



The TeKnoWave Story As Unique As the Initiative Itself

By: Clifford T. Summers

October 2004



"Chance favours the prepared mind."

—Blaise Pascal, 17th-century mathematician

Opening remarks from the Founder and President of TeKnoWave Inc.

"How do you describe the emotional effect of spoken words that touch your soul?"

How do you express one's phenomenal gratitude to the First Nations that allows you to experience their mysticism?

How do you describe the enduring good fortune when their people welcome's you as one of their own?

You can't; you can only share your story and leave it up to the readers to appreciate them.

-- Rima Aristocrat, M.Ed.
Founder and President, TeKnoWave Inc.

The TeKnoWave Story As Unique As the Initiative Itself

TeKnoWave was built on a wave of dreams – a vision! It's an inspiring story of giving and unique partnerships. When asked how TeKnoWave came to fruition, Rima Aristocrat, President and CEO of the 108-year old Willis College of Business & Technology, and the Founder and President of TeKnoWave Inc., tells a story as unique as the initiative itself.

"The inspiration for the TeKnoWave initiative began with an event that took place three years ago in Winnipeg, where I was presenting papers at an international conference. At the end of the day, educators from 20 different countries gathered for an evening of entertainment. George Bear, an Aboriginal "Hoop Dancer" performed his sacred dance. Afterwards, Bear spontaneously gave a personal account of his lack of education and the hardships that Canadian Indigenous people face in achieving higher education."

6 THE OTTAWA CITIZEN ADVERTISING FEATURE WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 2001

Willis College president moved to offer scholarship to aboriginal dancer

Willis Business College president and CEO Rima Aristocrat was one of the speakers recently at the UNEVOC international conference in Winnipeg.

UNEVOC is UNESCO's International Project on Technical and Vocational Education.

But it was another, impromptu speaker, who moved the educator to take action, offering George Bear, a 37-year-old aboriginal dancer and caretaker an \$18,000 scholarship.

Mr. Bear had performed a traditional hoop dance to a room packed with 150 educators from 20 countries who were in Winnipeg for UNEVOC.

After his dance, Mr. Bear said he felt compelled to give a speech about his lack of education and the hardships that first nations people face in achieving higher learning.

Successful educational methods for aboriginal learners were among the issues discussed at the two-day conference.

"Just something in the room, looking at the people, for some reason something was telling me to speak out from the heart," Mr. Bear said. The honesty of his words blew Rima Aristocrat away.

"He told us how he always dreamed of having an education. He said, 'I know I cannot learn, I'm not smart,'" she said. "His speech touched me. It was so human. I got goosebumps."

Ms. Aristocrat offered Mr. Bear a one-year paid scholarship to Willis College, worth \$18,000. Mr. Bear, who only went to grade nine, was shocked.

"Oh wow, I'm going to follow this dream," he said. "I've wasted a lot of time over the years. There's a big gap in my life and I'm going to fill it."

Mr. Bear grew up on Brokenhead First Nation before moving to Winnipeg. "There's a lot of aboriginal people that I know...who don't believe in anything. They grew up not having anything to learn from, not being talked to."

Ms. Aristocrat said she hopes Mr. Bear's desire and dreams will motivate other Canadians to understand the need for quality education.

(original story by Melissa Leong in the Winnipeg Free Press)



George Bear stands with Rima Aristocrat in the Royal Crown banquet and conference centre in Winnipeg.

Jeff Doherty, Winnipeg Free Press



Bear's story moved Aristocrat so much that she awarded him with an \$18,000 scholarship to Ottawa's Willis College. The college has since decided to grant a permanent educational scholarship for Aboriginal students named after Joseph Tokwirot Norton (J.T.N.) Grand Chief of the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory.

The *Joseph T. Norton Scholarship* is now accompanied by an additional \$10,000 stipend for living expenses which has been raised from the Aboriginal private sector, from corporations such as National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, Mohawk Internet Technologies and Donna Cona Inc.

Willis College & TeKnoWave announces Rahontsiio Cross Award of Excellence



In November 2002, Aboriginal leaders welcomed Rahontsiio Cross from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory and Joselyn Grant from Whitehorse, Yukon as scholarship winners at Willis College. The pictures taken at the J.T.N. Scholarship recipients' official welcome ceremony were sent to AHRDCC and were used to create posters for the national technology Aboriginal training program: TeKnoWave. Rahontsiio, whose dream was to open schools around the world to teach technology to Aboriginal youth, was very proud to be included in TeKnoWave.

In January 2003, 21-year-old Rahontsiio passed away unexpectedly. Rahontsiio was a young man with confidence in his culture and future who had big dreams for his family and community. He put his dreams to work, excelled in his studies and immediately became a "model student" at Willis.

