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## Construction Begins on Atoskiwin Training and Employment Centre of Excellence in Nelson House

**8.1 Million dollar project a credit to leadership and people of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation**

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and its partners in the Atoskiwin Training and Employment Centre of Excellence (ATEC) marked the beginning of construction of the non-profit, community-based, fully-accredited, post-secondary training facility at Nelson House, with an official sod turning ceremony.

"Jobs and training initiatives have been central to our discussions with Manitoba Hydro as part of our negotiations for our participation in the Wuskwatim project," said NCN Chief Jerry Primrose.

"We realize for our members to have meaningful participation in that project and other northern development projects, we need to acquire the training, skills and experience necessary for employment."

Construction of the \$8.1 million ATEC facility is expected to take 10 months to complete and will open as soon as it is ready to accept students, next summer. It will be an energy efficient building, constructed with quality materials to respect the intent of the facility as a cornerstone for future development. It is being built to last.

The facility will be around 28,000 square feet and include the ATEC campus, dormitory, day care centre and an internet café.

"The planning for this centre includes the potential for expansion to accommodate future demands of our fast grow-



The official sod turning ceremony took place in Nelson House Cree Nation last month for the ATEC Centre

ing community," said NCN Councillor and Future Development Portfolio holder W. Elvis Thomas.

"The operations of the centre will focus on hydro development in the immediate future, with the scope of its activities expanding into other areas in the future. The new facility is conveniently located on NCN's reserve to make it accessible for NCN members and residents of other First Nations in nearby communities," Thomas said.

"ATEC will provide First Nations people with the entre-

preneurial and trades skills needed to take full advantage of opportunities created by extensive hydro development and other projects that will be taking place in northern Manitoba over the next 20 years.

"The project will create job-training opportunities for NCN Members. Around \$500,000 will flow into the local economy, benefiting business and creating employment for Members during construction. There will be training opportunities in the areas of concrete, framing, welding, electrical, drywall, and mechanical, such as h-vac and plumbing, for example," he said.

Overall, Councillor Thomas said, the sod turning event was very encouraging to see. We have been working on the Wuskwatim project as a whole for a very long time and it is very heartening to see a portion of

the project come to fruition. "I can't emphasize enough how this institution will not only meet the present needs of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation but will continue to serve the community well into the future," said Thomas. We have taken every step possible to ensure that this facility can and will be sustained for a very long time to come.

I am very happy that we as a community have been able

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## Centre of Excellence in Nelson House

to achieve a result such as the training facility, said Thomas. It is very heartening that to be able to have a facility that will assist in training people in the development of business. Thomas said that it is the plan to have Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation become a business centre in the north. In order for that to happen we will have to have people trained in business and this facility will allow that to happen.

Marcel Moody, Co-Manager of the Wuskwatim Hydro Project said he was extremely happy to see the training centre start its construction. "It has been a long time in coming. When we first started discussing a joint venture between Nelson House and Manitoba Hydro the question was raised about training opportunities and employment. This Training Centre will make sure that the people of South Indian Lake and Nelson House will get the training they need to participate in the project," said Moody.

By building the ATEC it was a way to achieve a couple of goals that the leadership felt was important. Moody noted that by having the educational facility located in the community they would be able to maximize the training opportunities as well as allow people to stay in Nelson House while taking their training. This is an important factor, said Moody. He pointed out, when people are forced to leave the community to pursue training opportunities a large number of the students never complete their courses. This will allow the students to maintain contact with family and friends and have the support systems in place which will help them to finish their educational experience.

Councillor Thomas agreed that it was important that NCN members would be able to take the training they needed in their home community. As Chief and Council we recognized the problems of people having to leave the community to get training. It is far better to have the facility here where they have family support and can take the educational training they need in a culturally appropriate environment.

The federal government committed \$3.26 million towards the project, with additional funding for training provided by Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government, (including Indian Affairs, Northern Develop-

ment, Western Economic Diversification and Human Resources and Development). The province also brought forward the construction date of the access road to Nelson House to provide earlier on-the-job-training and work experience for NCN Members.

ATEC director, Ezra Bogle, who took up his position in early 2003, has put the program infrastructure in place and many people have already completed training. Bogle said that when the building is completed in June next year his job will become much easier. He noted at the present time the training courses

are taking place, but, are being held at various locations throughout the community. The completion of the building will allow them to bring all these training initiatives under one roof. This will allow the administration to better manage and coordinate what they are doing. Bogle said he was very happy with the quality of graduates that have already gone through programs, the addition of this building will only

help us increase the quality of graduates.

Currently the focus of the training is on the Wuskwatim Project, Bogle notes that this will change with the needs of the community. He stated that in the near future they will expand their training courses to include business development. Over time ATEC will become a satellite campus of the University of the North, said Bogle.

ATEC offered training to 166 NCN and South Indian Lake residents in the year ended March 31, 2004. About 90 NCN and South Indian Lake residents successfully completed various levels of training in designated and non-designated trades and construction support. In addition, the training can boast to having five students complete their Red Seal Interprovincial carpentry ticket.

Their skills have already been put to good use. For example, the PR-260 access road to Nelson House was completed ahead of schedule using NCN and South Indian Lake heavy equipment operator trainees under the Work Experience Program. Bogle noted that the trainees received a great deal of praise for the quality of work they did on the project.

The training process includes getting students ready to take their training. Moody notes, "we want the people who take the training to be successful and in order to do that there are a number of steps that have to be taken." Bogle said the first step is to register with ATEC. After that the persons educational level is assessed. Once that is complete they go through career counseling and if need be

they go through the educational upgrade that they may need. Before they go to the training portion the students will go and take a life skills program to prepare them for the rigors of study. The final step is for the student to go through the training itself.

With the various steps and procedures that prospective students go through we are finding that students are becoming successful and the system is working well.

Once complete, the facility will employ around 20 fulltime staff, and is likely to create some spin-off support jobs in the wider community.

Winnipeg-based, Parkwest Projects Ltd. will construct the facility, which has been architecturally designed by Winnipeg-based Gaboury, Prefontaine, Perry Architect. ES

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is based in Nelson House, Manitoba, about 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg and 80 kilometres west of Thompson. NCN has close to 5,000 members living in Nelson House,



**Councillor Elvis Thomas**

South Indian Lake, Thompson, Brandon and Winnipeg. More than 60 percent of its members are between 13 and 30 years of age.



**Chief Jerry Primrose**

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