

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Cory Stephens of Indigenous Ace receives 2021 Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Relations**

**Toronto, ON – July 15, 2021** – Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) and CIBC announce Cory Stephens of Indigenous Ace as the recipient of the 2021 Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Relations.

**“This award is presented to individuals who challenge the status quo and take action to advance Indigenous business relations,”** said Tabatha Bull, president and CEO, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. **“Mr. Stephens is an exemplary example of this initiative, and we are pleased to present this award to him.”**

Stephens was born to a Tsimshian mother, and raised in Prince Rupert with her and his Nisga’a stepfather. He grew up in multiple communities and cultures resulting in his vested interest in advancing Indigenous business relations and entrepreneurship.

He is a commerce graduate of Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria. From there, he has dedicated his knowledge and expertise to bridging the gap between Indigenous entrepreneurs and the national business landscape respecting tradition and culture while encouraging connection and understanding with non-Indigenous society.

After working with several businesses and government trade organizations, Stephens founded Foot Print Consulting based in Prince Rupert, B.C. Foot Print aimed to support the growth of Indigenous communities while preserving local traditions and customs. He would develop a training and capacity program for Health Canada that would become a best practices model for Pacific Coast First Nations organizations. His work continued with the development of a First Nations’ economic development strategy and included identifying, researching and reporting on barriers to First Nations’ economic development and access to capital.

“Entrepreneurship, from a First Nation's perspective, is often a strategic balance between community, culture and commerce” said Stephens.

In 2013, Stephens was approached by the University of Victoria to join the newly created Indigenous Advancement of Cultural Entrepreneurship (I-ACE) program (formerly known as NW-ACE) aimed at teaching entrepreneurs start-up methodology. He became the Learning and Enhancement Officer and Program Manager for the Northwest. He has been recognized by peers for the “operational success” of the program and its many awards.

In the eight-year history of the program, there have been 40 cohorts of the program resulting in 564 graduates, 184 new businesses and 67 Indigenous communities served. Stephens continues to be a mentor to these budding entrepreneurs and businesspeople.

Stephens continues, “As an entrepreneur, teacher, mentor and coach, my greatest reward is the gratitude expressed from those who now see the world from a different perspective. That is, envisioning opportunity through an entrepreneurial lens, while remaining true to our Indigenous values. I am honoured that my life's work and pursuit to build bridges and entrepreneurial capacity among First Nations, is being recognized by Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.”

The Aboriginal Business Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Relations recognizes an individual (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) who has contributed, through professional and voluntary commitments, to building bridges between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society, making a substantial impact across all sectors, socially, culturally, and politically. It highlights the efforts of people who have been ambassadors in working with Indigenous peoples and communities.

**“At CIBC, we are focused on taking an active role in educational programming, sponsorships and donations at both the community and national level,”** said Linda Hartford, Executive Director, Trust, CIBC Indigenous Markets. **“Mr. Stephens exemplifies dedication to bringing community together through education and entrepreneurship and we are delighted to be presenting this award to him.”**

The award will be presented on September 22nd during CCAB’s [Business Recovery Forum](#), a live virtual conference and unique experience to discover innovative ways to network, collaborate, and exchange ideas to rebuild business and strengthen the path toward a healthy and prosperous Indigenous economy.

#### **About CIBC**

**CIBC is a leading North American financial institution headquartered in Toronto, Canada, with a specialized Commercial Banking, Indigenous Markets team. In working with Indigenous communities across the country, CIBC has developed products and services with distinct features to address specific financial issues, both on and off reserve, including a targeted lending program, a targeted Indigenous trust team as well as a residential mortgage program for eligible on-reserve home purchases. For more information visit [www.cibc.com](http://www.cibc.com).**

#### **About Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB)**

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) is committed to the full participation of Indigenous peoples in Canada’s economy. A national, non-partisan association, with a mission to promote, strengthen and enhance a prosperous Indigenous economy through the fostering of business relationships, opportunities, and awareness. CCAB offers knowledge, resources and programs to its members to foster economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples and businesses across Canada. For more information visit [www.ccab.com](http://www.ccab.com).

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