

# ACCESS WEST

WESTERN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION CANADA

July - September 2004

## First Nations ... An Untapped Labour Force in Western Canada

Aboriginal Canadians have not fully shared in Canada's good fortune, but that is changing.

According to the September 2003 report by the Canada West Foundation, *Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People*, Western Canada possesses an under-appreciated opportunity to deal with this potential challenge. The West is home to 62.1 per cent of Canada's Aboriginal population – the largest untapped labour force in Canada.

Analysts, industry and the Offices of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions have all come to the same conclusion: an aging population, declining birth rates and a culture that celebrates early retirement means a Canadian labour crisis within the next 10 years is imminent.

While skills development and education will help Aboriginal peoples participate more fully in the workforce, many western Canadian Aboriginal entrepreneurs are creating their own opportunities by starting and running successful businesses in almost every industry sector. These included logging, non-timber forest products, fashion design, computer programming, graphic design and fisheries, to name just a few.

These successful entrepreneurs are demonstrating to their families and their communities that participating in Western Canada's economy is available for all Aboriginal people.

The Government of Canada is committed to creating real economic opportunities for Aboriginal individuals and communities. Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has assisted with various initiatives that are opening up opportunities for First Nations to fully participate in the workforce in Western Canada.

*Continued on next page*



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## WD Partners to Create Opportunities for Aboriginals

*Continued from cover*

Through WD-assisted programs like the distance learning initiative at the Grande Prairie Regional College, learning sites in remote northern Alberta Aboriginal communities offer students an opportunity to receive industry-specific training in their home communities. In B.C., many First Nations coastal communities are diversifying their economies away from the salmon fisheries with the help of federal support.

The Department is also building partnerships with major urban centres — Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg – to develop practical solutions that recognize the opportunities and challenges they face with the growing Aboriginal populations in their communities.

And, through a network of over 100 partners across the West, Western Economic Diversification Canada is helping Aboriginal entrepreneurs find success in the business community.

Ensuring that our First Nations individuals and communities are able to enjoy real economic opportunities, means a stronger West. And, a stronger West means a stronger Canada.

Canada West Foundation's series of research studies, *Building the New West*, including the report noted, has been funded in part by Western Economic Diversification Canada. Visit [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca) for online copies of these studies. ♦

## Resources for Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Anyone wanting to make the jump to entrepreneurship needs a place to start. Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and resources tailored to meet their unique challenges.

What unique challenges you ask? Shannon Armitage, Aboriginal Business Service Network Coordinator at The Business Link Business Service Centre in Edmonton, commented that many Canadians feel Aboriginal people don't know *how* to be good businesspeople. He added, "This attitude is changing. I am just one of many business services officers across the West that are helping Aboriginal people develop their business skills. And, I share their success stories with other business people and entrepreneurs who are considering small business as a career option."

Through Western Economic Diversification Canada's network partners across the West, services have been specifically designed for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to address these challenges.

**Canada Business Services Centres (CBSCs)** are a valuable resource for the budding Aboriginal entrepreneur.

**Aboriginal Business Service Network** offices can be found in CBSCs in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They are helping to increase the number, size and market reach of Aboriginal businesses by directing entrepreneurs to the information and resources they need, and increasing their ability to access capital and establish and grow their businesses. Alberta and Saskatchewan Web sites include interesting Aboriginal entrepreneur success stories.

In B.C., the **Canada/B.C. Business Service Society** launched **www.firstbusiness.ca** in November 2003, recognizing the diverse circumstances and needs of Aboriginal peoples in the province. The Web site was

designed to provide relevant information for adults and youth in both urban and rural areas that will help them start and run a successful business.

There are also 90 **Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs)** that are committed to providing business advisory services and creating new opportunities for Aboriginal peoples in rural communities across the West. Some of these offices are fully operated by Aboriginal people and located in Aboriginal communities. Since April 1999, western CFDCs have approved 860 loans totaling \$17.1 million to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, creating or maintaining 1,574 jobs.

