

The First Perspective: Northern Ontario native receives business award

Contributed by Joseph Quesnel
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Darcy Kejick, a member of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, has received an award for his recent business plan. Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler together with Minister for Small Business and Entrepreneurship Harinder Takhar, POA Educational Foundation Chairman Aditya Jha, and Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF) president Harvey Yesno, awarded contest winner Kejick with \$15,000 toward a business plan during an awards event today at Queen's Park.

Darcy Kejick from North Spirit Lake First Nation (one of NAN's 49 Ontario First Nation communities) received the award for a business plan submitted following his participation in Project Beyshick 2006 - an annual one week youth job-shadowing program focused on entrepreneurship among First Nation youth.

The inaugural award recognizes the participant who prepares the most feasible professional business or career plan.

"A quite intensive schedule was prepared for me to spend my time within the various areas of the bank, job-shadowing and meeting important people who work in each area," said Kejick who job-shadowed HSBC Senior Vice President Geoff Hoy August 2006. "The program is a real eye-opener if you're interested in venturing into the world of business or even if you're curious about it."

Kejick's business plan for "North Spirit Foods" - a grocery store in his First Nation community located northwest of Sioux Lookout - was one of 10 submitted by Project Beyshick 2006 participants.

"The grocery store will provide North Spirit Lake First Nation with all grocery needs, including the much needed diet of dairy and fresh produce," said Kejick. "The store will also meet the needs of those individuals with special dietary needs, diabetes for example."

Kejick expects building materials to arrive in North Spirit Lake mid March via winter road and building will begin this Spring.

Project Beyshick was developed by POA Educational Foundation and Nishnawbe Aski Nation in 2005. NAN youth are partnered with Toronto business executives in their area of interest - job-shadowing for one week learning through mentorship and being part of the staff.

Some of the businesses involved in the past two years include FedEx, TV Ontario, Globe and Mail, HSBC, Trillium Hospital, Canada Trust, ICICI Bank, Bell Canada, GlobalMaxx Technologies, and AMJ Campbell Van Lines.

"Project Beyshick has been an important step in promoting business skills among the NAN youth who've taken part, but it doesn't end there. The youth who've taken part in the job-shadowing program in the past two years are the best examples of the program and its benefits," said NAN Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. "The recognition of Darcy's business plan and the option for other candidates to pursue other support to develop their business plans, are perfect examples of how this experience can open up realistic opportunities for success at the community level."

"Project Beyshick serves as a platform for success in that it helps to enhance leaders with the training and financial backing to succeed," said POA Chairman Aditya Jha. "This inaugural award brings us closer to our vision of a social venture fund for First Nation people."

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is an Aboriginal political organization representing 49 First Nation communities within James Bay Treaty 9 and Ontario First Nations part of Treaty 5 - an area spanning two-thirds of Ontario with a total approximate population of 45,000 members on and off reserve.

POA Educational Foundation is a charitable foundation aiming to provide support for educational and entrepreneurial initiatives that target regions with specific challenges and pressing needs.