

## **2012 INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER EILEEN PAUL, MEMBERTOU ENTREPRENEUR CENTRE, NS**



Eileen Paul has lived in the community of Membertou for most of her life. She is a single mother of three and is currently the Manager of the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre (MEC). The MEC provides customized business training and support to interested entrepreneurs in the Membertou community as well as one-on-one support for new and existing businesses. The main focus of the MEC is to assist Membertou residents that are interested in starting or expanding a business, and to develop a solid business plan. The MEC works together with Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC), Ulnooweg Development Group and other federal, provincial and community economic development agencies to determine how best to provide investment capital and funding to support new business ventures in Membertou. The Membertou Business Park and the

MEC also offer an incubation center for Aboriginal businesses that are starting or expanding their own business. This incubation center allows the aboriginal tenant to rent space from the plaza and a reasonable/subsidized rate, along with uncomplicated leases, office equipment and support. Under Eileen's leadership and guidance, the MEC has been an effective and wonderful center of support, incubation and foundation for business development by community members in Membertou.

### **Community Participation**

Eileen is very active in her community, and is involved with many organizations and committees. She has been part of the Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Network for many years, which offers a forum for EDO's to share knowledge, best practices, work on training together and work on regional-based projects and initiatives. Eileen also sits on the Sydney Chamber of Commerce and is a part of the Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Tripartite Forum which is a partnership between the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada, to strengthen relationships and to resolve issues of mutual concern affecting Mi'kmaq communities. More recently, she became a member of the Membertou Governance Committee, where she will learn about and advocate for lands and economic development initiatives affecting her community.

### **Youth Entrepreneurship**

Eileen is also a strong advocate for the youth in her community, and she is passionate about ensuring that youth have opportunities to learn, grow and become successful entrepreneurs. For many years, Eileen has been involved in the BDC E-Spirit Youth Entrepreneur Program which involves working with the Aboriginal High School students in her community to develop business plans for entry into a National competition. She is dedicated to the youth in her community and supports the E-Spirit program because it allows youth to see their full potential and encourages them to consider business and entrepreneurship as a career.

### **Women in Business**

Early on in her career with the MEC, Eileen recognized that there was a general lack of support for the women in business in the communities. There were no programs or conferences for Aboriginal women, or other resources which would offer support and tools that women need to become more efficient and effective in the business world. In response to the needs of Aboriginal women, Eileen developed the idea for a "Balance:

Aboriginal Women in Business" forum that focused on self-esteem, confidence, building relationships, and that would offer all the basic tools and resources that are included in starting a business. With dedication and passion for seeing this initiative come to fruition, she worked tirelessly to find funders, sponsors and brought the right people together to make it happen. In 2008 Eileen held the "Balance: Aboriginal Women in Business Conference". It was recognized as the first ever Aboriginal Women in Business Conference. The project was deemed so successful that it developed into a larger scale Atlantic-wide initiative in 2009 and 2010, with support and funding from the Federal and Provincial governments.

Eileen also recognized the need for an MEC program that would deliver certified courses to prepare and strengthen entrepreneurs. In 2011, Eileen was recognized for her work and received the Impact Award for Women in Business. These programs are being delivered across Atlantic Canada and in this way; Eileen is impacting Aboriginal women throughout the region and has been extremely successful in creating partnerships with other Aboriginal communities for the delivery of programs.

In 2011, Eileen was invited to participate in the National Status of Women Roundtable discussion held in Ottawa and while there, she represented Aboriginal women in business. On International Women's Day this past March, Eileen's work was recognized when the MEC's "Balance: Aboriginal Women in Business" Success Story was successfully selected as one of the featured profiles and was part of Canada's showcase material and information kit presented at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW). The 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the United Nations headquarters in New York and hosted over 5,000 delegates from around the world.