



WE HAVE A NEW NAME! ○ ○ ○ ○

In the fall of 2006, the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada engaged in a research exercise to determine a new name and visual identity to better fit the organization's evolving role, its client services model and its competitive advantages.

As a result of this effort, the council will soon operate under a new name – the Aboriginal Human Resource Council. The name change will take place June 2007, primarily during the week of June 18th, when Canada recognizes National Aboriginal Day.

Along with its new name, the council will also utilize the new motto of Connections – Partnerships – Solutions which will appear prominently in all of the council's communications material. A new visual appearance will also be adopted to coincide with the name change.

A number of other identity changes will occur at the same time including:

- The council will launch a new website – www.aboriginalhr.ca. The new site is designed to move the council toward an entrepreneurial presence that profiles both products and services.
• Staff will have new email addresses (example klendsay@aboriginalhr.ca) and the general email address will be changed to contact.us@aboriginalhr.ca

Over the past eight years the council has established its reputation as a national leading innovator in Aboriginal human resource development. The new name will resonate better among Canadians to help increase the council's presence and assert its value proposition in Aboriginal human resources. The Aboriginal Human Resource Council will advance a strong public-private sector growth strategy to better meet the needs of an extended client-base and reinforce its perspectives and opinions are reflective of public, private and Aboriginal constituents. The new maxim; connections – partnerships – solutions, will represent the value the council delivers.



We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

- Gandhi

INSIDE: ○ ○ ○ ○
Spring 2007 – Issue Eleven

We Have a New Name! .....1
HR Practitioners Gather in Ottawa.....1
A Message from Kelly Lendsay, President & CEO.....2
HR Conference Unlocks Aboriginal Workforce Potential...3
The Council Gratefully Acknowledges the Sponsors.....6
Meeting Student Needs Holistically.....7
Charles Coffey – A Greater Sense of Being Canadian.....8
A New Take on Learning – Aboriginal Style.....10
Akina Shirt – The Spirit of Song.....11
How to Identify and Counter Subtle Harassment, or Microequities.....11
Our New Web Site.....12
Upcoming Events..... 12

HR PRACTITIONERS GATHER IN OTTAWA ○ ○ ○ ○

As tulips blossomed in some parts of the country and snowstorms raged in others, more than 300 human resource practitioners from across Canada gathered in Ottawa April 3rd- 5th, 2007 to discuss Aboriginal inclusion strategies.

Hosted by the Aboriginal Human Resource Council (AHRC), the conference on Aboriginal recruitment and retention, titled Unlocking Aboriginal Potential in the Workforce, attracted a packed house of delegates from the government sector, the private sector, the Aboriginal community and training institutions.

Over a three day period, the conference hosted a total of 55 speakers and five keynote speakers who shared their insights, knowledge and hopes for an advanced Aboriginal workforce.

By bringing together like-minded HR practitioners with a common goal, AHRC hoped to create strong networks of change. That hope was realized with enthusiastic dialogue from all participants and a stunningly successful sold-out conference that will be hosted again next year.

See pages 3-6 in this issue for an overview of the conference.



Since the inception of the council in 1998, Canada's business landscape has changed dramatically and, as a council, we've changed, too. Born with seed funding from the federal government, the council has evolved, over time, into a viable private/public sector, not-for-profit partnership that prides itself on being the nation's leading innovators in Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement.

Over the past nine years, we have developed networks, partnerships and relationships, based on integrity and commonality, and with our partners, we have coordinated hundreds of initiatives – all with the shared goal of creating a better future for an Aboriginal workforce.

We have been touched, changed and influenced by the many successes of Aboriginal people, and the shared experiences of our growing list of partners and clients. As a team, we have generated and captured passion from Canadians who are committed to the future prosperity of Aboriginal Peoples, and the economic and social justice fabric of our country...built on the foundation of inclusive workplaces, and an inclusive Canada.

Although a strong foundation has been built, there is so much more that needs to be done.

Canada is currently enjoying a period of unprecedented wealth and prosperity.

In very fast growing economies, a primary constraint on growth and productivity is often the availability of a trained workforce. Over the past few years we have seen such constraints appearing with increasing frequency in diverse sectors of the economy. By 2020, there is estimated to be a shortfall of one million workers in the country, mostly in high skilled and knowledge-oriented occupations. The current labour shortfall has skewed the operations of businesses, impeded their level of productivity, and distorted labour markets. It is anticipated that by 2020, the impact, if left unchecked, will be debilitating.

