

# BUSINESS VANCOUVER

October 7-13, 2008 ■ Issue 989

\$2.00 ■ \$79.95 annually ■ [subscribe@biv.com](mailto:subscribe@biv.com)

## Bands eye Asian investment billions

B.C. aboriginal leaders join historic trade mission aimed at luring investor cash from China to bankroll major natural resource and other business ventures in the province

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**N**ative band leaders are courting cash-flush Chinese investors in hopes of bringing billions of dollars into mining, forestry, fishery and other business ventures in Canada.

About 100 Canadian aboriginal leaders, mostly from B.C., will embark on an historic trade mission next month that will tie in with a high-profile **Canada-China Business Council** event and – equally significantly – the 2008 China Mining Expo, the world's third largest mining conference.

The trip will put potential investment opportunities "squarely on the radar of savvy Chinese investors," promises the **RCI Capital Group**, a Vancouver holding company that's organizing the mission.

"The Chinese have expressed a clear interest to participate in investment opportunities surrounding the resource sector in Canada," **John Park**, the group's president, CEO and sole principal, told *Business in Vancouver*.

While at times perceived as hurdles to development, some First Nations are adopting a novel approach: collaboration that they're beginning to realize will provide economic progress.

"I see a disparity between the potential of aboriginal businesses to succeed, on the one hand, and the likelihood of their success on the other," **Milton Wong**, chairman of **HSBC Asset Management Canada** told about 350 business executives and aboriginal leaders at a **Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business** gala dinner in Vancouver