For information about the resources nearest you, visit: [www.wd.gc.ca/pos/default\\_e.asp](http://www.wd.gc.ca/pos/default_e.asp) ♣

### Other Valuable Resources for Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

**Aboriginal Business Canada —**  
<http://abc-eac.ic.gc.ca>

**Aboriginal Business Development Fund -  
Apeetogosan (Metis) Development Inc. —**  
[www.bdc.ca/en/i\\_am/aboriginal\\_entrepreneur/  
strategic\\_alliances/default.htm](http://www.bdc.ca/en/i_am/aboriginal_entrepreneur/strategic_alliances/default.htm)

**Aboriginal Canada Portal —**  
<http://aboriginalcanada.gc.ca>

**Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business -  
Western Region —**  
[www.ccab-canada.com](http://www.ccab-canada.com)



## Strengthening Communities

*Our communities, our towns, our cities are key to our social goals and can attract the best talent and compete for investment as vibrant centres.*

Investing in community sustainability has long been a priority for Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD). The sustainability of our communities cannot be addressed through prosperity alone. Many factors affect their ability to access and take advantage of opportunities for enduring growth. Effective partnerships between WD, other federal government departments, the four western provincial governments, municipalities, educational institutions, industry and other stakeholders are building a future that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

WD investments help to renew physical infrastructure in western Canadian communities to protect the environment and support long-term economic growth through the **Infrastructure Canada Program**, a cost-shared program with provincial and municipal governments.

The Department helps identify new economic opportunities for communities facing setbacks. In the past, WD has helped to mitigate the impact of the military base closure in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; helped get flood victims back on their feet following the Red River flood in Manitoba; and developed programs to assist communities find alternative economic opportunities following the downturn in the salmon fisheries along the B.C. coast.

WD is delivering federal assistance in the West to support economic development and diversification in forest-dependent communities impacted by the softwood lumber trade dispute through the **Softwood Industry and Community Economic Adjustment Initiative (SICEAI)**. The program helps communities to create opportunities and transition away from

traditional forest-based dependency. The initiative supports local ideas and solutions that bring new sustainable economic growth with tangible benefits, such as jobs, to the local economy.

In fall 2003, WD and the four western provinces signed new **Western Economic Partnership Agreements (WEPAs)**. These joint federal/provincial initiatives are aimed at fostering increased economic activity and improving the quality of life in communities across the West. WD is providing \$25 million in funding to each western province. With matching provincial contributions, each WEPA will invest up to \$50 million to help create a better environment for growth, business development and innovation.

Urban Development Agreements are innovative agreements that enable WD to develop partnerships among federal, provincial and municipal governments that better coordinate economic and social activities to address complex issues in urban areas, especially in inner-city areas.

The **Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA)**, a \$75 million cost-shared agreement between the federal government (through WD), the



*Emerson, Manitoba, was the 1997 Red River flood thanks to the community's efforts.*



*SICEAI assistance helped the Society in Prince Rupert, B.C., comprises a historic Aboriginal building.*

## ities in Western Canada

*our economic competitiveness...Canada depends on communities that  
rs of commerce, learning and culture.*



*s surrounded by water during  
od, but managed to keep dry  
ty ring dike that surrounded*



*d the Port Edward Historical  
ert restore a cannery that  
riginal fishing centre.*

Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg, expired in September 2001. A new agreement is currently being negotiated among all three levels of government.

Signed in March 2000, the **Vancouver Agreement** has helped to lay the foundation for economic growth by improving conditions for business and employment, as well as quality of life, for residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The Province of British Columbia, the City of Vancouver and WD each contributed \$7 million over three years towards a variety of projects. Many initiatives engage the residents in projects that provide them with life skills and instill a sense of pride in their community.

The five-year, \$20 million **Canada-Saskatchewan Northern Development Agreement** was announced in October 2002. This agreement provides opportunities for northerners to improve regional economic infrastructure, employment prospects through training and practical skill experience, educational and business expertise, research and industry innovation, and business investment in the region. The

agreement is cost-shared equally by the governments of Canada (through WD) and Saskatchewan.

WD is a leader in the West, working with provincial governments and the cities of Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg on pilot projects that test new ideas on how to better respond to the local needs of Aboriginal peoples. The **Urban Aboriginal Strategy Pilot Projects** bring together government, local Aboriginal organizations, non-government organizations and the private sector to develop innovative solutions to address local priorities.

And finally, WD also supports **Community Futures Development Corporations** and **Francophone Economic Development Organizations** across the West. These non-profit, volunteer-led organizations offer technical and advisory services, as well as loans, to small businesses in their area. They also work to build stronger communities by creating local solutions to local challenges, new opportunity, new hope and new prosperity town-by-town and business-by-business. The francophone organizations also enhance the vitality of minority language communities in Western Canada.

For more information about the numerous ways WD is helping to create sustainable communities in the West, visit: [www.wd.gc.ca/ced/default.asp](http://www.wd.gc.ca/ced/default.asp). ♦



## Innovation is a Collaborative

by Jacob Berkowitz

What do the Tar Monster in the movie *Scooby Doo II*, the world's fastest digital information transfer and storage system, and a unique mobile emergency communications vehicle all have in common?

