EDUCATION

TeKnoWave: creating a wave of native IT talent

By Kelly Many Guns and Grant Thomas

Responding to the continuing demand for Aboriginal information technology (IT) professionals, the TeKnoWave program will train students in the fundamentals of this occupation to bridge the skills gap, create new employment opportunities, promote entrepreneurship and spur economic growth in Aboriginal communities.

Panel presenting the TeKnoWave program at 2003 IANE National Conference, May 22, in Ottawa. (Left to right): Joselyn Grant, member of the Tlingit Nation, J.T. Norton Scholarship Willis student; Rima Aristocrat, President & CEO, Willis College; Grant Thomas, CEO, Knowledge Resources Canada Inc; and Thomas International; Travis Russell, from Nova Scotia, member of the Labrador Metis association, Willis graduate from Oracle Developer Program; Tina Leblanc - Web Master, NNAPF, an Ojibway from the Sagamok Anishinawbek First Nation, Willis 2001 graduate from Web Developer program.

John Bernard, president of Donna Cona Inc., Canada's leading Aboriginal-run systems integration company says TeKnoWave will train Aboriginal IT workers who, as part of their education, must create a project for their home community.

"Education is critical for our Aboriginal youth to develop both personally and professionally. TeKnoWave prepares our youth to become future leaders and builds stronger, more self-sufficient communities, " said Bernard, a Maliseet from northern New Brunswick. "There have been many times that I've seen disappointment in the face of Aboriginal students who have come to me looking for work and we both realize that what they've studied has nothing to do with what I'm looking for."

TeKnoWave is Canada's first national Aboriginal technology training program with a goal to train 1000 Aboriginal IT professional over the next three years. The program is based on the proven model "Five Pillars of Career Development":

1. Ministry accreditation and international industry certification
2. Private sector involvement in curriculum development and job placement
3. Blended career college and university courses, both technical and management
4. Transfer of course credits to university undergraduate studies to create a lifelong continuous learning framework
5. Mandatory community internship projects to ensure the engagement of local leaders and the delivery of benefits to local communities.

The program is supported by a concerned and growing partnership that includes Canada's Aboriginal leaders, a premier private IT college: Willis College of Business and Technology, the University of Winnipeg, the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC), community centres such as the Odawa Native Friendship Centre, Abori-ginal companies such as Donna Cona and AHRDAs such as O- GI.

"The Council is proud to be a partner in TeKnoWave; an initiative that puts Aboriginal talent at the forefront of today's technology, improving the lives of trainees as well as the employers and communities they serve," says Kelly Lendsay, president of AHRDCC.

In September 2003, TeKnoWave will be launched with the first 20 students at the Odawa Native Friendship Centre in Ottawa. A one-year network-engineering program is being delivered from facilities, which have been developed at the centre within the Aboriginal community to ensure that community-based social support is available to all students. Admission requirements are based on the Private Career College Act, Willis College, and the University of Winnipeg.

Last September, Rima Aristocrat, president and CEO of Willis College and the inspiration behind TeKnoWave announced an $18,000 scholarship, named in honour of Mohawk Grand Chief Joseph T. Norton of Kahnawake, which would be awarded annually to a First Nation, Inuit or Métis student to pursue IT studies at Willis College. An additional $12,000 was raised from the partners to cover travel and living expenses.

Willis' IT diploma and the University of Winnipeg's management studies, a 48-week program, provides Willis and TeKnoWave graduates with 27-30 university credits towards a degree in the University's Department of Business Computing & Administrative Studies. Students will also receive industry certifications, a post-secondary IT diploma and a portfolio of practical experience.

Michael Tokunaga, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Offficers (CANDO) IT coordinator, agrees this program will help fill the gap in the information technology field.

"Many Aboriginal communities and organizations have access to computers, but are lacking in the technical assistance needed to help the computers run smoothly," says Tokunaga. ▲

Story courtesy of CANDO N-Side News

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