Economist Richard Florida argues that “the key to productivity rests not with the investment in machinery and equipment, taxation levels or technology, but with people – prosperity follows innovation and innovation is a function, pure and simple, of the caliber of people assigned to the task”.

Canadian CEOs now rank human resources as their number one productivity challenge. The priority and focus on human resources is possibly the most important and substantive element of the productivity agenda because not only may it be the key to enhancing the country's prosperity and productivity, but it also might bring the public more willingly into the debate.

We can also learn from other nations. Sweden's remarkable economic transformation “was achieved by not an exclusive focus on elite education, but by a broader effort aimed at reducing drop out rates in high school and welfare reform to bring the marginalized more fully into the economic mainstream”.

To generate and achieve economic transformation, more business leaders in Canada need to develop a better appreciation of the business case for hiring Aboriginal people. They must encourage and adopt new policies and strategies and invest in short and long-term development of an Aboriginal workforce. The business case for full inclusion is compelling. Aboriginal people fully engaged, educated and employed in the Canadian workplaces would contribute over 12 billion to the GDP.

Government, Aboriginal organizations and communities also need to consider new ways to work with training institutions and employers to prepare Aboriginal people for the future workforce.

There is a social and economic urgency in Canada. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and organizations are accountable for achieving results regardless of how difficult the challenges and obstacles. Facing adversity, channeling our collective efforts, and supporting each other is a commitment that the council makes each day to its partners, clients, and to First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples.

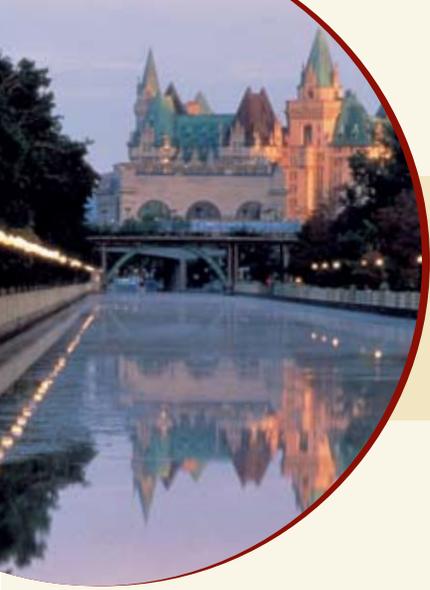
Inclusion is the sense of belonging in our workplaces, our schools our communities. Employment and workplace engagement is the fulcrum to closing and eliminating the socio-economic gaps and achieving full social and economic inclusion.

Thank you to our dedicated supporters and partners who have helped us contribute in the past eight years to increased Aboriginal employment, and a more inclusive Canada.

As we move forward with our new name, Aboriginal Human Resource Council, we will continue to evolve within the unique niche we have carved as Canada's national leaders in Aboriginal human resource. We will improve on what has been done, and we will stay focused on the path we started in 1998, under the maxim of connections – partnerships – solutions.

I invite you to join us and our partners, and begin a path not yet discovered by many employers in Canada – the path of Aboriginal inclusion.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Lensay". The signature is fluid and cursive.



# UNLOCKING ABORIGINAL POTENTIAL IN THE WORKFORCE...

National Aboriginal Recruitment, Retention & Advancement Conference

## HR CONFERENCE UNLOCKS ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE POTENTIAL

During the first week of April 2007, more than 300 human resource professionals from every region of Canada gathered in Ottawa to share their knowledge and insight into Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement.

The *Unlocking Aboriginal Potential in the Workforce* conference was sold out and represented a national first – bringing together delegates from the government sector, the private sector, the Aboriginal community and training institutions.

Over a three-day period, the conference hosted a total of 55 speakers, including five keynote speakers and three Aboriginal entertainment acts which performed for conference attendees at a gala event.

Considered a resounding success, the conference's main objective was to help employers develop better understanding and competencies on Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement.

"The advancement of Aboriginal people in the workplace is a complex issue that cannot be solved without thoughtful strategic consideration for the realities of the Aboriginal community and mainstream workforce," says Kelly Lendsay, president and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Council (AHRC) and conference host.

"It gives me great pride to say that, even in the face of much adversity, the transformation of solutions and proof-of-concept for Aboriginal inclusion in the workplace is evident in Canada and at this conference," he says.

