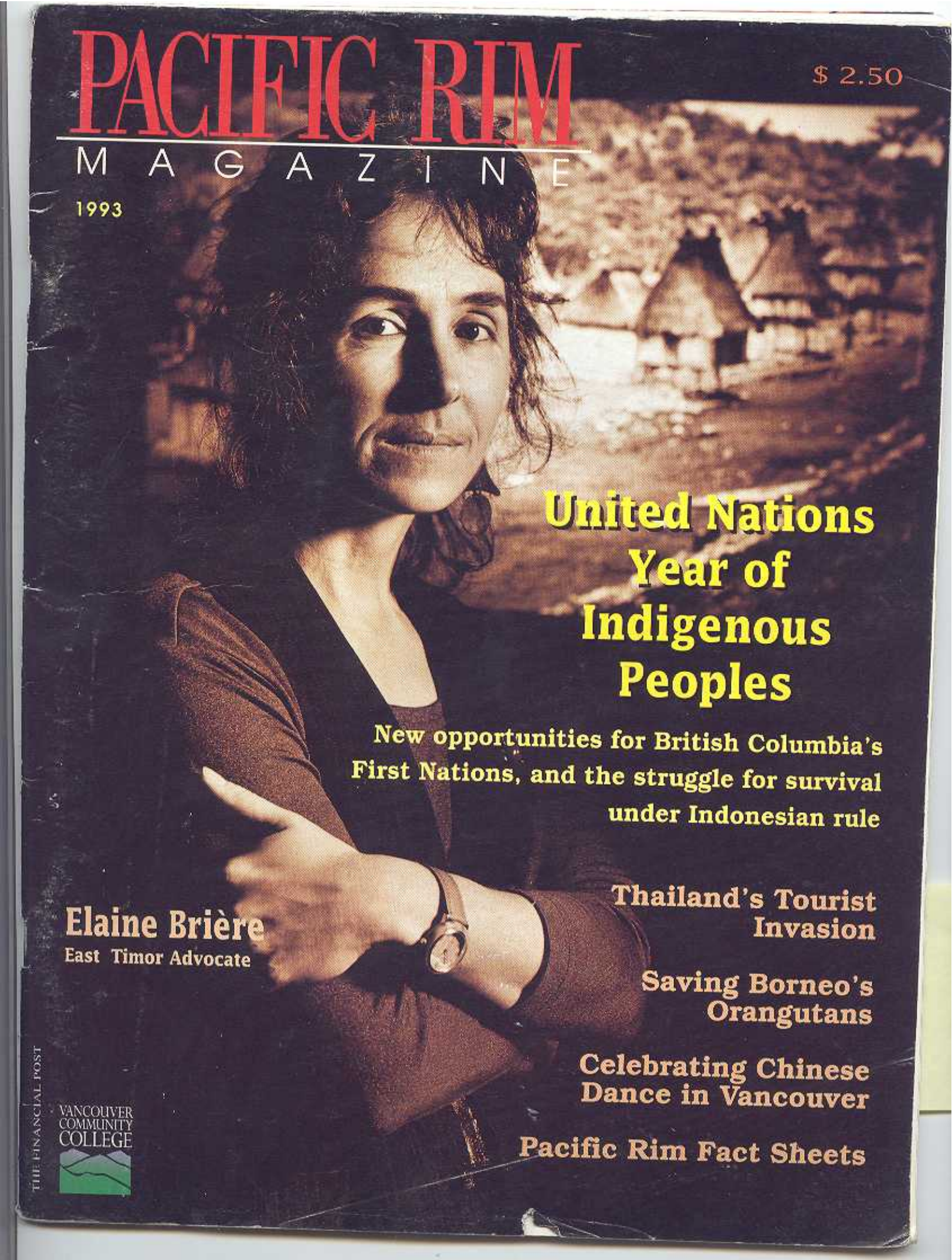


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CORPORATE BUSINESS ON ABORIGINAL TERMS

The Canadian Council for Native Business links investors inside Canada and across the Pacific Rim with Aboriginal partners.

by Wendy Bone

In a modest single room on the ninth floor of a downtown office building, Patrick Kelly rises from his partition-enclosed desk and greets me cordially. Two small prints by prominent West Coast Indian artist Roy Henry Vickers are displayed on one wall, while a long white bookshelf, neatly stacked with First Nations' literature and brochures, lines the opposite wall. From the start, it is clear that Kelly, a soft-spoken man, is more interested in talking about opportunities for Aboriginal people than he is in talking about himself.