As a testament to Rahontsiio's impact on the life of the college and his TeKnoWave connection, Willis College announced the creation of the Rahontsiio Cross Award of Excellence. This award will be granted to the highest academic achiever in each TeKnoWave graduating class.



On July 12, 2003 Willis College presented Rahontsiio Cross's honorary graduation diploma to his mother: Helen Cross and her family

In November 2004, at TeKnoWave's 1st pilot program graduation gala ceremony, Helen Cross, Joseph Norton and Joselyn Grant presented Christopher Brinklow, Mohawk from Tyendinaga, 2003 – 2004 Rohontsiio Cross Award of Excellence.



Rahontsiio is an inspiration for all TeKnoWave students.

Don't Tell Me It's Impossible

By Andrew Southward, MCSA graduate, TeKnoWave Pilot Program



As I sit here looking over the exams, essays and tests that I have completed over the last 7 months, I find myself filled with a quiet satisfaction thinking about what I have accomplished in such a very short time. I never would have believed that I was capable of achieving the grades I have obtained of late, such as 92% in HTML and Web Design, 94 % in Business Management, 91% in Computer Concepts, not to mention becoming certified in A+ Hardware as well as Microsoft Certified Professional Windows XP Professional. Now, for the first time in a very long time, I am beginning to catch a glimpse of a very bright future that awaits me. As I continue attending classes, studying every night, writing exams, etc., I find myself getting closer and closer to realizing my main goals: becoming MCSE certified by Microsoft, getting a Network Engineer diploma from 107-year-old

Willis College and receiving a Business Management Program Certificate from the University of Winnipeg. All of my above mentioned successes are due largely in part to having joined a program called **TeKnoWave**. Without TeKnoWave, and having met some wonderful people such as Rima Aristocrat, Linda Zaluska, Glenn Myatt, John Leggitt and Shellie Matthews, I am not sure where I would be right now. These people have helped me to continue believing in myself and have encouraged me to persevere when I simply wanted to throw in the towel. Now, I cannot wait for the future, and I feel ready to conquer anything. "Don't tell me it's impossible!" I did not always believe that statement, but the TeKnoWave program has given me an incredible opportunity and has changed my mind and spirit.

My journey began a few years ago when I was feeling down and my life was going nowhere. I quit university to stay with my mother who was sick and needed to be cared for. She was a very strong and spiritual woman who taught me about kindness, how to find the good in any situation, spirituality and to have and maintain a firm pride in whom I was as an individual. Although I was not improving myself academically at that time, we spent many a great moment talking with one another. This time with her will have an impact on me for the rest of my life. I became very complacent and satisfied in my little niche until one day her illness got the better of her. While holding her in the hospital, she looked me square in the eye and at that moment; I could see the love she felt for me. There was nothing I could do to help her as the life left her body and her skin went cold in my hands. The next day I scattered her ashes into a river alongside where we used to walk and talk. As the current washed her away, I remember feeling that there was something that I must do for her. Most people would say that it was impossible to have helped her at this point. "Don't tell me it's impossible."

Shortly after my mother's death, I got a call informing me that my father had fallen ill with cancer. I immediately rushed to Montreal to be by his side. My father was a tough but kind man who taught me that you only get out of life what you put into it. He also told me that what you do today will have a direct affect on what will happen to you tomorrow. I always aspired to be like my father. He was a successful man who got that way with no help from anyone else but himself. It was very difficult to sit by and watch him lose weight and strength. I watched his illness transform his strong, proud body into a skinny, brittle shell, which I had to carry to and from the bathroom. Before he died, he told me that he knew I would eventually do something significant with my life. He said that he wasn't sure what, but that he envisioned great things for me. As I stared at him in his coma, I thought of what I could do to live up to his expectations. Should I do something for him? Should I do something for my mother? Should I do something for myself? So many thoughts invaded my mind as the life slipped from his body and he lay dead in my arms. I felt like I couldn't handle anything after this. I simply did not have the strength or the

desire. I thought it was impossible! At that moment, I could hear my father's voice ringing in my head: "Don't tell me it's impossible."

After his death, I returned to Ottawa and moved into a tiny shed in the back of a downtown heritage building. In exchange for board, I worked there very meagerly as the on-site property manager for the summer and into the fall. I tried to make the best of it, but my sadness gripped me tightly and as I sank into depression, my drinking got out of hand. The room did not have any heat or insulation, but I somehow felt as though this was all that I deserved at this junction in my life. I finally decided to seek assistance from the Odawa Native Friendship Centre. It is there that I met a wonderful woman named Linda Zaluska. She informed me of a pilot project that was just about to start and she thought I would be the perfect candidate for it. The program was **TeKnoWave**, Canada's first National Aboriginal Information Technology program. I can say now, with the utmost certainty, that if not for having met Linda, my life would be significantly different right now. She definitely went above and beyond what was expected or necessary in order to help someone she had never even met before. She is the one who led me to Willis College where I was fortunate enough to meet Rima Aristocrat, President of Willis College and founder of the TeKnoWave initiative. After completing a few tests, I was accepted into the program, which began September 2nd, 2003. I cannot put into words how grateful I am to have met Rima. Her kindness and willingness to help everyone around her inspired me to be a better person.

