

Cape Breton First Nations take part in Winnipeg community economic development conference

Cape Breton Post, June 5, 2009

MEMBERTOU — Staff from the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office in Membertou were among the presenters this week at Canada's premier community economic development conference at the University of Winnipeg.

A joint undertaking of Cape Breton's five First Nations communities, the economic benefits office has distinguished itself nationally through the implementation of a range of initiatives aimed at economic diversity, employment and enterprise development.

The Cape Breton office is overseeing the implementation of a protocol agreement with Canada and Nova Scotia for First Nations participation in the \$400-million cleanup of the Sydney tar ponds and coke ovens.

As well, the office is responsible for a \$4 million Aboriginal Skills and Employment Program. In just two years, the office has undertaken a number of important communication initiatives, held development workshops, established outreach services, and led enterprise development in each of the First Nations.

The Winnipeg conference is the fifth of its kind organized by the Canadian Community



this week for a conference on economic development. From left, Bianca Mathieu, co-ordinator, Canadian Community Economic Development Network, Tracy Menge, member Unama'ki Economic Benefits Steering Committee, and Owen Fitzgerald, executive director, Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office.

Submitted by Owen Fitzgerald

Economic Development Network.

Owen Fitzgerald, executive director of the Cape Breton office, was joined by Tracy Menge, business development officer, Eskasoni First Nations, in making the presentation to the conference.

The pair also met with the head of the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce to explore the possibility of establishing a Unama'ki or Mi'kmaq Chamber of

Commerce in Nova Scotia. In July, the island office will host a group of First Nations communities from the Northwest Territories.

"We're enjoying considerable success on a number of important developmental fronts. Aboriginal businesses are growing, employment is up and a new respect is building for the First Nations labour force," said Fitzgerald.