Kelly is the Executive Director of the B.C. Chapter of the Canadian Council for Native Business, operating out of this one-man office since

its opening in March 1992. The CCNB, a national, non-profit organization, helps First Nations people achieve economic self-sufficiency by providing linkages between

Native people, one of the fastest growing segments of Canada's post-secondary educated population, and the non-Aboriginal business community.

Kelly supports this linkage through education, training, and business networks by providing information on available Native goods and services to any prospective customers. He also helps place Native people in the technical, academic, financial, or scientific areas of their choice.

As Executive Director of the Canadian Council for Native Business office in British Columbia, Kelly is fulfilling his personal goal of assisting young Native people find their own career paths in life. Education, which has always been Kelly's special interest, is highly valued according to the traditions of his people, the Sto:lo, a name which is lit-

erally translated as "People of the River." (The river referred to is the vast Fraser River, which divides the province pretty much in half.)

One of the basic principles of Sto:lo and most other Native traditions is to ensure that every person grows up to be independent and self-supporting. When a child exhibits natural talents in a particular area, both the elders and the child's family recognize it and work to foster its growth.

Kelly himself clearly has gained a strong sense of responsibility from both his family and

his people. "My grandmother taught me a lot of values and principles of what it was like in our traditions and what our responsibilities were. It's from that teaching as a child that I learned the value of education, and that's always been a part of me as I assumed the responsibilities that I need to in life. Fundamental values have always been a part of me, so I do anything I can to achieve and express that state of independence."

In the Sto:lo tradition, after personal independence is achieved, a person must then strive for a state of interdependence. When individuals can meet their own basic needs, they further their growth by becoming interdependent within the community and thus contributing to it.

Within this context Kelly speaks of his other public role as a member of the Board of Directors of Vancouver Community College. "I am able to contribute to the work needed at the board level at VCC and I'm offering my skills and abilities to help the Board do the work that it needs to do. That's how I see my role, in a traditional sense, as an Aboriginal person."

Kelly graduated from Mission Senior High School in 1970, and for three years attended the University of British Columbia in the Native Indian Teacher Education program. He wants others to share his personal understanding of the value of education in a changing world in which the ability

"If they are entering a partnership, Aboriginal people want to make sure that the philosophies and attitudes and approaches to the business are shared with their people."

Patrick Kelly

Patrick Kelly, Executive Director of the B.C. Chapter of the Canadian Council for Native Business, in his downtown office.