One of the major themes of the conference was the role of an Aboriginal workforce in Canada's future growth, and while the country currently enjoys a period of unprecedented wealth and prosperity, there are troubling signs ahead in the form of staffing shortages.

With skilled labour shortages already impacting business growth, Canada's Aboriginal peoples are poised to fill this void – provided that supportive training initiatives and career opportunities exist.

"To increase Aboriginal participation in the economy, more business leaders in Canada need to develop a better appreciation of the business case for hiring Aboriginal people," says Lendsay.

"They must encourage and adopt new policies and strategies... an investment is needed in the short and long-term development of an Aboriginal workforce."

By bringing together like-minded HR practitioners, conferences such as *Unlocking Aboriginal Potential in the Workforce* will help foster strong networks of change as organizations and communities consider new ways to work with employers to prepare Aboriginal candidates for the future workforce.

"Focus on economic development is critical to Canada's productivity," notes Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation and AHRC board member.

"However, attention must be given to the key driver of productivity – human resource development," he says.

As delegates left the conference with a better understanding of how the Aboriginal workforce could be accelerated into Canada's growing labour market, many commented on the positive outcomes of an event that promoted a better understanding of the role of human resource development in general.

For those who missed the conference or for those who want to revisit favourite sessions or take advantage of missed seminars, keynote and workshop PowerPoint presentations are posted on the AHRC website ([www.aboriginalhr.ca/HRconference/](http://www.aboriginalhr.ca/HRconference/)) as they become available.

Delegates will be notified by email when the conference proceedings are available to view on-line. As well, the conference will be offered again in 2008.



Independence doesn't end with having a job but that's where it starts  
– Chief Clarence Louie

Some of the thoughts of some of the presenters at the conference: ○ ○ ○ ○

"Systems today have the same devastating effect on Aboriginal peoples that smallpox had in the past."  
*Dr. Trent Keough, Portage College*

"Integrity means who I am as a real person shows on the outside."  
*Gray Poehnell, Co-author, Guiding Circles*

"We focus on high potential Aboriginal candidates, hoping to bring them into management."  
*Shana Bradley, Suncor Energy*

"Australia has reformed its approach. The key aim of the new strategy is to support the economic independence of indigenous families."  
*Jody Hamilton, HRSDC (Seconded from the Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations)*

"Many of the injustices that occurred only a generation or two ago would be unlawful today."  
*Chief Ian Davidson, Sudbury Police Force*

"We're trying to bring science and technology classes to the North so they can experience post-secondary education."  
*Darwin Roy, Cameco*

"Getting the right people into the right jobs also means getting the right mix of people."  
*Denise McBride, Shell Canada*



“  
I'd rather be hated for what I am rather than be loved for what I am not.  
”

*Farley Flex – Judge, Canadian Idol*



“  
Of the nearly nine billion dollars the federal government gives out [to Aboriginal people], only four percent goes to economic development.  
”

*Andrew Popko – VP, Aboriginal Relations, EnCana*

"The most useful ideas I learned and will apply from this conference are too many to list."  
– George Webber, Aramark

"I learned a lot about barriers and solutions, the importance of the interview and the pre-interview process."  
– Lisette Richard, Health Canada

"It is nice to know many companies are facing the same issues and coming up with different ideas to address them."  
– Stacy Lefevre, DeBeers Canada



“  
If you want to leave footprints in the sand, put on work boots.”  
”  
Chief Clarence Louie – Osoyoos Band

“You have your own identity because you have the support of people around you.”  
*Dr. Norm Amundsen*

“Government is so complex, we hire consultants to figure out how we can use government funding to help Aboriginal people.”  
*Andrew Popko, EnCana*

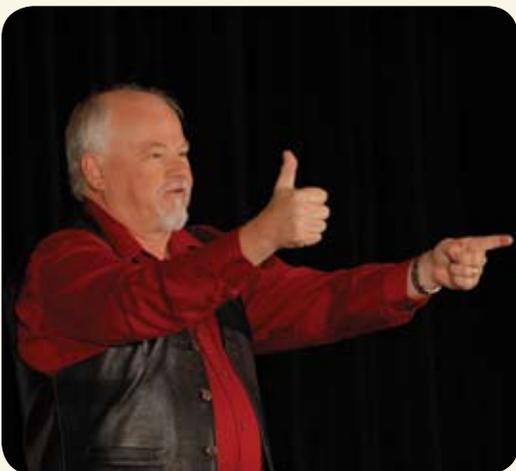
“What would this workplace be like if ‘Susan’ (a female) were not there?”  
*Farley Flex*



