks, manufactured by Mohawk International Lacrosse (MIL) of the Mohawks of Akwesasne First Nation on Cornwall Island, Ont. This loyalty has given MIL its elite status in the sport.

MIL gained new, international prominence in 2002 when it became the official sponsor of Team Canada at the World Lacrosse Games in Perth, Australia. The exposure was unparalleled — MIL sticks were introduced to a whole world of new fans, including many who were intrigued with MIL's First Nation roots. "Indians invented the game," says MIL owner **Mark Mitchell**. "People took to our sticks because they wanted something authentic."

The biggest difference with modern sticks is that about 98 percent of today's heads are made from lightweight plastic.

The NLL's top scorers set the pace for that trend, looking for any edge that gives them a quicker shot. Amateur players also prefer the plastic heads — if they break, they can be replaced without having to scrap the entire stick. To meet the plastic-stick market demand, MIL introduced its *Mach 1*, which retails for \$85 and has become a staple for amateurs and professionals alike.

For his part — and despite MIL's success — Mark misses the old days of wooden sticks. "When the guy upstairs gave us the game of lacrosse, there weren't plastic trees," he deadpans. His nostalgia for the wooden sticks is rooted in Akwesasne's history: the First Nation's craftspeople were famous for their wooden lacrosse sticks. Now, the First Nation — through MIL and its *Mach 1* — is again gaining fame for its lacrosse sticks.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada recently invested \$100,000 in the company

to support expansion plans and help offset operating costs related to the World Lacrosse Games venture.

Depending on the time of year, the factory employs between seven and 15 people. All are members of the First Nation.

Meanwhile, Mark will be busy filling orders. In January 2003, MIL was named official lacrosse stick supplier of the NLL. Said NLL commissioner Jim Jennings, "We are excited to continue our relationship with Mohawk International Lacrosse. MIL produces a great product, and we share in their commitment to this great game that is lacrosse."

For information, visit  
[www.mohawkintlacrosse.com](http://www.mohawkintlacrosse.com) ★

**Owen Roberts is a journalist and communications instructor of Ojibway and European ancestry.**

Mohawk International Lacrosse's *Mach 1* stick is drawing raves from amateur and professional players alike.





# Writing the Book on Success

by Cherie Dimaline

**A**nishinabe Printing used professional know-how and community support to build a successful business.

The Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg community is located approximately 130 km north of Ottawa, adjacent to the small town of Maniwaki, Que. This peaceful 2,350-member Algonquin First Nation seems miles away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. But with people like Wayne Odjick and partner Sid Cooko setting up shop, it's making its mark.

Like most successful endeavors, it all started with a carefully laid plan. Wayne, a trained flight engineer, and Sid, an offset printer working with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), decided to take a chance and to start a business. With no other income and no financial cushion to fall back on, the two cousins purchased an old house in their community and converted it into what has become a true success story.

Once they had completed their market research and determined their printing press idea was a viable one, the two turned to Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC) program for advice. After consulting ABC about their options, they accessed start-up funds through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC) Community Economic Development Program.



Wayne Odjick (left) and Sid Cooko have built Anishinabe Printing into a thriving business.

Starting a business from scratch took a lot of patience. They officially opened on June 1, 1993. "Because we were opening a print shop, you need volume. It was pretty hard to get going but we had the support of the community — from the Chief and Council, the Economic Development team and the community as a whole.

"We targeted the non-governmental Aboriginal organizations in Ottawa. Soon after, as we were developing, we started targeting the federal government."

The partners now employ eight full-time staff members — at peak times that number can grow to as many as 12 — and provide services to the AFN, many local Aboriginal businesses, INAC and other federal departments in Ottawa.

In 2002, Anishinabe Printing's solid reputation earned it the Professional Services and Communications award from the Vallée de la Gatineau – Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Maniwaki.

From nervously shopping around a business plan to running a booming business that has allowed the life-long friends and cousins to foster economic growth in their community, Wayne Odjick and Sid Cooko continue to demonstrate why they are a true success story.

For information, contact 819-449-7997. ★

***Cherie Dimaline is a writer and editor from the Georgian Bay Métis/Ojibway community.***



# Entrepreneur Leads the Pack

by Richard Landis

**D**r. Deb Crowfoot knows a thing or two about competition, commitment and the pursuit of entrepreneurial dreams.

A marathon runner, dentist and successful Siksika First Nation businessman, Deb lives by a simple creed. "I've always thought it important to recognize the connection between body and spirit, to be the best you can be while realizing your limitations — and to lead by example," he says.