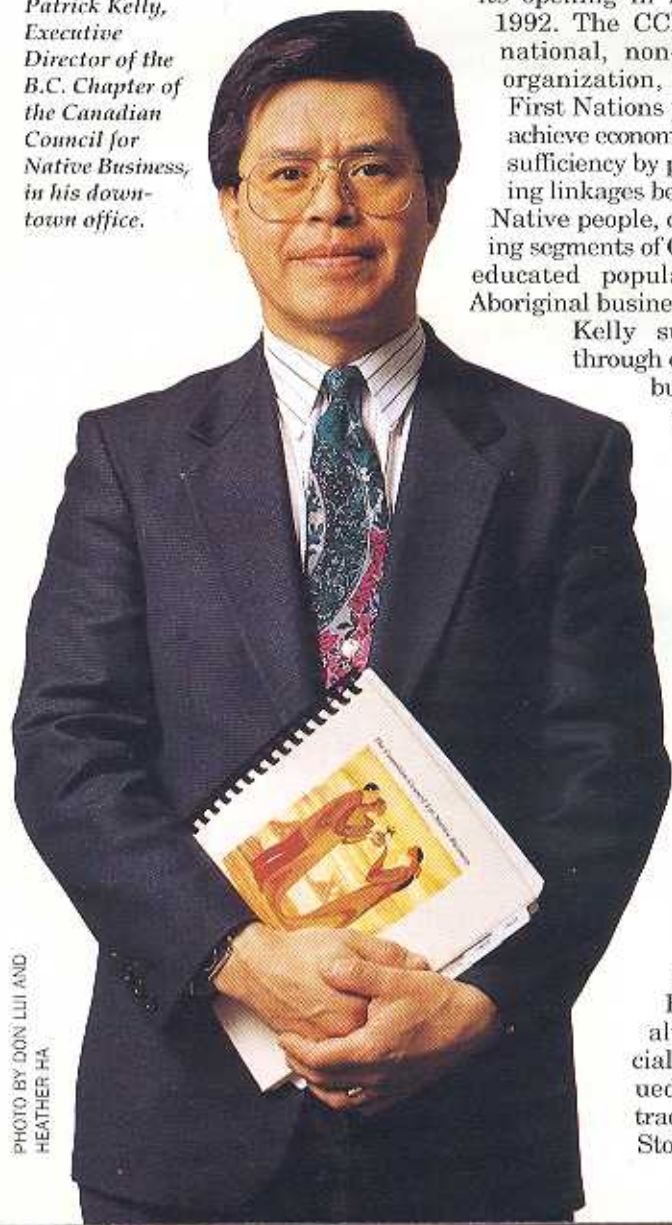


PHOTO BY DON LUI AND HEATHER HA

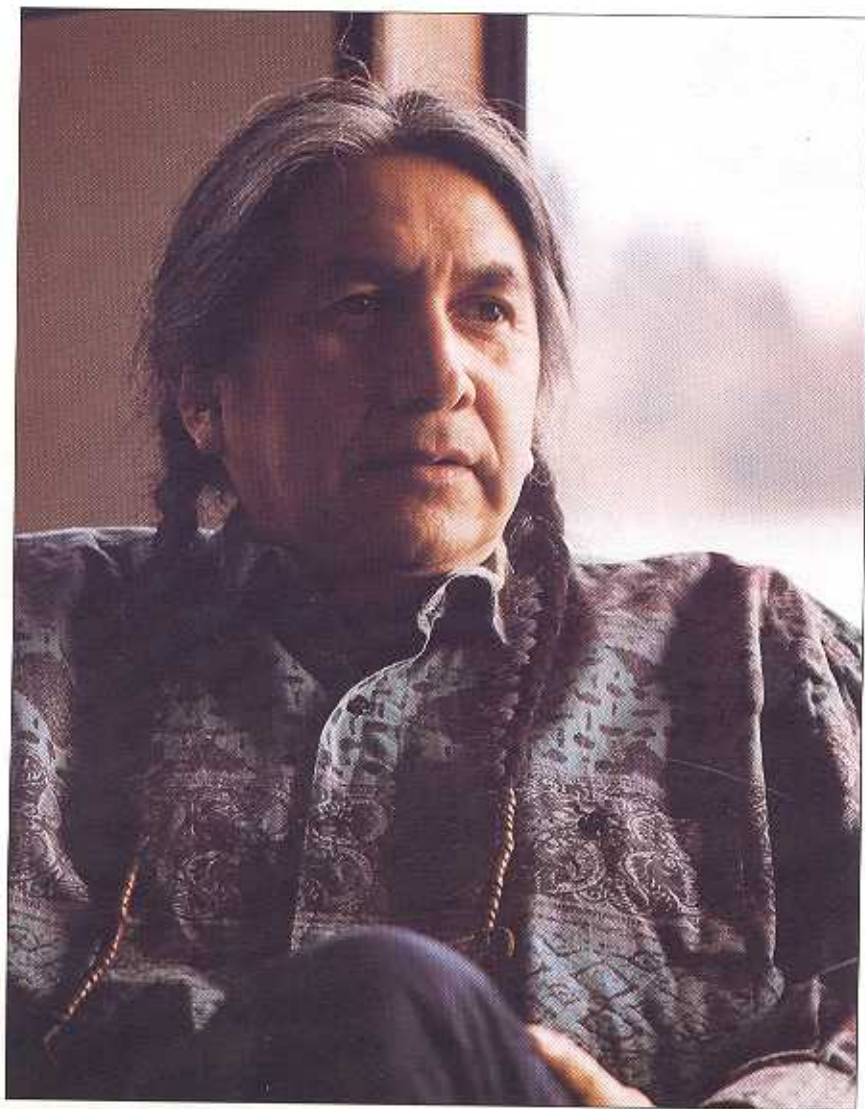
to learn continuously is becoming a more crucial skill. "I never stop learning and I always take different courses. I am always reading extensively, learning new skills and developing new abilities, so for me education is a continuous part of life. It is no longer okay to have only one set of skills or abilities and expect that to endure throughout your life. The ecological changes, the job market changes are so rapid."

On a larger economic scale, he wants people to realize that the Aboriginal people are a vast, untapped resource for the business community. For Canada to retain its strong position in global markets, emphasis must be shifted from primary industries, such as forestry and mining, to the service and technology sectors—areas which have shown job-creation growth in the past decade. Businesses must accommodate new ideas and approaches to revitalize Canada's lagging economy, and one of the keys to such development is co-operation with Aboriginal communities.