Once the course began, I ran into so many obstacles that I began to think that it would be impossible to continue my studies and complete the program. Although I often lost faith, Rima never altered her belief in me. I was evicted in November, as my landlord refused to heat, or insulate my tiny shed as previously promised due to an insurance concern. He gave me two days notice to leave, so I suddenly found myself homeless, without enough money to live, no food and enrolled in a full time course. The money I was receiving for my living allowance was not even enough to rent a room in the city. I believed that my future was doomed as I roamed from shelter to shelter in the city. I thought about quitting several times, and if it were not for Rima and her constant support and willingness to help, I would have. She gave me hope and pointed me in the direction of people like Shelley Hill at OFIFC-GREAT Initiative. She did everything she could in order to help me through my crisis. I have an enormous amount of respect for Shelley Hill. She is a firm supporter of the **TeKnoWave** program and its students, and she is a true friend. With all that was going on in my life, people were telling me that it would be impossible to finish my course under such conditions. I think back to what they said to me and find myself saying the words, "Don't tell me it's impossible!"

It's now the month of March and although things remain difficult I continue to persevere. I have overcome the obstacles that faced me and have come out on top. I now live with a young woman named Shellie Matthews who saw much more in me than a homeless Aboriginal. I love her with all my heart and I foresee a long and wonderful future together. School is going well and I am starting to feel that nothing can stop me, no matter what comes my way. I believe that the challenges and adversity I have faced have made me stronger and more dedicated both as a person and a student. There is very little that I am afraid of anymore. I feel as though I can now handle whatever the future has in store for me and will be able to overcome anything. TeKnoWave has grown into something that I could never have dreamed of. It is now a non-profit organization. The Pilot students are developing through TeKnoWave business opportunities of our own. With Willis College's Entrepreneurship Centre mentorship, we are forming an Aboriginal corporation, voting on things such as who will be president, vice president, head of the IT department, etc and participating in business simulations.

TeKnoWave began as a course and is now becoming a way of life and opening doors to a future for me as well as everyone else involved. The people that I have met, have been an integral part of my journey and I credit the **TeKnoWave** program for giving me the opportunity to have a future that looks brighter each day. If there is anyone out there that is feeling discouraged and thinks that things are just too tough to handle, I have just one thing to say to you; "Anything is possible!"

Canada Sends Aboriginals as Youth Ambassadors to Busan, South Korea

TeKnoWave students, Angela Vallely, Cree, from Fisher River, Manitoba and Philip Vanevery-Albert, Cayuga from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, in Ontario traveled to Korea as members of the Canadian business delegation led by Government of Canada officials. Ms. Vallely and Mr. Vanevery-Albert served as youth ambassadors at the Canadian Pavilion and gained valuable business, trade and international relations experience. They also participated in the second ITU Asia Youth Forum. The goal of the Forum was to cultivate the business and government leaders of tomorrow as they address critical digital divide issues – ICT literacy, access to technology and cultural issues.



"TeKnoWave has opened up many opportunities for all of us. Our quality education, friendly

atmosphere, and a variety of Indigenous social and cultural activities make TeKnoWave the perfect place to study, travel and develop life-long friends and we are proud to be the first Canadian Youth Ambassadors at the ITU Telecom Asia 2004 Youth Forum." - Says Phil and Angela.

왼쪽부터 김지은, 필립, 김상훈, 안젤라(지난 7일 부산 웨스틴 조선 호텔에서 열린 캐나다 대사관 주재 유스포럼 만찬에서 한국대표 학생들과)

TeKnoWave 2003-2004 Graduation Ceremony



The future of Aboriginal Internet Technology training was front and centre at the graduation ceremony for this years TeKnoWave graduates in Ottawa. TeKnoWave graduation keynote speaker Douglas Cardinal Principal of Douglas J. Cardinal Architects Ltd. gave an impassioned speech on his willingness in the 1970's to be the first architect in the industry to embrace technology and of its importance to our Aboriginal youth in the 21st century.

"Traditional culture really supports the whole idea of creativity and taking responsibility of being this powerful magical being of which we are as human beings. I feel that this is the opportunity that Native people everywhere can succeed because they can move into this information age and really make a difference where they could not in industrial age because it was one of exploiting mother earth and creating lots of hazards for the environment but... the information age, that is where we can excel – so I really look forward of having these young people make a difference on the society as a whole"



-- Dr. Douglas J. Cardinal
Principal of Douglas J. Cardinal Architects Ltd