They're all western Canadian innovations supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) and the **National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP)**.

By working together, WD and the NRC are promoting prosperity in Western Canada through technological innovation. NRC-IRAP works closely with all kinds of small and medium-sized enterprises, helping them grow their businesses, increase their competitiveness and enhance their impact in the marketplace.

Here are just three examples that demonstrate the range and success of this collaboration.

### *Animation Software Creates a Splash*

When the Tar Monster slimed its way onto movie screens across North America in March 2004, the audience at Winnipeg's Towne Eight theatre cheered and clapped. Not for the evil viscous blob in *Scooby Doo II*, but for its creators – Winnipeg's **Frantic Films**.

Developed with support from NRC-IRAP and WD, Flood is the company's unique, in-house software program that has rapidly emerged as one of the world's leading tools for simulating fluids.

"In the bigger film market, success for an animation studio is all about uniqueness and what you can bring to the table that's different than everyone else," says Ken Zorniak, Frantic's chief operating officer and senior visual effects producer.

The Flood software simulates the motions of liquids by applying the physics of fluid dynamics. Rather than trying to painstakingly animate a complex fluid motion, the software does the bulk of the work.

While Flood is making a splash in the animation industry, Frantic is now looking at other applications in industries that require visualizing fluids, from building ship hulls to medical procedures.

### *Double Data — Anywhere*

Wayne Karpoff knows his company's data storage and transfer technology doesn't break the speed of light, but for users it appears to be that fast.

Edmonton-based **YottaYotta's** new NetStorager System enables organizations to share and access information from anywhere in North America with near simultaneous symmetrical updating. It has broad applications for large-



(L to R)

AMEC prepares for communications equipment installation. (Photo courtesy of Frantic Film's computer programmers and artists spent six months creating YottaYotta's Storage Management System provides a single logical repository environment.

## ve Effort in Western Canada

scale data backup and sharing by groups ranging from the military to the medical and financial sectors.

Karpoff, YottaYotta's chief technology officer and co-founder, says, "You can have data centres that are all over the world and have them behave as if they're in the same room."

Literally. Last fall, NRC-IRAP support enabled YottaYotta to prototype and benchmark a system component that minimizes the bandwidth required for data sharing. The test run between YottaYotta in Edmonton and Silicon Graphics in Ottawa resulted in a 100-fold performance improvement compared to traditional data sharing methods.

In 2003, WD contributed to a groundbreaking project to apply the NetStorager technology to the networking and storage of digital MRI images among healthcare facilities in the Edmonton area.



of Telematics Research Lab, Simon Fraser University)  
g the Tar Monster's five minutes of silver screen fame.  
ory for all information collected across a customer's diverse storage

### *Communication Under Fire*

Two hundred metres. That's all that separated British Columbians from a massive communications brown-out in August 2003 when the huge Okanagan Mountain fire near Kelowna almost fried one of the province's primary wireless communications towers.

This fire season, B.C.'s Emergency Response Team is ready for such a worst-case communications scenario. The new Advanced Mobile Emergency Communications (AMEC) vehicle is a self-contained high-tech communications hub on wheels, ready to provide coordinated emergency communications even when all else fails.

"AMEC is unique," says Peter Anderson, director of the **Telematics Research Lab** at **Simon Fraser University** in Burnaby, and leader of the WD-funded AMEC project. "It is designed and scaled to be a mobile communications gateway to support community-wide emergency response and recovery operations."

Looking like a converted Brinks van, the AMEC contains more than 20 distinct state-of-the-art communications technologies that will link emergency response officials via broadband wireless, VHF radio and satellite phone. AMEC also supports multimedia applications to provide distant decision makers with real-time images of the disaster.

"NRC-IRAP support for this project has been crucial, especially in helping build partnerships with private sector firms in Western Canada," says Anderson.

For more information about the support programs offered by the National Research Council, including IRAP, visit [www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca](http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca). For information about Western Economic Diversification Canada's programs and services, visit [www.wd.gc.ca](http://www.wd.gc.ca). ♦

## Manitoba's Filmless Radiology Network Grows

by Lee Gregg



*Members of the medical community from Norway House Cree Nation participated in the announcement of extended teleradiology services to two northern Manitoba communities with Dr. Blake McClarty, the program director of diagnostic imaging at St. Boniface Hospital, via broadband technology.*

The **St. Boniface General Hospital Research Centre** is home to the Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS) — a central storage device and cornerstone of Manitoba's filmless radiology network. This state-of-the-art technology allows physicians and radiologists to view a patient's radiology images from their desktop computer without the delay of transporting x-ray film, the conventional means of transferring images.

