NS National Aboriginal Achievement Award Winners, 2006

Bernd Christmas, Business and Commerce
M’ikmaw, Membertou First Nation, Nova Scotia

“Trillions of dollars are traded in the world economy each day,” says Bernd Christmas. “I encourage all First Nations peoples and governments to step up to the plate and demand their piece of the pie. Our success lies in building on the innovations of today while at the same time, incorporating indigenous knowledge based on the principles of conservation, sustainability of resources and reverence for the lands and the waters.”

The current CEO of the Membertou First Nation should know a thing or two about economic development. In 1995, at the request of Chief Terrance Paul, Bernd gave up his lucrative and promising career as an elite corporate lawyer to return home to assume the leading business role for his Mi’kmaw community of Membertou. A decade later, the results of that decision have been dramatic.

Since 1995, he has helped bring Membertou First Nation go from a one million dollar deficit with an operating budget of six million dollars to a current operating budget of sixty-five million dollars. With the support of his Chief and Council, Bernd has set an impressive precedent, signing significant business arrangements with companies such as Lockheed Martin, Sodexho Canada, SNC-Lavalin, Grant Thornton, and Clearwater Fine Foods.

Throughout this process, Bernd made national news when he was instrumental in obtaining certification by the International Standards Organization (ISO) for Membertou, the first native community to obtain this status. He has also devoted much of his time to working with other First Nation communities interested in obtaining ISO certification.

Bernd currently serves as a Board member of the CBC Radio Canada, the Canadian Unity Council and the Canadian Aboriginal Minority Supplier Council. He has served on the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, the Governor General’s Leadership Conference Executive Committee, the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and the Prime Minister’s External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation.

A graduate of the Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, Bernd has been recognized as one of Atlantic Canada’s Top 50 CEOs.

Andrea Dykstra, Youth
M’ikmaw Nation, Pictou Landing and Halifax, Nova Scotia

The environment has a new champion and her name is Andrea Dykstra. Fresh from completing her Bachelor of Science from St. Francis Xavier University in the spring of 2004, Andrea is currently putting her skills to work as the Aboriginal Affairs Advisor for Environment Canada - Atlantic Region.

While her future holds immense promise, her academic career deserves equal praise. The recipient of numerous scholarships, the newly minted scientist also won the 2001/02 James A. Martin Award, the 2002 Commendation for Excellence in Research from the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, the Maritimes and Northeast Pipeline Scholarship and the 2004 Celebrating Women Award for outstanding community service.

In tandem to her academic pursuits, Andrea spearheaded the Pictou Landing Thermal Disturbance Study which looks at the effects industrial thermal disturbance on the organisms
living in and around freshwater streams; a project she secured funding for independently making her the first student at St. Francis Xavier University to direct and fund her own research project. This research was accepted for publication in August 2005 and is currently in international circulation in the aquatic biology journal Hydrobiologia.

Her extracurricular activities exemplify her commitment to maintaining and preserving natural habitats and ensuring that Aboriginal concerns are incorporated into these conservation exercises. From 2002 to 2005 Andrea represented Aboriginal Canadians on the Aboriginal Liaison Committee of the Canadian Environmental Network. She has also participated in many boards and committees working in the areas of Aboriginal forestry and traditional knowledge. Andrea has worked with the Canadian Wildlife Service on a project that articulates the importance of Aboriginal traditional knowledge in the conservation of species at risk.

If that’s not enough, in 2003 this youth leader was elected to the position of President of the Aboriginal People’s Commission (APC) of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and Co-President of the Aboriginal People’s Commission of the Liberal Party of Canada to become the youngest APC President in Canadian history, positions she held until March of 2005.