“  
Turn off the lights, we are all equal. The only race worth talking about is the human race.”  
”  
Dr. Neil McDonald – Cross-Cultural Consulting

“You don't have to be prejudiced to discriminate. Self-interest is enough. For example, it's easy to discriminate against people from First Nations if you believe everything they get is for free.”  
*Dr. Neil McDonald*

“We seem to be able to recruit and retain our Aboriginal woman employees more than Aboriginal employees generally.”  
*Shana Bradley, Suncor Energy*



“  
Meeting the needs of employees has become as important as meeting the needs of customers.”  
”  
Dr. Norman Amundsen, Professor, UBC & Co-Author of Guiding Circles

“It's not just a job – it's a person.”  
*Denise McBride, Shell Canada*

“I always tell people, the most important counselling you give should end in employment counselling.”  
*Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos First Nation*

## When the Laughs Were on Everyone

Whether it was the competitive efforts at throat-singing by two halves of the audience, or the stunning rhythms and dances of an Inuit trio, or the uncanny reawakening of Kermit the Frog, the evening's entertainment was engulfing, invigorating and easily the equal of any evening of entertainment anywhere in Canada. We're so pumped about these performers we encourage you to book them for your events; contact information is on page 6.



Inuit cultural performers sang and performed with a bracing combination of grace and gusto



Recently the Disney Company announced that Derrick Starlight will be the new voice of Kermit the Frog – a better-than-suitable choice, according to the audience's reactions.



Métis singer Sheldon Elter acquired a following as a performer on Canadian Idol; with the brio and wit of his singing, he expanded that following at the night's gala.

## THE COUNCIL GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SPONSORS:

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## Watch for the 2008 National Aboriginal Recruitment, Retention and Advancement Conference

The council is planning to host a second national conference in Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement in the spring of 2008. We will announce a call for papers and more pertinent information about the upcoming conference in the fall. Watch in the council website ([www.aboriginalhr.ca](http://www.aboriginalhr.ca)) or in the *National Report on Aboriginal Inclusion*, Issue #12, due in November.

## Psst – want to book a great entertainment act?

One worthy and long-established tradition of Aboriginal employment is entertainment. We would like to see more Aboriginal entertainers hired, particularly such fabulously good ones as were heard the evening of April 4th in Ottawa. Booking sources for Kendra Tagoona and her group are 613.889-0765; for Sheldon Elter 780.217.1979; for Derrick Starlight 780.217-1979.

## WHAT THE NEWS HEADLINES SAID

National Post –  
"Employers hungry for workers, Human Resource Minister says"

The Vancouver Sun –  
"Labour shortage benefits aboriginals"

Montreal Gazette –  
"Red-hot job market opens to immigrants, aboriginals: Solberg; Minister sees upside for other minorities, too"

The Edmonton Journal –  
"Solberg sees boom benefits for aboriginals; Other unemployed also stand to gain from hot job market"

The Leader-Post, Regina –  
"Labour shortage benefits aboriginals"

The Windsor Star –  
"Northern industrial boom good news for aboriginals"

The Daily News, Nanaimo, B.C. –  
"Businesses finally reaching out to aboriginal workers"

The Star-Phoenix, Saskatoon –  
"Society to benefit from shortage of workers: Solberg"

## MEETING STUDENT NEEDS HOLISTICALLY ○ ○ ○ ○

For 12 years now, Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, has not only offered an Aboriginal division but it has been one of the few post-secondary institutions to actually have a dean of Aboriginal education.

As a progressive initiative born from a consultative process, the creation of a dean position was ground-breaking in its day.

“In the early 1990s, the college met with community members and First Nations communities to ask what they could do to support Aboriginal students and one of the findings that came out of the forums was to have a dean of Aboriginal education,” says Marti Ford, the current dean of Aboriginal education for Red River College.

Today, Ford is the third dean – with the first two deans having both retired.

As Ford notes, even today, very few post-secondary institutes have made such an extensive commitment to Aboriginal learning. With an array of programs available, Red River College has customized their Aboriginal resources to include:

- A student support group.
- A student support centre.
- A transition program called Biindigen (“Welcome” in Ojibway).
- Outreach “learning trips” to various venues from women’s shelters to Manitoba Hydro.
- An elder-in-residence program to provide guidance, teachings and cultural support.
- An urban orientation program for incoming rural/remote students.
- A mentorship program using college alumni.
- An Aboriginal recruitment officer to assist with job placement and career planning.
- A medicine wheel garden where traditional teachings can take place.
- A time out program to assist with down time activities for students.
- A student community Christmas party for adults and children.
- A student community kitchen program to teach the preparation of low-cost, nutritious meals.
- A graduation pow wow ceremony with honour song.

