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KTEI HOSTS TWO MORE ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURS IN YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SERIES

Speaker Series #2 Held Captivates Youth Attention in Digital Media and Clothing Design

[M'Chigeeng, ON] – The youth entrepreneurial spirit was ignited yet again, with the second speaker series held on November 25, 2011 at Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute. This youth entrepreneurship project by KTEI, partially funded by Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, has been named the *e-Spirit Learning Café* to signify the importance to Anishinabek generation X'ers and Y'ers that learning about business and entrepreneurial options can indeed become a part of building their successful futures.



Approximately 21 participants were on hand, ranging from high school age to senior adult learners - who all listened attentively to the personal stories of two Sudbury-based Aboriginal entrepreneurs Brad Robinson, owner of *BradDesign* and Tracy Toulouse, owner of *Swirling Wind*.

Brad Robinson was the first to take the stage, demonstrating hands-on the tools of his trade business. Brad is the owner of *BradDesign*, a multimedia business which is about photography, videography and graphic work – and his artistic creativity immediately captivated and intrigued many of the artists in the audience. Brad told the story of how he originally thought he wanted to be a police officer and actually completed his college studies in that field, but was always drawn back to his passion for the arts and especially his keen interest in Native studies.

Brad openly shared his personal story of when he first discovered he had a learning disability and how today he uses technology to help keep him on top of things for his successful multimedia business. Brad says that he knew that he was 'somewhat different' because in his college study groups, he noticed that other students seemed to 'be getting things a lot faster than I was...and I began to doubt my abilities; I also started to think that maybe my younger days playing football at Lo-Ellen Park Secondary School and maybe getting 'too many hits to the head' was catching up with me!. Brad was later officially diagnosed with a learning disability that involved his memory – but not until almost completing University. Brad clearly sent the message to students that, "having a learning disability is not the end of the world and should not limit or become an excuse to limit your opportunities". One young participant in the workshop

readily took notice of this message, and then openly shared with the group that he too had been diagnosed with a learning disability - and that his passion right now is all about *boarding*. “Well, then, now your challenge is to think about how your passion about boarding can perhaps someday become your work and to actually get paid for it!”, said Brad.

After a lunch break from the eSpirit Café at KTEI, Tracy Toulouse, a member of Sagamok Anishnawbek of the Ojibwe Nation began to share her story. Tracy shared with the audience that her inspiration as a designer came from her grandmother, who is a gifted quilt maker. She began to follow her inspiration in high school by taking clothing construction and then continuing on to take fashion design at Fanshawe College. As part of her 3 year Business diploma she completed an internship with the prominent Canadian designer, Linda Lundstrom. Tracy designs her garments with Aboriginal and woodland motifs, using natural fabrics such as leather, wool, cotton, and embellished with beadwork, appliqué, hand-carved bone, fur, airbrushing and silk screening.

Tracey shared a personal story of disappointment when she attended a prestigious Toronto fashion event with her clothing line - only to have not even one of her original designs showcased.... “But you know what?”, shared Tracey, “those million tears of disappointment and that feeling of rejection afterwards only made me stronger, and made me even more determined to succeed!”

Tracey also shared that she is now ready to take her business to the next level, and wants to begin planning the move from her home-based operations to that of a larger location to showcase and begin selling her clothing line in retail stores. Tracey later confessed at the end of the session to the students that she actually has a really hard time getting the courage to do public speaking events, and that she was *very* nervous coming out to speak to them; but, knowing that this is a challenge that she must overcome to in order promote her business, she agreed to do it. “Because in order to get over my fears, I have decided to face them head on!” said Tracey. “This is why I said yes when asked to come and speak to you today, although I’m shaking in my boots!”

The key messages of *resiliency, perseverance, and believing and loving what you do* were strongly heard from these remarkable Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

The next entrepreneurship speaking series session is planned for January 13, 2012. The eSpirit Learning Café project’s workshops and seminar activities are open to ALL youth to participate regardless of where they may live or may be going to school. The best part of the program is that is also FREE – there is no cost to register to participate. “The primary objective of this project is to begin igniting the *entrepreneurial-spirit* of a new generation and to inspire them with possibilities for their future”, said Beverley Roy, KTEI Director of Business and Training.

KTEI’s valued partners in the *e-Spirit Learning Café* project are the Waubetek Business Development Corporation, The School of Skills Training (formerly called The Enterprise Centre, with Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology, Sudbury, ON), and the Business Development Bank of Canada. This youth entrepreneurship program is 50% funded by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

For more information on how your business or organization can become a part of this exciting youth initiative, or if you are interested in becoming a participant, contact KTEI at 705.377.4342

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