

At 106, Willis College is young, healthy and a national pace-setter in education

BY CARL DOW

In partnerships with private business and government, the Willis College of Business and Technology has taken a giant step forward by offering young Canadians access to the tools they need to succeed in the 21st Century.

Among the five pace-setting initiatives is TeKnoWave, Canada's first national Aboriginal IT program with the goal of producing a rich source of skilled personnel in the first nations community.

Rima Aristocrat, president and CEO of the Willis College of Business and Technology, says developments today are the most exciting in the school's 106-year history.

"Willis College has really demonstrated the benefits of innovation and the power of the three Ps in education – public, private, and partnerships," says Ms. Aristocrat. "Throughout its long history, Willis has laid a firm foundation of public trust, innovation, and successful partnerships in the development and delivery of training programs that meet the needs of employers. These have made Willis College the leading private education institute in Canada."

Aside from TeKnoWave, Willis College provides IT security-training programs that protect corporations against potential disasters. The partnership with Cygnos IT Security Willis College launch a series of security courses, directed at managers and IT technical staff. This comprehensive suite empowers individuals to fortify their organizations and implement enterprise security policies.

Willis is an organization designated by the Canadian and International Industrial Security Directorate (CIISD) to screen prospective students for security clearance. "I thought it was absolutely essential to screen prospective students before we trained them to become security experts," says Ms. Aristocrat. "I was surprised that there were no other learning organizations providing security clearance before accepting students in security training programs. Now there is one – Willis College."

The government requires that employees hired after May 1995, possess a minimum of two years college diploma in order to remain permanent federal employees. Willis College, in partnership with the University of Winnipeg, provides Prior Learning Assessment Recognition that allows individuals to transfer their work and life experiences into one of Willis College's IT diploma programs and earn university credits.



Historic initiative: Left to right, Chief Ron Evans, Norway House Cree Nation; Rima Aristocrat, Willis College; Grand Chief Joseph Tokwirot Norton, Kahnawake, and Anna Molley, Donna Cona Inc.

"Willis College diploma programs in Information Technology have been approved by the Public Service Commission as equivalent to two years post-secondary training," says Ms. Aristocrat. "In partnership with the University of Winnipeg, students can also obtain university credits. This is the first and only such program in Ontario."

Willis is also establishing a new division that will deliver the highest quality corporate training in Canada.

"In addition to being the first and only Microsoft IT Academy in Ottawa, Willis is excited to be a part of a new corporate training initiative specializing in IT, Security and Management."

TeKnoWave

While Willis College is, as it always has been, open to all Canadians, TeKnoWave is dedicated to the development of a highly qualified Aboriginal workforce, creating new role models, leaders and IT champions to meet the challenges of the 21st century. TeKnoWave aims to develop one thousand Aboriginal IT

professionals and to provide 10 million dollars worth of community internship opportunities.

The TeKnoWave program provides accredited, articulated and industry-certified IT training programs that meet the demands of employers. The training is mixed with essential workplace skills, and management studies. Also included are Aboriginal spiritual, cultural, and history sessions, co-operative work experience, and community internship programs. The latter enhances graduate employability while contributing to community development and capacity building.

TeKnoWave provides a bridge between Aboriginal graduates and corporate Canada and will optimize the prospects for Aboriginal IT employment and corporate human resources strategy development. It will provide opportunity for credit transfer and will position Canadian Aboriginals as leaders.

Each TeKnoWave graduate will receive an accredited IT diploma from Willis College, a university certificate,

two university credits transferable towards a degree, industry certification, and a portfolio of real work experiences.

TeKnoWave is a unique response to a Human Resources strategy announced by Ministers Jane Stewart and Ethel Blondin. It directly responds to a call for action announced by business and government leaders at an unprecedented forum entitled Taking Pulse, which was established to improve the numbers in employing Aboriginal people in the Canadian workforce.

John Kim Bell, founder and president of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, and the organizer of the Taking Pulse Forum, in a letter to Rima Aristocrat of Willis College said:

"I am writing to express my support of TeKnoWave. The three sets of recommendations for greater participation of Aboriginal people into the Canadian workforce established by the leaders who attended the forum, certainly did include the strength of the Willis College TeKnoWave initiative to build an Aboriginal IT capacity."

TeKnoWave was built on the existing Willis College model that has been acknowledged as "community development at its best" by OCRI. TeKnoWave is completely unique, timely, and has already gained international attention.

TeKnoWave partners are Canadian public and private education sectors, global industry certification providers, Aboriginal IT corporations, Canadian IT employers, Aboriginal community leaders, small medium enterprises (SME), non-profit organizations, government, and Aboriginal learners.

"What's so exciting about this historical initiative," says Ms. Aristocrat, "is that it is spear-headed by Willis College, Odawa Native Friendship Center, and Donna Cona Inc., all three of which are located in Ottawa, and the University of Winnipeg."

TeKnoWave accomplishments

The Joseph T. Norton Scholarship of \$18,000 has been established by Willis College to support Aboriginal youth studying IT. Willis College is also pledging an additional scholarships in each city where TeKnoWave is deployed.

An additional \$12,000 in living expenses has been raised from private sector partners and Joseph T. Norton Scholarship Board of Trustees, John Kim Bell, founder and president of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, John Bernard, president of Canada's leading Aboriginal IT company Donna Cona Inc., Joseph T. Norton, Grand Chief of Kahnawake and chairperson of Mohawk Internet Technologies, and the CIBC.

A partnership has been struck by Aboriginal leaders, Aboriginal communities, the Aboriginal Human Resource Council of Canada, Aboriginal IT companies, local IT corporations, and university sectors.

A community internship program has been implemented wherein all Willis College and TeKnoWave students are required to work with the local communities and charitable organizations to develop IT applications as a prerequisite for a Willis College diploma.

Implementation planning is underway with the Odawa Native Friendship Centre to launch the first pilot TeKnoWave program in the Ottawa region in September 2002.

Corporate Canada partnerships have been announced by John Bernard, president of Donna Cona Inc. and the most recent partner is Robert Lacasse, president of Alcea Technologies Ltd., located in Ottawa.