The college also offers Access model programs which were first introduced in the 1970s. Designed to help Aboriginal students, inner city students and new immigrants, the programs provide support to obtain an education as well as to break the cycle of poverty that many experience.

“It’s such a short time that you see such a huge change in people; it’s why I’m in adult education,” says Ford.

“I look at peoples’ lives changing all the time...they may be on social assistance when they come in and do the Access nursing program, and four years later, when they graduate, they graduate into a job where they’re making twenty-five dollars an hour.”

“I remember saying to a student who had just graduated, “So, what’s new?” and she said, “What’s new! Marti, I’ve got new furniture...my child has new clothes...we’ve got a new car. We’ve got everything now.”

Ford says the ultimate goal at Red River College is to have post-secondary education systems teaching students holistically using Aboriginal methods.

“We’re working on curriculum development using the medicine wheel as a tool for holistic learning and teaching and we’ve presented it at four different conferences across Canada,” she says.

“So far, people are saying, “What a great idea, we need to see more of this.”

Clearly, using a holistic approach, training institutions can meet the needs of students in a well-rounded way that addresses many concerns.

“You can have a student who is as motivated as anything but if they’re sitting in your classroom and they’re thinking, “How am I going to feed my kids this week?” or “Where am I going to get money to pay my rent?” or “How am I going to get home because I don’t have a bus pass?” then they’re not going to learn anything,” she says.

“It doesn’t matter how motivated the student is, it’s the other supports that we can provide that helps them get through each one of these days so their motivation can be utilized to make them successful students.”



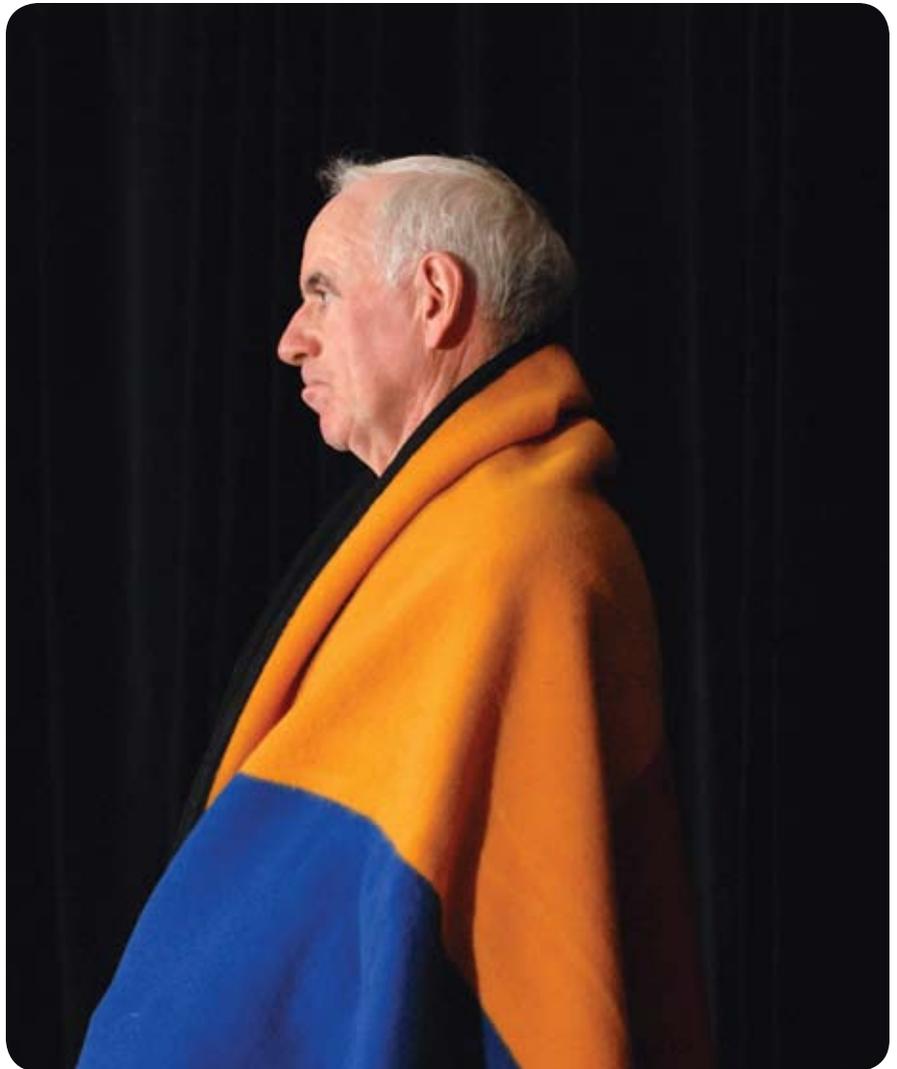
Marti Ford, Dean of Aboriginal Education for Red River College