**Norway House Cree Nation** and the **Town of Churchill** recently entered into partnership with St. Boniface General Hospital to enhance locally delivered health services by becoming the first two rural communities to be connected via broadband technology to Winnipeg and the filmless radiology network. This new service is expected to have a tremendous positive impact on the health care provided to the largely Aboriginal and Métis populations of these communities.

Extending teleradiology services to these communities was made possible through \$99,999 in WD funding that was used to purchase equipment, upgrade infrastructure and provide training to local staff.

Residents will now have access to high-end medical diagnostics and care without having to wait up to five days for x-ray results. It is also expected to significantly reduce the need for patients to fly to Winnipeg for routine examinations and tests. Existing broadband technology will be used to transmit digitized pictures to Winnipeg, where viewing stations are set up at the Health Sciences Centre and the St. Boniface General Hospital. Technicians will interpret the images and communicate with their colleagues in the north, allowing for instantaneous consultation and diagnosis.

The remoteness of northern communities presents a unique challenge in the ability to provide local health services. Through the introduction of this innovative technology, health services are being enhanced in these communities, an important step in enabling them to prosper and grow. The Government of Canada is pleased to be building strong rural communities and investing in people — Canada's most important economic asset.

This project contributes to the on-going federal strategy to improve health care for Canadians, and builds on WD's \$1.25 million investment in PACS at the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Centre in 1988. ♣



## Creating a Vision for Success in Alberta

Creating new opportunities often takes vision. Aboriginal, industry and educational representatives partnered to form the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Committee with a vision to increase the number of Aboriginal people participating in Alberta apprenticeship programs.

In 2002, the **Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project (AAAP)** was launched to promote apprenticeship and industry training to Aboriginal people, communities and organizations in the province. Quite simply, the AAAP moved the vision into reality by providing industry and First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples with a “win-win” situation – an increased pool of skilled labour and more employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

The initiative bridges cultures and provides applicants with support and guidance needed to choose the right trade and secure a position with partner employers. And, one of the best aspects of the AAAP is the opportunity for an applicant to start and complete an apprenticeship program and earn an industry-appropriate wage while they learn a trade.

The employer partners in the AAAP recognize the diversity and potential of the apprentices they have hired, as well as the steadily increasing Aboriginal representation in the workforce since the program began two years ago.

Piloted in regions with large Aboriginal populations Edmonton, Fort McMurray and High Level – the AAAP program is already a success. There are currently 76 apprentices participating in 11 trades, including carpentry, electrical, machining and welding.

Ron Paul is a third-year millwright apprentice with Syncrude Canada Ltd. in Fort McMurray. Both apprentice and employer feedback is conclusive.

Syncrude Canada’s Team Coordinator Michael Hewson said, “The AAAP has been very visible and given us an excellent worker who is very eager to learn his trade. Ron is becoming a very competent millwright.”

“Before becoming an apprentice, I didn’t feel I had a real future,” commented Paul. “The AAAP provided me with a good foundation in my life. It is an excellent program and I have recommended it to many others. I now have goals that are clear and the path to a journeyman is pretty straightforward.”

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) invested \$1 million in this innovative program that helps to address labour shortages in the trades and provides meaningful career opportunities to Alberta Aboriginals.

For more information about the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project, call 1-866-408-1840 or visit [www.thinktrades.com](http://www.thinktrades.com). ♣



*Ron Paul, third-year millwright apprentice, was hired by Syncrude Canada under the AAAP.*

## Mixing it Up at L.A.B. Soundworks

by Cameron Zimmer



Lee Bell mixing music at L.A.B. Soundworks recording studio in Meadow Lake.

It's the perennial question for professional musicians — when are you going to settle down and get a day job?

Guitarist and drummer Lee Bell heard that query often enough during his days on the road.

His response was to start **L.A.B. Soundworks** recording studio, an initiative that shows not every musician has to give up music to get steady employment.

“Being a musician required traveling a lot and I wanted something more stationary,” says Bell, who has played in a band since he was 12. “Knowing all of the musicians I did before just opened up all sorts of opportunities to do recording and teaching.”

In November 2001, Bell made Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, his musical base and constructed a small but versatile recording studio. It's filled with state-of-the-art equipment purchased with financial assistance from **Aboriginal Business Canada**.