However, Aboriginal businesses in Canada are generally still isolated and in the fledgling stage: Native people are concerned with gaining access to the capital so crucial to make their businesses work. Partnerships and joint ventures are attractive options for them, in part because they seek experienced business people, with expertise and capital, to work with. In return, Aboriginal business people can offer new markets, and possibly even leasehold land, which would otherwise not be available to developers.

Such partnerships are already happening on Vancouver's North Shore. Chief Leonard George of the Tsleil-Waututh (formerly called Burrard) Band has been working with the Asian-based property group Abbey Woods Developments on the creation of a golf driving range in North Vancouver (see side bar).

But attitudinal barriers exist within the business realm, where the traditional Native focus on community differs from the typical non-Native emphasis on entrepreneurship. In Aboriginal thinking, cultural and lifestyle differences must be understood by both sides before mutually satisfying business relationships can be built.



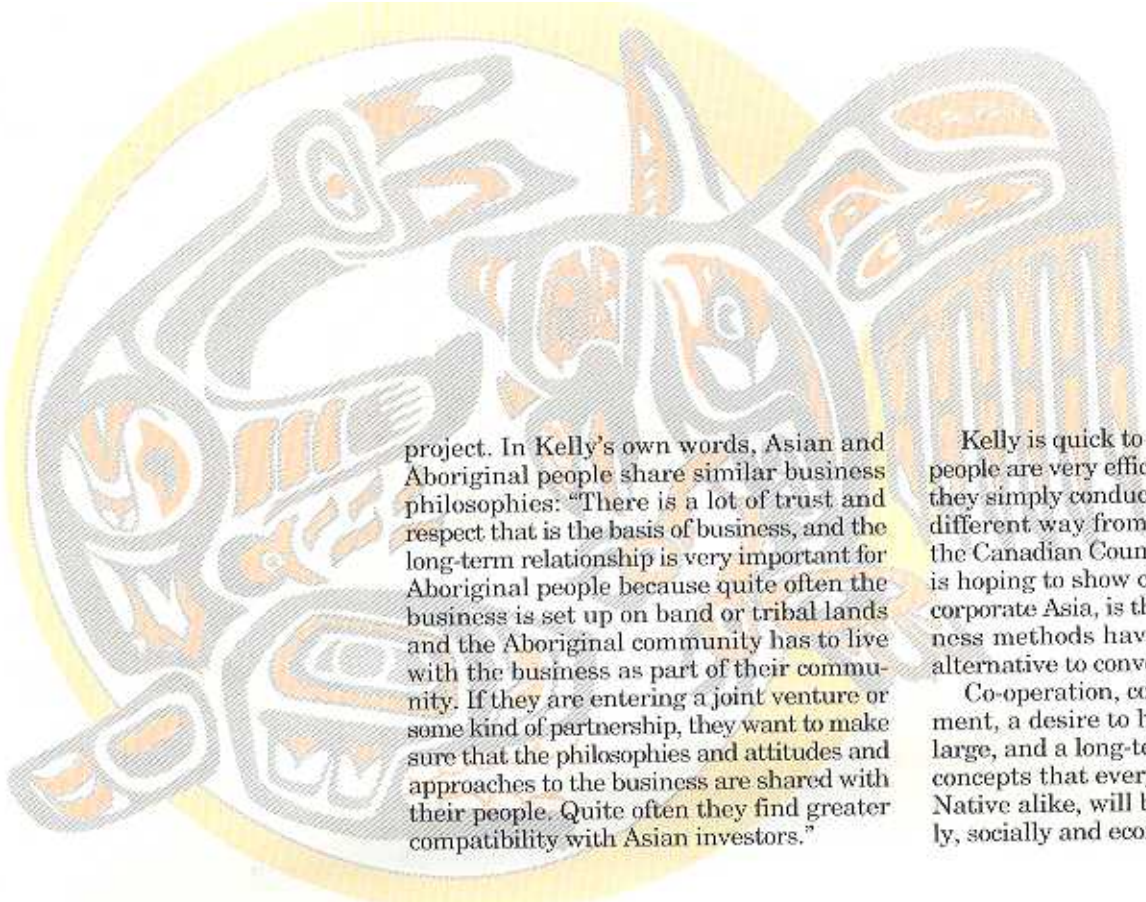
Native people traditionally set goals through consensus and co-operation rather than through instruction or pressure tactics. Non-competitiveness and sharing became valued because, historically, group survival took precedence over the accumulation of individual wealth.