“

People may forget what you say and people may forget what you do. But they will never forget how you made them feel.

”

– Charlie Coffey, O.C.



Only a handful of Canadians can claim the title of humanitarian but Charles Coffey is certainly one of them.

For those who have been touched by Coffey and his many endeavors, they might also say that he qualifies for the title of angel, guardian and champion.

In a 2006 tribute to Coffey at an Aboriginal Human Resources Council (AHRC) retirement function, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean noted, “The people in the room, who have gathered here in your honour, have all been touched by your leadership, your compassion and your vision.”

Over the years, those wonderful words had been echoed by many – from young Aboriginal students to early childhood educators because Coffey had not only supported diversity in Canada, he has lived it.

Through his varied interests and volunteer roles, Coffey was able to support and encourage an astonishing number of organizations including the Council for Early Childhood

Development, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board and the AHRC.

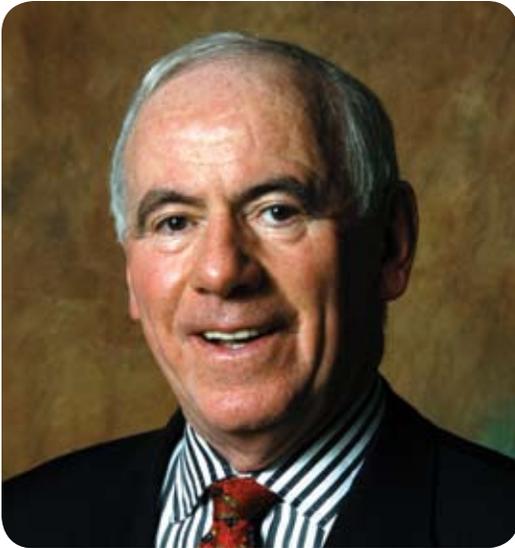
In 2004, Coffey’s commitment and dedication to serving others was formally and officially recognized by his investiture into the Order of Canada.

“Charlie has given so much back to Canada,” says Kelly Lendsay, president and CEO of the AHRC. “He believes in social justice and social cohesion...he also believes there is no economic justice without social justice.”

“Charlie was courageous in fostering a very humanist approach to inclusion,” adds Lendsay.

In her 2006 citation, Her Excellency also made mention of Coffey’s commitment to serving others and his wisdom which, as she noted, would be passed to the next generation of visionaries.

Continued on page 9



It was a fitting tribute for a man who believed that as youth assumed the leadership role, that they should set their own course.

“He is a very kind, open, interested and genuine individual,” says Jaime Koebel, coordinator for education, language, culture and youth for the Metis National Council, who spoke at a retirement function for Coffey. “He is truly interested in seeing the successful development and growth of Aboriginal youth, even at a time when it wasn’t popular to be Aboriginal.”

On a personal level, she noted that Coffey had helped her to make many contacts and that she banked at the RBC because of him.

“I encourage others to bank there because I know that the top level cares about Aboriginals,” says Koebel.

Recently retired, Coffey, a native of Woodstock, NB, began and ended his career with the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) where he excelled to the position of executive vice-president of government affairs and business development. During that time, he also headed three regional headquarters: Manitoba, metro Toronto and Ontario.

Renowned for his desire to work on behalf of marginalized groups in society, Coffey led by example. Through his role with the Royal Bank of Canada, he was able to influence others in a way that few are able to do, including encouraging major corporations to donate a percentage of their annual profits to charity.

Throughout his career, Coffey made community leadership a central focus of his relationships with others. He especially enjoyed spending time interacting with young people, entrepreneurs, and Aboriginal peoples although Coffey’s efforts on behalf of them extended well beyond the parameters of his association with RBC.