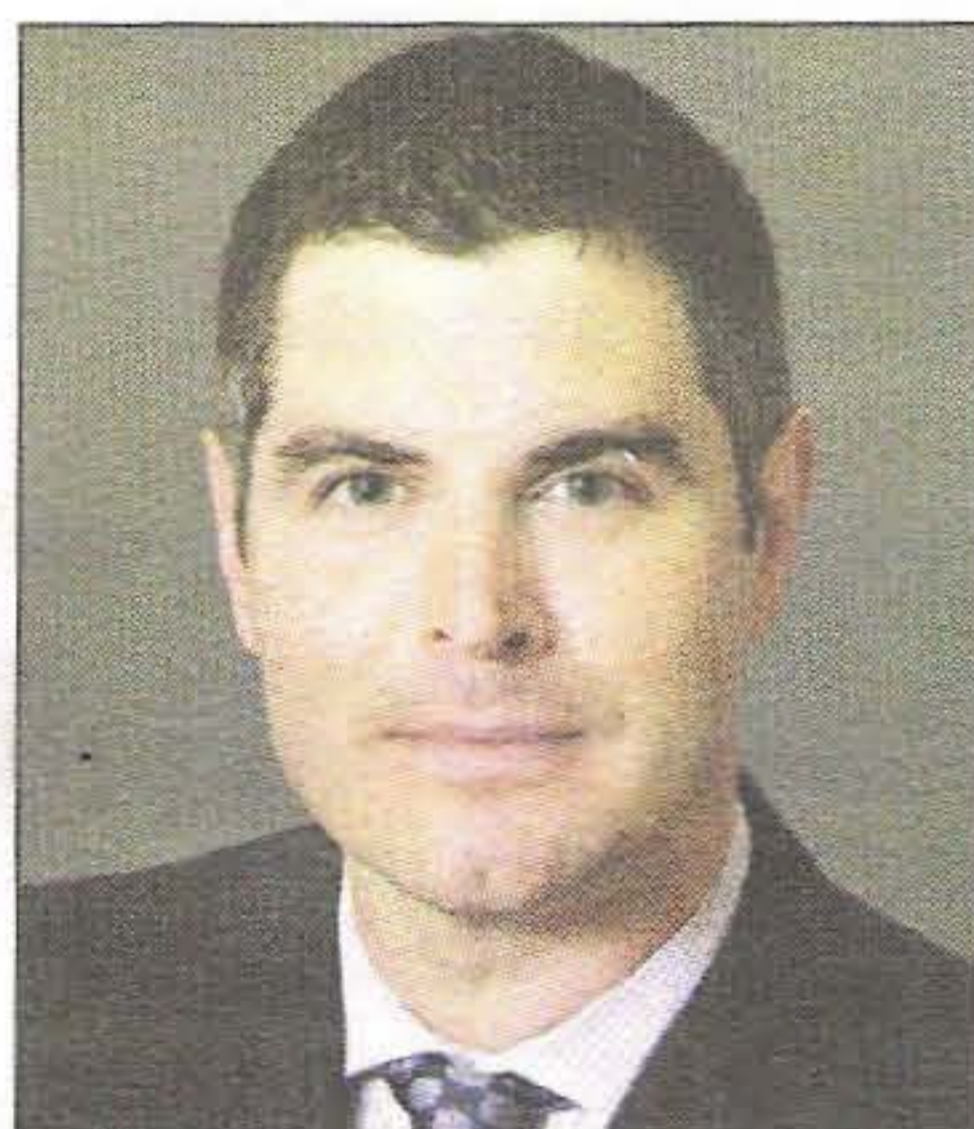


Milton Wong, chairman of HSBC Asset Management Canada: "I see a disparity between the potential of aboriginal businesses to succeed, on the one hand, and the likelihood of their success on the other"

last week. "There is a gap – and I believe collaboration is one way to bridge it."

Speaking on collaboration in the context of the global capital markets, Wong said First Nations, for whom access to capital has been a major obstacle, have "significant business opportunities" on the horizon, especially as the emerging, large middle classes in developing countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China become key drivers behind the world's consumption of resources.

"While some may view [First Nations] as stumbling blocks, I've never heard of any individual who said they actually enjoy unemployment, or they enjoy suffering from some of the socio-economic ills that they're experiencing right now as a result of abject poverty," **Clint Davis**, the council's president and CEO told *BIV*. "Clearly, every aboriginal person and every Canadian wants op-



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Davis said B.C. is at the forefront of aboriginal business activity in the country.

The China mission, which is the largest international native business initiative undertaken, comes at a time when aboriginals are exercising further legal rights to their participation in their territorial lands, but also as young, educated, assertive and "worldly" aboriginals begin to demand more from their leaders.

"The traditional leaderships were perhaps comfortable with receiving welfare and handouts from Indian affairs, but the young generation thinks that hasn't really worked, and they want to determine their own futures," said Park.

RCI, whose companies include independent investment dealer **RCI Renaissance Capital Inc.**, will take the delegation to two cities in China for meetings with sovereign wealth funds, the investment arms of the four biggest banks and private equity

players.

Also joining the delegation: ■ the **Tahltan First Nation**, whose B.C. land is believed to contain deposits of gold, high-grade coal, copper, tungsten and molybdenum; ■ **Chief Gibb Jacobs** of the **Squamish Nation**; and ■ **Grand Chief Edward John**, the hereditary chief of **Tl'azt'en Nation**, who was a member of the B.C. Claims Task Force, which recommended establishing the independent **BC Treaty Commission** to facilitate negotiations between First Nations, the province and Canada.

John helped spearhead the first aboriginal mission to China in July, which was focused on attracting capital for First Nations' interests in B.C. forestry businesses.

"This is hugely significant, particularly in light of the financial meltdown that's going on in the U.S.," said **Calvin Helin**, a Vancouver aboriginal lawyer who will lead the delegation. "There's just a huge shortage of capital. Indigenous people in Canada own or control a third of the land mass and this could result in huge investment being made into Canada."

Helin, who is also the CEO of the **Native Investment and Trade Association**, a non-profit association trying to forge ties between aboriginals and the business community, said the further development of B.C.'s natural resources will benefit the entire province.

"The reason why they're trying to settle treaties is to get rid of uncertainty, and if you've got the tribes in the deal, there's no uncertainty." ■ [kbisetty@telus.net](mailto:kbisetty@telus.net)