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## New generation of entrepreneurs get their due

### YOUNG HONOURED

#### Hall of Fame widens focus in 2014

Young aboriginal entrepreneurs will be among the annual honorees at the Aboriginal Hall of Fame beginning in 2014.

Erin Meehan, president of ESS North America, and co-chair of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business board of directors, says recognizing the lifetime achievement of chiefs, band council members and business leaders in the community has always been fundamental to the CCAB's success.

But starting next year, ESS will sponsor a cash award for young business leaders.

“We are driving our programs to make aboriginal businesses have a footprint in the economy

“The Aboriginal Hall of Fame honours will split into two awards. The first will be the Lifetime Achievement Award and the second will be the Aboriginal Entrepreneur of the Year Award,” she says.

The award will be open to candidates who are aboriginal entrepreneurs who are 35 years of age or under. It will include a \$10,000 prize for use in the entrepreneur's business endeavours.

Ms. Meehan says it's her hope the excitement surround-

ing the entrepreneurial program will create increasing interest in the CCAB's Aboriginal Business Mentorship Program (ABMP).

“We want to be able to ensure that the experience, the ingenuity and all of the amazing things that make them entrepreneurs is supported by a financial contribution. We are really trying to drive our programs to make aboriginal businesses have a footprint in the Canadian economy.”

ESS North America is part of Compass Group Canada, a leading food services and support services company, with revenues of \$1.45-billion in 2011. It has 25,000 associates across the country and is part of a larger global organization with some 470,000 associates worldwide.

In Canada, the company specializes in school and university dining, business and industry, stadiums and major events, such as the Canadian Open golf tournament.

ESS operates in defence, offshore and remote sites, such as mining developments, where Meehan said the company has significant involvement with aboriginal people.

“Where they typically operate — and where our units are — are on lands that are traditional aboriginal lands,” says Ms. Meehan, who is based in Mississauga, Ont.

“The bulk of mining activities, whether it's in terms of infrastructure, oil and gas, iron ore, coal and diamonds, all that business is happening on traditional aboriginal lands. By the very nature of the fact that we live and work on those lands, we believe we have a responsibility as an organization to be a positive, contributing member to those communities.”

She says the company has been involved with the CCAB for about 10 years and noted that when the organization was



Erin Meehan says the CCAB awards program will expand to help promote entrepreneurs.

formed, a number of its leaders already had ongoing working relationships with people in her company.

Ms. Meehan, as co-chair, has been part of the board of directors for three years and is proud to be part of its continuing development. “I have seen an incredible amount of growth in CCAB over the last 12 months,” she says.

Ms. Meehan says aboriginal people will be a growing source of employees for Canadian businesses in the next three to five years. “And the best way

you can ensure you get good employees is to join the communities, offer your expertise in terms of business and jobs and take advantage of training opportunities.”

She emphasizes how important it is for companies to reach out and build relationships with aboriginal people and communities across the country.

“I cannot stress enough that a community and a corporation do not always have the same goals and aspirations. We joined CCAB to share some of

the learning that we had within the marketplace and within aboriginal communities to ensure that as more and more opportunities became available for aboriginal communities, that there were some best practices that people could use to build a framework.

“We were able to help people build businesses with aboriginal communities and for our own business to grow and broker new relationships that hopefully will take us into the next 25 years.”

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## Aboriginal businesses stating their case

### SUCCESS STORIES

It's easy to hear the pride in JP Gladu's voice when he talks about the success of aboriginal businesses in Canada.

Mr. Gladu, president and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), says people need to hear about the positive role aboriginal employees and businesses play. Two aboriginal leaders, Jim Thunder and Manny Jules, are being inducted into the CCAB's Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame to celebrate their achievements.

“There aren't enough really good stories being showcased that can educate the Canadian people about the incredible work aboriginal people are doing every day. There are some incredible leaders out there, and these are a couple of them.”

One of Mr. Gladu's roles at CCAB is to promote the organization's groundbreaking programs, including the Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR) program for non-aboriginal businesses and the Aboriginal Business Mentorship Program (ABMP), pairing entrepreneurs with experienced mentors.