In a recent interview, Coffey talked about his passion and dedication to a diverse range of interests and what he had been involved in since retiring.

“I’m doing a lot of speaking now...I’m trying to encourage more women to go into politics,” he says. “I’m basically lobbying women to think about entering the political sphere.”

“However, I’ve noticed that I have a lot more demands now that I don’t have an executive assistant,” adds Coffey, with a laugh.

Coffey says he also regularly speaks on the importance of diversity in Canada, a lesson he says that gave him a “greater sense of who I am as a Canadian.”

“We have a huge need to ensure the survival and celebration of the Aboriginal culture...the importance of culture, language and heritage cannot be overstated,” he says. “Unfortunately, there is a huge underestimation of Aboriginal peoples.”

Ultimately, Canada is richer for the legacy of Coffey’s passions which continue to this day – an imprint that will echo long after his retirement, especially since he says that he “hasn’t retired from life” and plans to keep pursuing his interests.

But, ever modest, Coffey points out that there are “many Coffeys out there, you just need to get engaged and find a champion.”

“I often end my speeches with this advice; smile with your eyes, outreach with your heart and do your job with your head.”

“People may forget what you say and people may forget what you do. But they will never forget how you made them feel.” he says.

Ironically, for many Canadians, young and old, they will never forget how Charles Coffey made them feel because of what he said and did.

## The Legacy of a Great Champion

**Charles Coffey’s leadership, proven record and reputation in private, public and not-for-profit sectors across the country, resulted in several appointments and special honours.**

- Appointed an Officer to the Order of Canada in 2004.
- Named an honorary chief in 1997 for his support of First Nations and their goals of economic development and self-sufficiency by former Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.
- Received the Canadian Women’s International Business Initiative award from the Canadian embassy in the US for the Royal Bank of Canada’s outstanding support of businesswomen.
- Received the Award of Distinction from the Public Affairs Association of Canada.
- Received the Order of St. Michael for his work in support of St. Michael’s College School in Toronto.
- An amphitheatre in the new Canada Student Residences at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, Israel will be named in his honour.
- Received the Humanitarian award for community service from Yorktown Family Services in Toronto.



Edna Harder Mattson

“  
The more Aboriginal nurses that graduate, the more we will see an increase in the standard of Aboriginal health care.”

”

After more than 30 years in the nursing profession, Edna Harder Mattson has seen it all. Her career as a nurse has taken her to foreign countries, involved her in high-profile projects and allowed her to become part of isolated northern communities.

It was on one of these adventures, fulfilling a contract for a northern university, that she was struck by the irony of too few Aboriginal students despite an Aboriginal community surrounding the university.

When Mattson enquired as to why there weren't more Aboriginal students, she was told that they weren't often successful due to the anatomy and physiology and mathematical mastery required for drug calculations.

It was that chance experience that altered Mattson's career path, prompting her to establish her own nursing tutorial business ([www.nursingreview.ca](http://www.nursingreview.ca)) to ensure that Aboriginal students are successful.

Today, as president of Canadian Nursing Tutorial Services, Mattson has helped more than 3,000 students by offering a unique approach that appeals to the Aboriginal learner. It's an approach that is both holistic and big picture, recognizing the way in which Aboriginal students process information and knowledge.

“They don't compartmentalize...they see things holistically,” she explains.

“Adult Aboriginal learners also need to see the relationship between knowledge and career so I use a lot of real-life stories to assist with learning.”

“Typically, I use this approach to help them to prepare for exams or national licensing requirements,” she says.

And that approach has helped many Aboriginal students leapfrog over hurdles and barriers to graduate as nurses.

Aboriginal nurses provide a great “fit” for community nursing, says Mattson, given their cultural lifestyle of living within a large family setting that includes seniors and babies.

“And the more Aboriginal nurses that graduate, the more we will see an increase in the standard of Aboriginal health care,” she adds.

Today, the Canadian health care system is increasingly focusing on the determinants of health. Nowhere are those determinants more glaringly obvious than in First Nations communities.

Ironically, educational institutions struggle with finding a suitable clinical practicum for nursing students while First Nations communities are not considered, despite providing an excellent learning opportunity with all ages and stages of life, says Mattson.

“If educational institutions have difficulty in providing learner-centered teaching strategies, then inclusion and success in the workplace will be increasingly problematic,” she says.

