



Vision Quest CONFERENCE 2009

Promoting Aboriginal Business, Community and Economic Development



Honourary Chair David Chartrand (left)
Grand entry ceremony (above)
May 11, 2009

Crystal Shawanda: Open Heart & Mind

Sony Music Nashville recording artist Crystal Shawanda is an award-winning entertainer taking country music by storm. Vision Quest was proud to have her share her songs and stories this year, and deliver the keynote address on the second day of the conference.

Crystal was born in Ontario and grew up on a reservation called Wikwemikong on Canada's Manitoulin Island. Her musical roots began at an early age: "My mother used to tell me I started singing when I started talking." And it was her mother who encouraged her to make her own music: "When I was six years old, my mother asked me 'what is that you keep singing?' I said

continued...



**Keynote Presentation by
Sony Music Recording Artist Crystal Shawanda**

Message from the Vision Quest Board

It was a good year for our 'lucky 13th' Vision Quest Conference, which took place May 11 to 13, 2009, at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. Over 900 participants – of which 217 were youth delegates – took part in workshops, keynote presentations, trade show, youth program, networking events, and the gala banquet.

Vision Quest brings together innovators, entrepreneurs and business leaders to discuss and promote Aboriginal business, community and economic development. At the heart of Vision Quest is the mission of supporting sustainable Aboriginal economic development, and the goal of the emergence of best business practices that support and synergize community and individual development.

We are grateful for all who helped make Vision Quest a success – speakers, sponsors, partners, presenters, delegates, exhibitors, staff, volunteers, media

friends, and special guests. Thank you to everyone! We'd also like to say thanks to our Honourary Chair David Chartrand, President of the Manitoba Métis Federation; our Vision Quest Elder Mae Louise Campbell; and our Master of Ceremonies Robert Campbell, CEO of Tribal Marketing Communications Inc.

We hope everyone enjoyed themselves in 2009, and we hope to see you again in 2010 - Mark your calendars for May 18 to 20, 2010!

From the Board of Directors Vision Quest Conferences Inc.

Kim Bullard, Dakota Ojibway CFDC
Carol Johnston, Southeast CFDC
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Vision Quest Conference Partners





Keynote Presentation by
Calvin Darrell Helin

Calvin Darrell Helin: *Opportunity & Crisis*

A member of the Tsimshian Nation from the Northwest coast of B.C., Calvin Darrell Helin is son of a hereditary Chief, a practicing lawyer, and President and CEO of Eagle Group of Companies and Orca Spirit Publishing & Communications. He is author of several publications relating to law, Aboriginal business, and associated issues, including the best-selling book, *Dances with Dependency: Out of Poverty through Self-Reliance*.

The message Calvin brought to Vision Quest during his keynote address was both powerful and passionate. “For thousands of years, we didn’t just survive. We thrived,” he told the audience. “People used to say what they meant and do what they said.” He referred to the words of the legendary Chief Cochise: “Speak straight so that your words go like sunlight to our hearts.”

*“Is this a time of
crisis or opportunity?
It’s both.”*

Calvin believes that being honest is the first step towards empowerment, and in finding solutions to the social ills plaguing First Nation people. As part of his presentation he showed a video segment about ‘Violet’ from Vancouver’s lower Eastside who lost her husband to pneumonia. It revealed a slice of life on the street, riddled with poverty, pain, addiction, and little hope. It is these kinds of stories that motivate Calvin the most.

“My personal reason for writing my book is that we’ve got to do something for our people,” he said, adding that gatherings like Vision Quest can help initiate change. “The subject of this conference is very important to the future of Canada – not just in moving our people forward, but in moving the whole country forward.”

“Is this a time of crisis or opportunity? It’s both.”

Youth Participation

Story by Natasha Tersigni, Youth Reporter

The future of Aboriginal people lies with youth, and the 2009 Vision Quest conference focused many aspects towards youth. One popular exhibitor was Graffiti Art Programming Inc., which offers programs that help high-risk youth learn to express themselves artistically and creatively.

Graffiti Art displayed and interacted with conference youth through break-dancing, art cards, DJ-ing, and hip hop art. Program leader Michael Duduck said that participating at Vision Quest helped raise awareness of their initiatives and provided a release for youth during the long day.

Youth workshops this year included Rex Smallboy of War Party, who talked about his life on the reserve and how he had to learn to think ‘outside the box’ in order to grow beyond the box – referring to the reserve as the box. Youth like Terrance Clarke and Chad Mallete from Fisher River found his message to be motivating and inspiring. Taylor Fleet from Split Lake thought the conference was good at helping youth to set goals and realize what’s out there.



