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Murray Koffler Reconciling the Past with Aboriginal Business Success

In a time where Truth and Reconciliation hold great promise, it is with profound sadness that the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) mourns the passing of its Founder, Canadian business icon, Murray B. Koffler. His vision and empathy created the foundation for a new age of Economic Reconciliation for Indigenous peoples in Canada today.

Mr. Koffler, the Founder of Shoppers Drug Mart and the co-founder of The Four Seasons Hotel and Resorts, and his associates, were inspecting a partly completed Four Seasons Hotel in Calgary, Alberta in the spring of 1982. He was stunned to find a family huddled in the basement among building materials. On inquiring, he learned that it was a common sight in Calgary — homeless Aboriginal people. Later, that same day, Mr. Koffler visited a local Shoppers Drug Mart, only to interrupt a security officer escorting a young Aboriginal boy from the store being suspected of shoplifting. He couldn't understand why a prosperous city allowed such devastating conditions to exist for its Aboriginal citizens. These instances triggered Mr. Koffler to undertake some individual research on the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. What he discovered set in motion a chain of events that would alter the landscape of business in Canada and give rise to the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB).

For decades, corporate Canada had assumed that government was in control of the situation and therefore eschewed any responsibility for helping Aboriginal people to participate in the mainstream of this country's commerce. Once equal business partners, Aboriginal peoples, and businesses had been marginalized and stigmatized, shut out of the prosperity being enjoyed all around them.

Driven to action, when Mr. Koffler returned home, he pulled people to his farm "Jokers Hill" in King, Ontario. He spent the day with several individuals holding a one-day think-tank. Prominent attendees included Maurice Strong, The Right Honourable Paul Martin, and Edward Bronfman. The results of this think-tank were that business could be an important avenue to build skills and develop capacity for young people and adults. Furthermore, an organization like the CCAB could educate business about Aboriginal issues and work to level the playing field on the road to a more equitable relationship between corporate business Canada and Aboriginal business.

"Mr. Koffler was a friend whose generous humanity was a humble vessel for the life he so graciously lived. Bringing people together to make things happen was done with a smile and a handshake. It was his foresight over 35 years ago that created the change that supported an economic paradigm shift that resulted in the extraordinary Aboriginal business success exploding across the country today. With an estimated 43,000 Aboriginal businesses contributing over \$12 billion dollars to the national income Aboriginal business confidence is growing the 21st-century Canadian economy and this is thanks, in a very large part, to Mr. Koffler." JP Gladu, President & CEO, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.



Ron Jamieson former CCAB co-chairman and Director of 30 years stated, “Murray Koffler was one of the very early corporate leaders that saw the mutual benefits of linking corporate Canada with Aboriginal communities to their benefit. This was really the raison d’être for the formation of the CCAB. It was a great pleasure knowing him in the early years, he was a great mentor to the organization and to me personally.”

In the years to come, Murray B. Koffler will be remembered as a man before his time who challenged the status quo. For this, all Canadians can be forever grateful for his leading role on the road to reconciling the past with a prosperous future for Canada’s Indigenous peoples.

About the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB):

CCAB is committed to the full participation of Aboriginal people in Canada’s economy. A national non-profit, non-partisan association, CCAB offers knowledge, resources, and programs to both mainstream and Aboriginal owned companies that foster economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and businesses across Canada.

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