



First Nations Voice and North West Company – a new relationship

BY MARTIN ZEILIG

A new relationship between First Nations Voice (FNV) and The North West Company (NWC) will bring benefits to both partners – something that bodes well for the future.

That's no idle comment.

Just ask the two people who initiated this arrangement: Al Isfeld, publisher and owner of FNV – a national, non-political, privately owned paper, which first began publishing in 2008; and, Michael McMullen, Executive Vice-President of the Northern Canada Retail Division of NWC – a leading retailer of food and everyday products and services (which is headquartered in Winnipeg and traces its roots back to 1668) to rural communities and urban neighbourhoods across Canada, Alaska, the South Pacific and the Caribbean.

"I think this is an opportunity for the First Nations Voice to profile its working relationship with First Nations over many years," said Isfeld during an interview with a reporter.

"It's also an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with all the First Nations communities that are presently serviced by NWC and all their northern stores. It adds to the credible relationship that FNV already has in Winnipeg and with other distribution partners."

McMullen, meanwhile, emphasized that NWC wanted an association with a voice in the Aboriginal community that has "resonance" – a publication that is respected and has real growth potential.

"For us, the paper reaches key communities. Its editorial content is based around strong positive messages from First Nations leaders," he offered.

"We also believe that this is a vehicle in a practical business sense. It's providing a strong and direct communications channel to the communities we operate in. We'll utilize the relationship and advertisements to recruit both management and management training positions. We will also be distributing FNV in 62 of our communities."

Isfeld observes that First Nations and Aboriginal people face "challenging obstacles," particularly privately owned First Nation/Aboriginal businesses trying to do business with private sector companies and all levels of governments.

"We can in a positive way create an equal playing field for education, jobs and doing everyday business," he explained.

"The First Nations Voice is meant to be used by all First Nation/Aboriginal individu-

als, groups, organizations, and the private sector as well as all levels of government who wish to participate, through sharing of information, and educating each other."

Significantly, as well, this new relationship fits in well with The North West Company mandate, mentioned McMullen.

"Our company is driven by a strategy aimed at growing 'with and within' each market we serve," he said.

"You can see this commitment in our continuous expansion into new products and services and in our effort to tailor each store's merchandise mix to the community it serves. While the ongoing expansion of our food offering continues to drive sales growth, complementary products and services including financial services, healthcare, motor vehicles and gas retailing are growing contributors to our continued success."

"At the store level, NWC continues to invest in the skills and technology required to refine its merchandise selection and ordering capabilities", commented McMullen.

"This combined with the insight of our local managers, enables us to deliver the best merchandise at the best price, one community, and one customer, at a time," he added.

NWC is also a big supporter of Community Support programs with a focus on sports and recreation, culture and arts, healthy living and environmental sustainability within the various communities in which it operates.

For example, noted McMullen, last year the company helped more

than 7,000 community members to participate in sporting events.

"Every year, we give more than 450,000 dollars to communities for cultural events and performing arts," he said, noting, too, that since 2000 The NWC has raised more than \$2 million for the Canadian Diabetes Association and the American Diabetes Association.

In this day of heightened environmental concern, NWC has, not surprisingly, initiated an environment and sustainability program.

"Since we started our *Greener Tomorrow* program in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Nunavik, plastic bags have been reduced by more than 60 percent," said McMullen, who has been with the company for five years now, stressing that

Continued on P13 >>



Michael McMullen, North West Company and Al Isfeld, First Nations Voice.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP

<< Continued from P12

every year, his company gives more than \$180,000 in scholarships and education assistance help to its staff and community members.

All of these Community Support programs fits in well with the objectives of FNV.

“One of our main goals is to create partnerships that will help eradicate First Nation/Aboriginal poverty by providing access to economic opportunities and jobs in the private sector,” said Isfeld.

“We want to promote issues relating to First Nation/Aboriginal business, culture, health, education and our languages to the public and in schools, including the workplace where applicable. The fastest growing population demographically is the First Nation/Aboriginal community.”

The publication already offers some company profiles where job opportunities can be identified by the private sector businesses as well as First Nation/Aboriginal organizations.

“Private sector companies, Crown Corporations and Industry who derive their livelihood by providing services or commodities to Aboriginal and First Nation individuals and communities can use the ‘First Nations Voice’ as a Direct Marketing venue and as a job recruitment vehicle, using their individual procurement strategy,” says information on the FNV website.

McMullen and Isfeld began their initial discussions about this partnership three years ago when FNV was first launched, noted McMullen.

