

The Aboriginal Advantage:

By Marina Wilson

A Win-Win for Canada

Joel Cardinal is Cree and grew up on a reserve in Northern Alberta. He firmly believes that Canada's Indigenous people can play an important role as ambassadors to other countries.

In an essay he submitted for the Aboriginal Essay Competition sponsored by DFAIT and Cameco Corp. in collaboration with the Canadian Bureau for International Education, Cardinal makes that case: "Active participation by Aboriginal groups in the decision making process on issues that affect them is the key for gaining Aboriginal support on international issues, thereby creating solidarity with Aboriginal people on Canada's international affairs."

Deborah Chatsis, Canada's ambassador to Vietnam, could not agree more. Chatsis, a Cree from Northern Saskatchewan, firmly believes that "within DFAIT, Aboriginals can bring a unique perspective to foreign policy work, including on Aboriginal rights, the Northern strategy, Arctic relationships and sustainable development, which helps to ensure that foreign policy is relevant and useful to Canadians."

And DFAIT has made possible just that. James Bartleman, who served as the 27th lieutenant governor of Ontario from 2002 to 2007, was at the forefront of Canadian foreign policy making for 35 years, serving as the chief foreign policy advisor to the prime minister and as ambassador to Israel and South Africa. Bartleman is a member of the Chippewas of Mnjikaning First Nation.

Mary Simon was Canada's first ambassador for circumpolar affairs and later served as ambassador to Denmark. Simon, an Inuk from Northern Quebec, is now president of Canada's national Inuit organization.

Today, with support from the Corporate Resourcing Division (HSR), Don Bobiash, the champion for Aboriginal people in the department, is actively working to attract and retain new talent from Canada's Aboriginal communities. "Involving Aboriginal Canadians in foreign policy is the right thing to do," says Bobiash. "They are affected by



Winners of the National Aboriginal Essay Competition: Kelly Campagnola, Lea Toulouse Florentin and Joel Cardinal

decisions made in this department and should definitely have a say."

In March 2010, Bobiash hosted the Aboriginal Career Counsellor Conference, which brought together counsellors from 20 universities across Canada to learn about the department and to promote opportunities for Aboriginal students and graduates.

This conference is one of a series of DFAIT initiatives designed to strengthen relations with universities that have significant Aboriginal student populations and to promote Aboriginal recruitment.

In the summer of 2010, DFAIT inaugurated an Aboriginal co-op stream, which brought in several students over the summer and fall semesters.

"We need managers to come forward with opportunities—we want them to take on a student!" says HSR Director Monica Janecek. "Co-op programs and initiatives like the essay competition enable Aboriginal students to use their academic knowledge in an actual work setting, gain insights into future occupational opportunities and develop skills that could lead to employment after graduation."

Joel Cardinal, who won the essay competition, got a taste of that last summer. He travelled to Geneva as part of the official Canadian delegation to the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Cardinal says he has, at times, considered a career in the Canadian foreign service.

"Winning the essay competition has definitely made me interested again."