“We have a mentorship program that recognizes not only aboriginal leaders but non-aboriginal leaders, to help our young people navigate the business world.”

## Aboriginal businesses are being competitive

There is a strong and growing presence of aboriginal businesses in this country, Mr. Gladu says, particularly in the petroleum industry, mineral extraction, green energy and forestry sectors.

“Anywhere that there are large resource projects happening, you are going to see a strong presence of aboriginal businesses,” he says. He notes there are approximately 260 aboriginal economic development corporations in Canada.

A recent report by TD said 46% of those corporations had total sales revenues of \$5-million or more in the previous fiscal year.

A key area requiring attention is skills development, Mr. Gladu says, noting that talk of filling the country's employment gap often centres on immigration.

“We are overlooking a major segment of the population. The youngest, fastest-growing demographic in this country is aboriginal youth. We should be investing more in them.”

He said non-aboriginal corporations are seeing the value of forming meaningful partnerships with aboriginal businesses.

“There's a pride. You can see it when I talk to both corporate Canadian companies and the aboriginal businesses as well.”

But the bottom line for business is making a profit. And that's something aboriginal companies are getting better at doing, Mr. Gladu says.

“Aboriginal businesses are being competitive. They are competing against non-aboriginal businesses nose to nose and are winning. That speaks volumes. We are not just a token part of the population, we add value.”

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## ‘Partnering is the right thing to do’

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### Companies focus on aboriginal employment

Canadian corporations are becoming partners with aboriginal communities, employees and businesses because “it's the right thing to do,” says Mike Briggs, manager of First Nations and Metis Relations at Bruce Power, a nuclear power utility in Ontario.

Bruce Power is also lead sponsor of this year's Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business gala in Toronto.

In 2011, the company decided to establish an aboriginal program within its corporate affairs framework. One element of that is Bruce Power's involvement in the CCAB program that helps companies adopt best practices for partnerships with aboriginal communities.

“The Progressive Aboriginal Relations program (PAR) looks at how companies interact with communities in areas of employment, business de-

velopment, community investment and community engagement,” Mr. Briggs says.

“Aboriginal communities that are close to us are interested in employment opportunities. We also do a good deal of sponsorship of their programs. We try to focus on youth, for example, as a party to the Right To Play program.”

This is a national program that ensures young people have an opportunity to play sports and promotes leadership opportunities.

“There's a wide variety of things that communities ask for help with, and we explore those with the communities,” Mr. Briggs says.

He sees his job as fostering or strengthening relationships between Bruce Power and the communities it deals with.

Bruce Power operates one of the world's largest nuclear reactors, with eight CANDU reactors, and provides about 25% of Ontario's electricity. The company's site in Tiverton, Ont., was established in 2001 as an all-Canadian partnership among TransCanada, Cameco, Borealis Infrastructure Management, the Power Workers' Union and the Society of Energy Professionals. Bruce Power has 4,000 employees.



Mike Briggs: Working on employment for aboriginals makes economic sense.

Mr. Briggs says his role with the company goes far beyond public relations.

“I'm out meeting with chiefs and councils or different organizations within the community and interacting and seeing where we can help.”

Mr. Briggs says there are a number of ongoing issues in Canada with aboriginal people in the forefront in the news.

“A lot of issues are getting attention in relation to the aboriginal peoples. How they have been recognized, or not,

in Canada, or how they have been treated, has really stayed in the forefront of our minds,” he says.

Mr. Briggs believes aboriginal communities have the right to be consulted on projects that could affect their communities or livelihood, such as mining or resource projects. “Is there employment for the people, does it displace traditional activities that they might otherwise have enjoyed and how will the company accommodate that? These are among the things that are frequently asked.”

The former park ranger says that working with aboriginal communities on employment programs are vital for Canada's future.

“As a country it makes great economic sense. Why not train and employ local aboriginal people rather than looking for workers in another province or another country? We are short of skilled tradespeople in this country. Why don't we engage our local aboriginal people and help them get to where they want to be?”

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