Over the years, Alberta's first First Nation dentist has reinvested more than \$1 million into upgrading his three dental clinics. His goal is to provide better service to his 21,000 patients. When not criss-crossing among his own clinics, Deb can also be found at one of two pediatric surgical centres in Edmonton and Calgary, where he performs about 400 procedures yearly.

Not one to stand still, Crowfoot has moved beyond the dental field. Ultrex Podiatric Laboratories — a business inspired by his marathon running — is a case in point.

"Being a marathon runner, I'm conscious of the importance of proper-fitting footwear," he says. Deb started the Samson First Nation-based orthotics business in January 2000 and has since turned it into a successful venture — both through his own initiative, as well as through \$75,000 provided by Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC) program. The program promotes the growth of Aboriginal businesses by providing services, information and support to clients in all sectors of the economy.

Money provided through the ABC program helped Ultrex purchase a computer-controlled automated milling

system that manufactures foot orthotics. This leading-edge technology has paved the way for Ultrex to produce high-quality customized footwear faster and less expensively than through traditional processes.

Today, Ultrex produces between 700 and 800 pairs monthly, with yearly revenues of about \$1 million. The company currently markets its products in western Canada, exports to Montana and Nevada and has set its sights on expanding exports to England and Australia.

The end result is a successful business venture, increased on-reserve

employment opportunities and footwear that's kind to your feet. The venture has also given Deb an opportunity to contribute to his community.

"Through initiatives like Ultrex and the Chief Crowfoot Health Careers Scholarship — which is named after my great, great grandfather and which is made available each year to four students pursuing professional health careers — I try to give something back to my own people and to the community."

For more information, phone 877-844-5227 or e-mail [crowfoot@telusplanet.net](mailto:crowfoot@telusplanet.net) ✳



Photo courtesy of Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada

Dr. Deb Crowfoot and Ultrex Podiatric Laboratories use leading-edge technology to produce orthopedic inserts for shoes.

# House of Himwitsa Native Art Gallery

## Enterprise Builds on Success

by Diane Koven

A dream has grown into an award-winning tourist destination for a Tofino, B.C. family.

In 1991, **Lewis George** was a school administrator in his native village of Ahousat, and **Cathy George** was working in a Tofino art gallery, where the couple lived. Lewis was tired of commuting and wanted to spend more time with the family. "We started by approaching a local restaurant owner who had a small, 400-square-foot space available to allow us to rent it for a gift gallery," said Lewis. "We convinced him to do the renovations, which we paid for, and we leased the property from him. We started with \$30,000 of inventory. We had to prioritize what we wanted to sell."

The couple re-mortgaged their Tofino home and secured additional financing for the start-up from the Government of BC's First Citizens Fund, through their tribal council.

"The gallery really took off and people wanted more and more. At the beginning, everything we made we put back into the gallery, to purchase more inventory," said Lewis. The business was a remarkable success from the very beginning. Within the first seven months, the Georges were able to pay off both the mortgage on their home and the initial business loan.

The business grew and a new, 1,200-square foot building opened in 1994. A space next to the gallery was leased to another First Nation business, Seaside Whale Watching. The location was an advantage, with its view of Clayoquot Sound. "The Trans-Canada Highway ends right by our building and government buildings are right below us. We don't have to advertise much, because people pass by us to go to the end of the highway," said Lewis.



Photo courtesy of Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada

With the influx of tourists, the Georges decided to expand their services — and did so with support from Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada program which had also helped with starting the original gallery. They added the Sea Shanty Restaurant, a 55-seat seafood restaurant, with another 30 seats on the patio. For people who want to spend more than a couple of hours, the Himwitsa Lodge offers high-end accommodation.

House of Himwitsa Gallery represents West Coast artists from the Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nations, and the Tlinget, Tsimshian, Kwagwiltz, Haida, Salish and Coast Salish Nations.

In 2002, House of Himwitsa was recognized by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia with the "Strength in Marketing Award."

For more information, visit [www.himwitsa.com](http://www.himwitsa.com) \*

Lewis and Cathy George have won an award for their marketing abilities.

*Building Aboriginal and Northern Economies* is published by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and is printed by Anishinabe Printing. Articles may be reprinted in whole or in part by contacting: *Building Aboriginal and Northern Economies*, INAC, Communications Branch, Room 1901 Les Terrasses de la Chaudière Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H4 Telephone: 819-997-0330 Published under the authority of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Ottawa, 2003 QS-6145-024-BB-A1 ISSN 1706-3388 [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca)



Printed on recycled paper



# Boat Helps Inn Boost Business

by Raymond Lawrence

**T**he opportunity and the idea were there, but the money was another matter.

The Adlavik Inn, located in Makkovik on the north coast of Labrador, some 320 km north of Goose Bay, had been dealing mainly with business and government patrons. However, Inuit entrepreneur **Randy Edmunds** and partner **Lory Dyson**, who is Métis, wanted to tap into their region's tourism potential by taking advantage of its spectacular scenery.

