

## Omni TV: Project Beyshick 2005

The Nishnawbe Aski Nation nestled near Thunder Bay, Ontario, is larger than France and takes up two thirds of the province, spanning a land mass of 1127x 644 kilometers across the north of the province and is home to 49 First Nation communities. But, according to Grand Chief Stan Beardy, despite the vastness of their nation, his people feel they are second class.

“Under the Indian Act, we’ve been conditioned to think that we’re less than anybody else,” he says. Beardy also says his people need to start believing in themselves if they are to have a successful life. After all, the nation’s motto is, “Unity-Strength-Success. When we are united, we are strong and our strength leads to success in all that we do.”

Now, meet Aditya Jha. Jha is not just a businessman, but he’s a self-made multimillionaire who immigrated to Canada from India in 1994. He says he heard Chief Beardy speak about his people and their needs some time ago and felt a special bond. A bond so strong, Jha is out to prove that no one should ever feel second class.

So Jha flew ten youth from Nishnawbe Aski Nation’s isolated communities first class to Toronto to participate in Project Beyshick (which means number one), a youth mentoring project he spearheaded, to focus on nurturing entrepreneurship among First Nations. During the last week of August these youth had the opportunity to work closely with successful business people in a setting extraordinarily different from their home life. It was also a great opportunity for the urban community to familiarize themselves with the nation and its people, especially the many potential entrepreneurs among the youth involved.

The ten young entrepreneurs were paired with and job shadowed several top Canadian senior business executives of corporations and organizations that best matched the students’ personal goals and interests. Some of the corporations with executives who participated in the program include TV Ontario, AMJ Campbell Van Lines, Trillium Health Care Centre, TD Bank Financial Group, ICICI Bank Canada, Bell Canada, Osellus Inc., and GlobalMaxx Technologies.

After Jha made his fortune by selling his Toronto educational software company to Sun Microsystems for more than \$100 million (U.S.) in 2001, he was flooded with requests for donations. But instead of simply giving money to various charities, Jha decided he wanted to experience first-hand what it really meant to give. Not only did he personally approach about 40 executives to take part in program, but he financed and organized Beyshick himself.

Jha believes governmental approaches should not be the only answer when it comes to exposing native youth to the working world. He says if we nurture youth and let them experience the work of executives firsthand, they will see what the corporate world is like and what it takes to be successful. Grand Chief Beardy agrees, “This is just another example of how we need to place more importance on our youth by empowering them with knowledge and experience that will allow them to be successful in life,” he says.

So successful that both Jha and the Grand Chief are hoping to repeat the program next year and make it bigger. Fifty students will be invited to participate, and not just from Ontario, but from native communities all over Canada. They will get to mentor not just in Toronto, but in big cities in New York, Thailand and India.

For more information on the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, you can log on to their website: [www.nan.on.ca](http://www.nan.on.ca)