



## **New Company Combines First Nations' Knowledge with Business Technology**

### **FireSpirit provides employment services to northern communities**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Winnipeg, Canada — In another example of inspired innovation, Protegra announces a unique joint venture between the business and technology company and First Nation organization Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO). Protegra and MKO have formed FireSpirit, a First Nation-owned company that will work to improve employment services and economic development in First Nations communities. MKO owns 65 per cent of FireSpirit while Protegra holds 35 per cent.

"FireSpirit represents a truly innovative solution that delivers great value to clients, in this case, Aboriginal individuals, employers and educational institutions," says Wadood Ibrahim, CEO of Protegra and Vice Chair of FireSpirit. "The joint venture also symbolizes the power of working together to build stronger communities, an important part of Protegra's values. This First Nation-controlled company will lead and support sustainable development, job creation and wealth within its own communities."

"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 equitable distribution of economic opportunities and wealth in Northern Manitoba for the First Nation people."

"In addition to supporting existing Aboriginal training and employment programs, FireSpirit will provide human resource specialists and capacity builders who will work closely with First Nations job seekers and groups," adds FireSpirit's Chair, Chief Glen Ross of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

In its first major project, FireSpirit will develop a sophisticated Job Referral Services system for the Government of Manitoba's Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade. The system will focus on supporting job recruitment and placement for Manitoba Hydro and Floodway initiatives, including Hydro's Wuskwatim, Keeyask and Conawapa projects.

The design and development of the Job Referral Services system will be led by Protegra and supported by partners such as IDFusion Software, an Aboriginal IT company.

“This project gives us the opportunity to create employment for young Aboriginal IT professionals and develop the IT capacity of our Aboriginal communities,” says Christian Dandeneau, President and CEO of IDFusion. “We applaud the Manitoba Government for choosing the solution proposed by MKO and Protegra, which included a small company like ourselves. These joint ventures and partnership solutions have a great and positive impact on everyone in Manitoba.”

In addition to technology expertise, Protegra brings its highly successful business performance practices to the table. “FireSpirit’ leverages MKO’s knowledge of First Nations’ needs and interests with Protegra’s business and technology savvy,” says Dan Perron, CEO of FireSpirit.

“With its comprehensive services in career building, skills training and employee recruitment, FireSpirit is well positioned to help First Nation communities create economic sustainability, financial independence and tangible wealth far beyond simple job creation,” adds Perron. “The potential economic impact is exponential; and the social impact incredible.”

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

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.

-30-

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