Native tradition also upholds the need to exist in harmony with nature, a principle closely connected with the desire for interdependence. Born of this need is a concept of time that is ruled by the forces of nature—things will get done when all environmental factors are favourable.

In many, if not all, cases an Aboriginal tribal leader will set up business opportunities that benefit the whole community, as in the case of the Tsleil-Waututh Band. They participated in the driving range project on the understanding that employment and training would be provided for their people, environmental concerns would be heeded, and the community would prosper. A tall order to fill for non-Aboriginal companies that generally do not have the same business practices.

It is no coincidence that a Pacific Rim company was picked for the Tsleil-Waututh

Chief Leonard George, of the Tsleil-Waututh Band (formerly the Burrard Band) on Vancouver's North Shore, has formed a business partnership with Hong Kong's Abbey Woods Development Company.



project. In Kelly's own words, Asian and Aboriginal people share similar business philosophies: "There is a lot of trust and respect that is the basis of business, and the long-term relationship is very important for Aboriginal people because quite often the business is set up on band or tribal lands and the Aboriginal community has to live with the business as part of their community. If they are entering a joint venture or some kind of partnership, they want to make sure that the philosophies and attitudes and approaches to the business are shared with their people. Quite often they find greater compatibility with Asian investors."

Kelly is quick to assert that Aboriginal people are very efficient and business-like: they simply conduct their businesses in a different way from other cultures. What the Canadian Council for Native Business is hoping to show corporate Canada, and corporate Asia, is that First Nations' business methods have much to offer as an alternative to conventional methods.

Co-operation, concern for the environment, a desire to help the community at large, and a long-term perspective are all concepts that everyone, Native and non-Native alike, will benefit from, personally, socially and economically. ♦

IN TRUE PARTNERSHIP STYLE

Hugging the side of the Seymour foothills, Dollarton Highway winds and weaves through the trees. If you follow it a short distance into Deep Cove, there is, on the left-hand side, a small white-painted sign that says "Tsleil-Waututh Indian Band." It marks a road which climbs steeply upwards. The neighborhood is busy: people are out on their balconies and workmen are scattered everywhere. Higher up are some newly built houses and a cluster of small grey mobile offices. In one of the offices, an Asian woman is working at a reception desk. "Abbey Woods Developments," she answers to each ring of the phone, and it doesn't stop ringing.

Last week I visited Chief Leonard George of the Tsleil-Waututh Indian Band in his home. As he sat in front of the huge expanse of his living-room window, Burrard Inlet in the background, he talked about the evolution of his business partnership with Hong Kong's Abbey Woods Developments. They have just completed a driving range in Deep Cove and are now working on the construction of 100 townhouses, scheduled to be completed this summer. He considers Loong Keng Lim, president of Abbey Woods, both a friend and a colleague.

He was the one person who understood my philosophy of what I was trying to do," says George, adding that his focus has always been on the development of his community and his people. "What your community wants and needs means more than the cause and effect of making money."

When George was first elected chief, he set aside five acres of reserve land for residential development. He wanted as many band members as possible to be trained both directly and indirectly through the development project. After consulting his people

and establishing a traditional council, George started looking for developers who would help him build.

George wanted a trusting business relationship: "We needed a partner...rather than a developer who would just lease the land off us." He was looking for "a long-term marriage rather than a one-night stand." The council selected 18 developers, and for eight months interviewed them thoroughly. George's attitude towards them was this: "You're not going to be acting as a normal developer...you are going to become part of the community." Most developers didn't understand this approach to business. They were more of the one-night stand variety: build it, sell it, and get out of it quickly.

Loong Keng was willing to develop a sense of trust. He spent four months meeting with the council before they decided to work together. Last May he moved his offices onto the reserve and brought his relatives from Hong Kong to meet with the Band.

George says Asians and Natives have some similarities: "[The Chinese] understand what it is to be poor. They understand what it is to be oppressed. . . . They only gained respect because they are now an economic power."

Now, says George, his people have an employee development officer and will soon be opening a restaurant and convenience store. The building costs and the profits are split down the middle, in true partnership style. He is confident that this style of doing business will be the wave of the future: "The big conglomerates—they'll die and fade away. We'll become a force again as smaller communities of innovative people."

"It's a new frontier, and if we approach it right, we can right a lot of wrong mistakes that were made."

—Wendy Bone

