

Talent + Discipline Makes A Pro

By Margaret Wanlin

Thunder Bay Ventures

That maxim is part of Michael Fox's advice for First Nations and other young people. He sees two tracks to capturing job and business opportunities associated with the mega-developments in the region: one is in the skilled trades because there will be many job opportunities available, and the other is in the wide range of professional services. The latter will require the study of economics, earth sciences, commerce, engineering, and other disciplines with foundations built on math and science, which he promotes.

Until he was eight years old Michael Fox lived at Winisk on the Hudson Bay coast where he spent time on the trapline with his grandfather. (The community of 250 people has since relocated upriver to Peawanuck and is known as Weenusk First Nation.) From there, it was on to North Bay, Timmins for high school and then Toronto.

On a trip across Canada, it was the beauty of the setting of Thunder Bay and the visible presence of Aboriginal people that caused Michael to settle in Thunder Bay for his post-secondary education. He completed a Business Administration Diploma from Confederation College and an Honours Degree in Political Science from Lakehead University.

Michael works at the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF) in Thunder Bay as a Resource Sectoral Specialist. In that role he assists northern First Nations with economic development initiatives within the main resource-based sectors: forestry, energy and mining. He has facilitated joint ventures and partnership agreements between First Nations and industry. He has also served as an advisor between First Nation project proponents and government agencies.

Michael is a person with his eye on the big picture. Among the opportunities he sees for Thunder Bay is a Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence. He sees the development of a renewable energy cluster based on the windpower, biomass, and waterpower potential located in the region. Also on his mind are minority supplier opportunities within government contracts, which would involve First Nations in Canada and Native Americans in the US. He has already started the dialogue by hosting a Bi-National Aboriginal Business Summit this past spring in Thunder Bay.

Another avenue that Michael is pursuing is bringing the knowledge and development capacity to regional First Nations. He points out that he has spoken to many international institutes who are interested in his ideas around First Nation capacity issues and is continuing to assemble a regional



Mike Fox

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platform to bring peoples, processes, and projects together to import best practices from around the world to First Nation communities.

When not developing projects Michael, his wife Corinne and 10 year old daughter, Cree Angela, are most likely found at hockey rinks watching their 15 year old twins (Mitch and Marsh) play AAA hockey for the Thunder Bay Kings. The twins also play in First Nations tournaments for the Bearskin Lake First Nation's team, Corinne's home community.

About his hopes for the future of Northwestern Ontario, Michael says he would like to see stronger connections and real partnerships between Thunder Bay and First Nations. Those relationships will be needed to achieve the development potential of the region for everyone's benefit. He sees a development mindset emerging in First Nations and believes that they will be the next economic drivers in the region as they become players in the economy around them.

Internet technology is contributing to a more informed and empowered membership in First Nations, including those that are remote and accessible only by air. The many thousands of websites, self-created by Nishnawbe Aski Nation people, have internet access and email addresses which now give the communities instant access to information. Michael sees this as a great opportunity for communications, learning, and development, especially for young people.

When it comes to defining and developing opportunities, look to Michael Fox who has both the talent and the discipline to be an Everyday Hero.

Everyday Heroes is a community initiative by Thunder Bay Ventures. Everywhere there are people living, working, playing and contributing to the fabric of our city. Nominate a hero-heroes@thunderbayventures.com. Read about past heroes at www.thunderbayventures.com