



New First Nation Company Leverages Knowledge and Business Technology

FireSpirit will provide employment services to Manitoba's North

FOR RELEASE

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Winnipeg, Canada — In an innovative business partnership, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) and Protegra have formed FireSpirit, a First Nation-owned company that will facilitate jobs, training and business opportunities for Aboriginals and northern communities in Manitoba. FireSpirit will provide employment services and capacity building to those seeking jobs, as well as services to employers looking to increase their Aboriginal workforce. MKO owns 65 per cent of FireSpirit and Protegra holds 35 per cent.

"Manitoba is proud to support this multi-million dollar initiative," says Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister Oscar Lathlin, "The spirit of co-operation and the need to further economic benefits for Aboriginal Manitobans has resulted in this exciting venture, which will have long lasting positive results for future generations."

"I am extremely proud of the launching of FireSpirit, a partnership between Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak and Protegra," says MKO Grand Chief Dr. Sydney Garrioch, speaking on behalf of the Northern chiefs. "This partnership will begin to address the equitable distribution of economic opportunities and wealth in Northern Manitoba for the First Nation people."

"FireSpirit services will support existing Aboriginal training and employment programs, as well as provide human resource specialists and capacity builders who will work closely with First Nations job seekers and groups within their communities," says FireSpirit's Chairman, Chief Glen Ross of the OCN. "FireSpirit will help them develop and execute career plans designed to increase employment."

In its first major initiative, FireSpirit will develop a sophisticated Job Referral System for the Government of Manitoba's department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (CTT). The system will support CTT's job referral services for Floodway and Manitoba Hydro's initiatives, including Wuskwatim, Keeyask and Conawapa projects.

FireSpirit will focus on the specific needs of Aboriginal job seekers and employers operating in the north. The company's head office is in Opaskwayak First Nation, The Pas, with a subsidiary office in Winnipeg. "FireSpirit leverages MKO's knowledge of First Nations' issues, interests and employment needs with Protegra's business and technology savvy," says Dan Perron, CEO of FireSpirit.

FireSpirit's own operations will employ about 27 people, but the company expects to generate significant jobs for First Nation people from the several thousand job opportunities arising from the three Manitoba Hydro projects. FireSpirit projects an additional 400 jobs will be created and 500 potential employees trained beyond Hydro's requirements, during the first five years of the company's operation. "FireSpirit will also enable Canadian employers to deploy Aboriginal workforce strategies and generate real Aboriginal and northern economic development," adds FireSpirit's CEO.

As a company offering skills training, career planning and development, employee recruitment and economic sustainability, FireSpirit is well positioned to help First Nation communities generate financial independence and tangible wealth far beyond simple job creation, says Perron.

The Job Referral System developed for the Manitoba Government, is FireSpirit's first step towards a bigger goal where the First Nations' company will own and operate a job referral system that can serve other organizations.

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak is a political office established in 1981 by First Nations in Northern Manitoba. MKO is made up of 53,000 citizens from 30 sovereign First Nations, with a specific mandate to represent northern First Nation rights and interests.

Protegra is a Winnipeg-based business and technology solutions company, which offers business performance consulting, software design and development and Information Technology services.

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