

First Nations education conference in Hamilton

by Marie-Lauren Gregoire

HAMILTON—Mississaugas of the New Credit hosted the 4th annual Partners in Success education conference at the Sheraton Hotel on February 6 to 9, 2001. The Mississaugas of the New Credit partnered with Indian and Northern Affairs for the 4th consecutive year to bring the conference to teachers, administrators and educators. The theme of this year's conference was 'seeing the potential in every child.'

The conference presented speakers and seminars that deal with critical issues in education. Bryan LaForme, co-founder and committee chair, spoke with Teka about the conference. "I started it because I felt that First Nations weren't really kept up to date on a lot of the changes that take place within the province and the federal government when it comes to education, especially with the young people," said LaForme. The conference focuses on the young people, "We try to focus all our interests on how we can benefit our youth, because, after all, they're going to be our next leaders."

The First Nations education conference covered topics like school violence and curriculum development, as well as spirituality, parent-teacher relations, futures and post secondary education, celebrating success, dealing with adversity and the power of positive thinking. Conference speakers are professionals in their field presenting relevant topics and conference attendees enjoyed them, "Our participants are very satisfied in the calibre of the speakers that we have," said LaForme. The response of the participants about the seminars was overwhelmingly positive.

The teachers, administrators and directors that attend the conference come from all over, "We have students that come from Niagara College, from Mohawk College. We have students that are doing their thesis from Ohio, we've had delegations from Fiji, educators come from Alaska," said LaForme. The New Credit First Nation Education Department ensures all its teachers attend this exceptional conference by providing professional development days to the schools and the day care.

As many as 200 participants attended the conference this year. Conference organizers expect that number to grow. The conference is built upon the recommendations of past attendees and the issues of the day. Thérèse Oden, Luxmar Marketing Inc., explained the topic selection, "We work from information from last year's conference, we do evaluation sheets and people submit their ideas of what they want to hear about."

This year's theme included a seminar about school violence as it is becoming more predominant. John Van Allen, detective sergeant of the Ontario Provincial Police, presented a seminar on school violence, awareness, assessment and prevention. Van Allen discussed the role of the teacher in safety at school, "I think they should see where their role is in dealing with parents, encouraging children to come forward and discussing safety issues with children and dealing with setting some bounds of control in the classroom."

Van Allen's presentation covered the spectrum of violence in schools from school shootings and bomb threats to school