Intrigued by the perspective of the Aboriginal learner, Mattson developed four pre-learning modules to address the common areas where student difficulties were occurring.

Now, after having the opportunity to work with so many students, she says these Aboriginal learner concepts can also be applied to “dominant” society as well.

“We need to turn around faster as a society...if something is not working, then we need try out new solutions,” says Mattson.

“We also need to adapt educational institutions and workplaces for the Aboriginal learner.”

“I would suggest that this is a very realistic approach to inclusiveness and offers a win-win approach for the learner, the educational institution and the employer.”

Aboriginal learners and employers are very willing to teach what is required for inclusiveness; however the question that remains to be asked is “are we ready to learn?” she says.

## AKINA SHIRT – THE SPIRIT OF SONG



Music has always united appreciative fans from around the globe, but recently it was music that united a nation.

During a February, 2007 hockey game in Calgary, Akina Shirt, a young 13-year-old singer from Edmonton, made history by singing Canada's national anthem in Cree. With television cameras focused on her, it was the first time many Canadians had ever heard the Cree language in song.

"For many people, it instilled a lot of pride...we got emails from all over Canada," says her mother, Jean Cardinal. "It brought a nation together".

Akina was given one week to prepare and she worked diligently, says her mother. The anthem's translation into Cree was provided by an instructor from Hobema, Alberta, although Akina's great-grandmother also speaks Cree.

"My great-grandmother, Edna, has a beautiful voice...she used to sing in church," says Akina. "She taught me a few words in Cree but I had to look over the notes everyday."

"I wasn't nervous a few days before but, about 20 minutes before, I got scared," she says.

Akina says hearing all the crowd cheering gave her to confidence to perform. "It was a proud moment for me," she adds.

More recently in March, Akina was asked to perform at a Government House francophone event in Edmonton. In another first, she sang the anthem in three languages; Cree,

French and English. "It turned out lovely...and these events have provided so many opportunities," says her mother, Jean.

"Now, she has become a public speaker...she speaks on education and on being a role model for others."

"I had no idea she could speak like that," she says, proudly.

Akina's message to others is one of perseverance. She also talks about the role of supportive parents and the work needed to develop a talent or skill set.

Despite singing in four choirs and at numerous engagements including a gang symposium, headstart conference and an educational seminar, Akina works hard herself to keep up with homework.

Currently in Grade 8, she is an honors student at the Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts in Edmonton.

Recently, Akina was commissioned to perform a new piece of music that is being translated into Cree. She has also been asked to perform at a new installation in the Royal Museum in Toronto.

"Despite all the exposure, she is still grounded and takes it all in stride," says Jean.

And Akina's advice to other hopeful singers? "Take every opportunity to do what you love and follow your dreams," she says.



Akina Shirt unites a nation by singing Canada's national anthem in Cree.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY AND COUNTER SUBTLE HARASSMENT, OR MICROEQUITIES



Very often, the racist acts that occur in the modern workplace are not conspicuous, in-your-face acts of overt racism. They are subtle acts, which researchers have called microinequities.

Microinequities are small slights that can lead to large problems. The targets of repeated microinequities are being told, again and again, that they are "less" than others and the expectations held for them are less than they are for others.

Mary P. Rowe of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been studying microinequities for 30 years. "Microinequities occur whenever people are perceived to be different," she says. "These mechanisms of prejudice against persons of difference are usually small in nature, but not trivial in effect. They are especially powerful taken together."

Here are some examples of microinequities:

- The boss is much more attentive to one employee than to another, who is Aboriginal.
- A new Aboriginal employee sits alone at the cafeteria because no established group has shown any indication of welcoming her.

- There is much soft murmuring in a group while one person presents, as if it's okay to distract themselves now, but not at other times.
- One employee consistently treats another employee in a slightly condescending manner.
- A manager is more easily distracted while one person is speaking, than when others speak.
- Some are greeted when they join a group, others are ignored.

How can a company combat these microinequities? Here are five recommended steps:

1. Promote the notion of a workplace free of even the slightest acts of racism – or subtle microinequities.
2. Create a context where these subtle harassments can be openly discussed and recognized – such as an Aboriginal employees support group, or a support group for Asian-born minorities.
3. Use surveys and regular interviews to offer employees routes for identifying subtle acts of racism.
4. Ensure that employees and managers have access to appropriate training in cross-cultural relations and the creation of a non-racist workplace.
5. Train supervisors to be scrupulously attentive to the presence of microinequities in the workplace.

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