

## Aboriginal Business Leaders on Investment and Trade Mission to China

By SHAWN BELL, SRJ Reporter

Aboriginal business leaders from across Canada are headed overseas on a trade mission to recruit capital investment funds and formulate partnerships for the exportation of resources from aboriginal lands.

One hundred business leaders from aboriginal groups embark on a four-city tour of China, Nov. 2-14, where they will have face-to-face meetings with prominent members of the Chinese business community.

"Aboriginal leaders control quite a bit of land mass, after all the treaty negotiations and land agreements," said Darrell Beaulieu, CEO of Denendeh Investments in Yellowknife. "In a lot of cases, they don't have any capital money, so [this mission] is positioning to take advantage of large capital projects, like oil and gas, mining and hydro for example."

Beaulieu explained that with the economic downturn in North American markets, the options for capital funding coming from Wall Street or Bay Street are limited. China, on the other hand, is sitting on a lot of money and is looking for inroads into North American markets.

Denendeh Investments is owned by 27 Dene Nations in the NWT. Beaulieu said that Denendeh is looking to secure Chinese investment in large infrastructure projects, specifically a road from Wrigley to Tuktoyaktuk running up the Mackenzie Valley. According to Beaulieu, the road would benefit small communities of the Mackenzie Valley by connecting them and lowering the high cost of living. It would also open the valley to further development, bringing jobs and economic opportunities to the people.

"But it's not only looking at (investment) money," Beaulieu added. "It is also establishing business relations between Chinese and aboriginal businesses for providing natural resources."

The trade mission is co-sponsored by RCI Capital Group Inc. and the Native Investment and Trade Association (NITA). Each aboriginal member is paying their own way, estimated at \$10,000 per person. RCI has been working with aboriginal business groups in Canada for over a year. Teresa Ryan, RCI's Trade Mission liaison, explained RCI provides benefits by knowing the players in China and having the network to set up meetings.

Shawn Riley, Vice President of RCI, said "RCI has recognized there's a deficiency in access to capital for many viable First Nation companies. This is a good

opportunity to marry Aboriginal groups with capital in China.”

Riley added that RCI, with two offices in Canada and four in China, is looking to broker any deals that come from the trade mission. For aboriginal people, Beaulieu explained, the trade mission is a step towards aboriginal development of their own lands.

“The aboriginal community is now going to start taking a lead role in the development of their land,” Beaulieu said.

There is also a cultural connection between aboriginal and Chinese people. Beaulieu told a story of meeting the Chinese ambassador to Canada a few years ago.

“In the Dogrib language, we say ‘ni’ for ‘you’,” Beaulieu said. “In Chipewyan, they say ‘nen’ for ‘you’. Well, it turned out that in Mandarin they say ‘ni’ for ‘you’ and in Cantonese, ‘nen’ for ‘you’.”

The 100 aboriginal delegates, and the capital group sponsoring them, hope the cultural understanding goes even deeper than that in China next month.