To turn that potential into real tourism dollars, they needed to buy a 12-metre Northumberland Strait-style boat that would allow them to take people on tours of the area. The only issue for the couple, who bought the business in 1999, was the money.

"We accessed funding from Aboriginal Business Canada for the boat and I put up my own equity and the rest came in the form of a loan," says Randy, who purchased the boat in 2000. He adds that the move was a risk because of the region's short tour boat season that lasts from July through September.

He notes that during the three years the boat has been in operation, the demand has steadily increased. "Between guests from major corporations and people wanting to do iceberg sight-seeing, it's pretty much full."

"We're trying to expand into recreational tourism, into outfitting, and into sight-seeing tours," says Randy. During winter they offer a dogsled tour around the bay but all other tours are a little more high-speed. "We have new groomed trails for snowmobile enthusiasts and in the summer we centre our operations around the hotel and the boat. Sport fishing is good up here with brook trout and char, plus the scenery alone makes the trip worthwhile."



Photo courtesy of Industry Canada's Aboriginal Business Canada

Partners Lory Dyson (left) and Randy Edmunds broadened the appeal of the Adlavik Inn by adding boat tours.

The waters close to the Inn are often filled with slow-drifting icebergs that can tower high above the surface of the water. There is a variety of sea birds in the area, as well as wildlife such as black bears, moose and caribou. There are also a number of archeological sites close-by. The area, Randy notes, is a unique cross-cultural point where Inuit artifacts can be found close to those left by Europeans.

The Inn has five double-occupancy rooms, plus additional space for larger groups. Rooms are equipped with cable, phones, and laundry service. Its kitchen delights restaurant guests with a combination of traditional northern fare, including foods from the land, and Western foods.

Because of the success of their foray into tourism, Randy already has his eyes on a larger, faster boat that will hold more people and make for a more thrilling tour.

For information, call 709-923-2389. ★



# GV Snowshoes Leading the Way

by Hélène Katz

**J**ust as snowshoeing is experiencing a surge in popularity in North America, a Huron-Wendat snowshoe company is making great strides.

Located near Quebec City, GV Snowshoes is one of the leading manufacturers of snowshoes in North America. It is ranked third in the world and first in Canada, with about 28 percent of snowshoe sales in the country. Their main clients are sporting goods and outdoor stores — as well as some forestry workers who need to hit the trail without sinking into the white stuff.

The Huron-Wendat company has an extensive line of snowshoes, made with three different types of materials: traditional white ash, modern aluminum or injection-molded plastic. Aluminum snowshoes are the most popular, says vice-president, director general **Stephen Vincent**. “They’re beautiful, more naturally resistant, perform better and are available in more colours.”

GV Snowshoes has three plants, for a combined 55,000 square feet. On average, more than 1,000 pairs of snowshoes are produced each week by the company’s 50 employees.

Their snowshoes are currently exported to Europe, Japan, Chile and the



GV Snowshoes makes snowshoes that appeal to all tastes — from high-tech to traditional.

United States. Founded in 1959, the company was bought by **Maurice Vincent** in 1982. Now his sons, **Stephen** and **Michel**, run the company. They promote their products through magazine advertisements and manufacturing agents.

Funding from the National Research Council’s Industrial Research Assistance Program allowed GV Snowshoes to double the size of their production facilities, and work on the research and development of new product lines. Industry Canada’s Aboriginal Business Canada program has also provided support for new product development, marketing and international trade initiatives.

Now, Stephen says his company’s next goals are to capitalize on snowshoeing’s

growing popularity by increasing sales in Canada and the United States.

“We want to chase the American market, give it a good boost and improve (market share) in Canada as well,” Stephen says. “We know there is potential for growth and want to increase sales.”

Given the seasonal nature of snowshoeing, squirrelling away money for rainy days is important for the company’s long-term growth, Stephen says. “The main thing is to have money set aside for those quiet periods,” he says. “When you don’t have money, you see opportunities go by because you can’t afford to make the investments needed to capitalize on them.”

For more information, visit [www.gvsnowshoes.com](http://www.gvsnowshoes.com) \*

