

Aboriginal businesswomen gather in Membertou

Aboriginal Women in Business Conference attracts more than 60 people

By DOUG MACKENZIE

CAPE BRETON POST Mar.28, 2008

SYDNEY — Membertou Trade and Convention Centre was the site Thursday as the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre hosted the first Aboriginal Women in Business Conference.

Eileen Paul, manager of the entrepreneur centre, had hoped for approximately 25-30 women to attend from Cape Breton communities, but was overwhelmed when, within days of the initial announcement, she had 60 people registered from across Nova Scotia.

"I knew in my heart that this was something much needed by the aboriginal women across Nova Scotia," said Paul, who pointed out they even had a delegate from Quebec in attendance.

See 'Conference' page A2



Lorie Benjamin, from left, government relations and economic officer with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Eileen Paul, organizer of the Aboriginal Women in Business Conference, and her daughter Ashley Paul, a masters student at Dalhousie University, speak Thursday at the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre. Steve Wadden — Cape Breton Post

Conference was needed... Cont. from page A1

"I decided to organize this 'pilot' day, which was originally only going to be for Cape Breton Island, but it quickly spread throughout Nova Scotia."

The theme for the conference is "Balance," helping aboriginal women deal with balancing the needs of family and the needs of business. Managing finances was another issue covered, as well as networking and panel discussions.

"It's obvious from the response people are really enjoying the networking and getting together," said Paul. "We would like to see this grow in the future. We're going to focus on Nova Scotia, but we will never turn anyone away."

Paul pointed out there have been many business conferences and some women in business conferences, but never an aboriginal women in business conference. It seemed obvious to her and she believes the need ties into the recent economic success in Membertou and the new retail mall planned for the community. The need also stems from the growing optimism

in the Cape Breton economy and new opportunities such as the \$400-million tar ponds cleanup project, the new Donkin mine and the opportunities around the harbour.

"Whether you are currently involved in your own business, want to start a business or are working in a professional career, it's important to take time out to network and discover what others are doing," said Paul.

Paul also pointed out a little known fact that many aboriginal women actually have more experience in business than their male counterparts.

"The women have been in business a lot longer than the men and really been the unknown quantity," she said. "Especially cottage industry and home-based businesses, the women have been at it for years and years. They are really pioneers at it, but only now getting noticed by the public."

It's obvious from the response people are really enjoying the networking.

Eileen Paul, Aboriginal Women in Business Conference organizer