Even though L.A.B. is over 3,000 kilometres from Nashville, Los Angeles and other music hubs, it records artists in 5.1 Dolby digital sound with the same mixing software used by Shania Twain and other marquee musicians.

“Location is not a huge factor anymore because of the Internet. With digital technology, you can have a studio pretty much anywhere,” says Bell.

Since opening this high-quality studio to northern musicians, L.A.B. Soundworks has flooded western airwaves with distinct local sounds. Many of the 30 acts Bell has recorded have already made it to Aboriginal music charts in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

“He's made it affordable for local people who can't afford to go to the city to be heard,” says Charlotte Sinclair, a business development officer for **Beaver River Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC)**. The CFDC also provided Bell with a loan to establish his music school.

Bell leads a hectic life teaching music, recording artists and playing gigs with four Saskatchewan bands, but he doesn't have any plans to slow down. Soon he will offer DJ, sound and lighting services for local events.

All in all, a day job and then some.

For more information about L.A.B. Soundworks, phone (306) 236-5480 or e-mail [lab\\_sound@hotmail.com](mailto:lab_sound@hotmail.com). For information about the closest Community Futures Development Corporations across the West, visit [www.wd.gc.ca/pos/cfdc/xindex\\_e.asp](http://www.wd.gc.ca/pos/cfdc/xindex_e.asp). 🍁



# Hydro Project Helps Build Foundation for a Secure Energy Supply

by Carla Shore

The **Douglas First Nation**, located in southwestern B.C., relies on diesel-powered generators to provide electricity. The Band is not connected to the B.C. Hydro grid and is subject to equipment failure and local air pollution.

Thanks to assistance from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), the Douglas Band may soon be able to power their villages with electricity generated by their own small power-generating facility.

The 233-member Douglas Band reached a participation agreement with Cloudworks Energy of Vancouver to develop three run-of-the-river power-generating facilities on Douglas, Fire and Stokke creeks.

“Our intention is to harness the untapped energy of the water in a way that preserves its natural flow and also supports the generation of renewable energy,” said Douglas First Nations Chief Darryl Peters. “This project will allow us to preserve the biodiversity of our lands and waters and create new economic opportunities for our people.”

Run-of-the-river projects are different in design, appearance and impact from conventional hydroelectric projects. Water is diverted from a creek, through a pipeline and into a small powerhouse, where the water produces electricity by turning a turbine. There is very little threat to fish habitats, and it can also provide a long-term source of renewable electricity that can displace energy sources that produce greenhouse gases.

The Douglas First Nation will conduct an archaeological impact assessment and legal land survey to support the establishment of three generating facilities. The project will strengthen their communities’ ability to pursue new

economic opportunities and develop new housing and infrastructure that may attract off-reserve members back to the area.

Unemployment rates for the Band are around 80 per cent. It is significant that several band members were trained as fisheries technicians with previous funding from Cloudworks Energy. Six members will be employed directly in conducting the archaeological assessment and land survey work.

This is just one of eight projects announced by WD in late March to help rural and First Nations communities to develop alternative energy as means to stimulate their economies. For more information, visit [www.wd.gc.ca](http://www.wd.gc.ca). ♦



Chief Darryl Petters (C-L) and Cloudworks Energy Principal David Andrews (C-R) shake hands marking the signing of the participation agreement as band councilors and other Cloudworks representatives look on.

Photo courtesy of David Nairne & Associates.



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# Access West – It's Time to Hear from Our Readers!

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has an inspiring mandate: to promote the development and diversification of the economy of Western Canada, and to advance the region's interests in national policies and programs.

As the Department has moved away from programs and services specifically for small business, so has the focus of *Access West*. In the past two years, the newsletter has provided its readers with a more complete snapshot of WD's three strategic business lines – *Innovation*, *Entrepreneurship* and *Sustainable Communities*. Each of these business lines, although often interconnected, has different readership interests.

The goals of *Access West* are simple. Foster support for WD and its approach toward economic development and diversification in Western Canada. Provide information about WD's investments and activities. Inform potential users of the programs and services offered by Western Economic Diversification Canada, directly or through its partners in the Western Canada Business Service Network.

Now we need to hear from you, our readers. Are you receiving information that is useful, timely and interesting?

We'll even provide some incentive! The names of respondents from each western province will be added into a draw for a WD prize package – two per province.

Watch for the **2004 Readership Survey** in the October-December issue of *Access West* and plan to take a few minutes to provide WD with your feedback. The information you provide will help to ensure we reach our target audience, as well as provide insight into what you would like included in future issues of the newsletter. ♣



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