“But, it was at the third anniversary celebrations in 2011 that we decided to create a longer term relationship,” he said.

“From our perspective the commitment to this relationship was predicated on the strength of the Aboriginal leadership as presented in FNV.”

McMullen describes this relationship as a new perspective in the three R’s: The message has to **resonate** with the community; NWC can help it **reach** the Aboriginal communities; It is an excellent **recruitment** vehicle for The NWC.

“We will be advertising in FNV on a monthly basis,” he said.

“It will focus on a mix of promotions and healthy living, including low cost meal recipes and later in 2012 Aboriginal scholarship programs.”

For his part, Isfeld praised the “first rate service” provided to First Nations people by NWC for many decades now.

“We’re moving into the future,” he said, noting that FNV already has a partnership with three major auto dealerships in Winnipeg and will be marketing them through the Wasaya Group, Inc. in the publication’s pages, as well as being the only First Nations newspaper to carry the APTN T.V. Guide in every issue.

“We at FNV are excited to be part of this process. This opens the door for any other corporation or business to reach their target market through our publication. FNV is looking for any meaningful partnerships that will be of benefit to First Nations communities. We owe some gratitude to all the wonderful partners who are coming to our table to try and better the lives of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples.”

Now that is something we can all support.

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Chiefs of the North Shore Tribal Council say **NO!** to a multi-billion dollar nuclear waste disposal project in their territory

NORTH SHORE TRIBAL COUNCIL (Cutler, Ontario) December 20 – The First Nations of the North Shore Tribal Council strongly reject the prospect of the North Shore of Lake Huron becoming a site for the long-term storage of nuclear waste for the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO).

The City of Elliot Lake has publicly expressed interest in possibly becoming one of the sites for the long-term disposal of nuclear waste for Canada’s nuclear industry. Elliot Lake has a long history of uranium mining that resulted in the boom and bust of the city, as well as significant and lasting environmental damage to the local watershed and nearby ceremonial grounds. In addition, there are dozens of tailings ponds surrounding Elliot Lake currently waiting for a solution for their safe disposal.

“We cannot idly stand by and watch as they inject Mother Earth with this cancer,” says Chief Lyle Sayers, Chairman of the North Shore Tribal Council. “We must ensure that the future natural resources of this area are there for our children, gen-

erations to come, and businesses alike.”

The half-life of this material is hundreds of thousands of years old and could impact generation after generation. No site can ever be totally safe for nuclear waste storage.

“Natural disasters sometimes happen, such as we’ve seen in Japan. It could make this whole area a nuclear wasteland suitable for only that industry,” says Chief Sayers.

Our statement to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and to the Nuclear Waste Management Organization is: Do not waste your financial resources if you plan to conduct a study in this area because a nuclear waste dump is not going to happen here.

The North Shore Tribal Council represents seven First Nation communities across the North Shore of Lake Huron. Chief Lyle Sayers is the Chief of the Garden River First Nation and also the Chairman of the North Shore Tribal Council.

~ Alan Ozawanimke,
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Chambers sign memorandum of understanding

At the sold out Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce Annual Gala Dinner on November 16, 2011, the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce, The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce co-signed an historic Model Aboriginal Procurement Policy Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU, believed to be the first of its kind in North America, is intended to foster and encourage the participation of more Aboriginal businesses in Manitoba’s main stream economy.

“Procurement practices, or the purchasing of goods, services or construction, are ways to assist in the development of Aboriginal Business and create a more inclusive business climate in Manitoba and across Canada,” said Andrew Clarke, Chair of the Board, Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce. “The Policy is intended to provide opportunities, not hand outs, and its success depends on satisfied customers, just like the success of every other business venture.”

“The purpose of the MOU is to help Mani-

toba companies connect more successfully with Aboriginal suppliers of goods and services,” said Manitoba Chambers’ President, Graham Starmer. “A good Aboriginal procurement program is a hallmark strategy designed to strengthen corporate social responsibility and enhance partnerships with the Aboriginal community for the benefit of both sides and Manitoba as a whole,” he added.

By signing this MOU, the three Chambers will use their strengths to enhance procurement opportunities, both in the public and private sectors, as well as enhancing relationship building and the potential for partnership opportunities between the Aboriginal and mainstream business communities.

THE MODEL ABORIGINAL PROCUREMENT POLICY RESOLUTION, approved at the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce Annual General Meeting, and the MOU are available at www.aboriginalchamber.ca

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