Comedy Night

There were plenty of laughs at Vision Quest Comedy Night, the opening event of this year’s conference. Special guest comedians Ryan McMahon and Gerry Barrett warmed up the crowd with their own comedy, before turning the stage over to ‘open mic’ participants. It turns out there was no shortage of wannabe-comedians on hand trying to stir up the laughs. Even the Vision Quest Board of Directors took turns on the mic, with Rick Ducharme receiving the unofficial ‘honourable mention’ for the world’s longest joke.

The winner of the \$100 prize went out to Marilyn Merasty from Brochet for her ‘hello Charlie Brown’ joke. Next time you see her, ask her to tell it! Other highlights of the evening included an appearance by Elvis, and musical performance by War Party.



“Crystal Shawanda” continued...

‘I don’t know, it just keeps popping in my head.’ So she said ‘write it down. With all these songs you are singing, you might as well sing one of your own.’”

Crystal heeded her mother’s advice, and wrote her first song at the age of nine. She discovered that songwriting would become her way of coping with the hopelessness she saw on the reservation. With a father who drove truck from Michigan to Nashville, she had an ongoing ride south, and began making trips to Nashville at the age of 11. Around that same time, she started her own cable television access show called The CS Show, and received a surprising response.

“People drove for four hours to be on this show, a little show that only broadcast on the reserve. It made me realize there was a need for musicians and entertainers to have shows where they could be heard.” Through helping to promote other musicians, Crystal found the confidence to pursue her own career. “When I let my heart be open, and my mind be open, somewhere along the way it clicked.”

Crystal was determined to make her dreams come true, and believes everyone has the power to do the same if they persevere: “When it comes to your career, it should be something that motivates you; something you want to do when you wake up every single day; something you are excited about. We give up on our dreams way too easy, and we give up on our dreams way too soon. If it’s something you love, it’s going to be hard, but it will be worth it.”

Her biggest lesson so far? “I learned to love life – hold on to it and never let go.”



Crystal Shawanda performs at Vision Quest Conference 2009 Gala Banquet

TRADE SHOW

Vision Quest’s Trade Show was once again a popular attraction in 2009. More than 70 Exhibitors participated, representing suppliers, service providers, hospitality groups, economic development organizations, educational institutions, and information services, along with a selection of artists and artisans.

Mindy Brooker was a first-time Exhibitor at the Vision Quest Trade Show in 2009. She was inspired to start Mindy’s Jewellery after participating in Ka Ni Kanichihk’s Self Employment Program for Aboriginal Women.

“I had a great time, and met a lot of people. I was inspired by the speakers and it has encouraged me to continue.”

Mindy Brooker, Mindy’s Jewellery (Trade Show Exhibitor)



Over 70 exhibitors participated at the 2009 Vision Quest Conference Trade Show

“I had been making crafts and jewellery since I was ten, and was always interested in starting my own business,” said Mindy, who launched Mindy’s Jewellery in 2009. She saw Vision Quest as a chance to promote her business while meeting others in the community.

“Vision Quest was a great place to be. I was able to sell some of my jewellery and get some contacts and further promotion. I was able to get my face recognized and people that I have met recently mentioned that they also saw me at the conference.”



Congrats Are In Order!

The Order of Manitoba was established to recognize Manitobans whose demonstrated excellence and achievement have benefited the social, cultural or economic well-being of the province and its residents. Twelve recipients received the award in 2009, including Joseph Meconse, a Sayisi Dene elder and Manitoba representative for Aboriginal veterans in Canada. For the past several years, Joe has lead Vision Quest’s Grand Entry along with fellow Aboriginal veterans. We are happy that Joe was named to the Order of Manitoba, and proud that he is a part of Vision Quest. *Congratulations Joe!*

Award Presentations

Aboriginal Business Service Network: Business Plan Competition Awards



Gilbert Forbister, Forbister’s Renos & Repairs



Jacki Azure-Townsend, Azure Virtual Assistance Services

Vision Quest: Steve Prince Memorial Bursary

Josée Lépine



Our New Team

Vision Quest Conferences Inc. welcomes our 2010 coordination team:

Conference Coordinators:

Melanie Rennie
Anne-Marie Thibert
Stacey Beito

Administrative Assistant/Bookkeeper:

Jacquelyne Johnston

Ph: (204) 942-5049 / 1-800-557-8242

Fax: (204) 943-1735

E-mail: visionquest@mts.net

Special Thanks

Vision Quest Conferences Inc. is a non-profit charitable organization formed through partnerships with six Community Futures Development Corporations:

Cedar Lake CFDC; Dakota Ojibway CFDC; Kitayan CFDC; Northwest CFDC; North Central CFDC; and Southeast CFDC

Therefore, Vision Quest would not exist without the generous support of our Sponsors.

Once again, we'd like to acknowledge and say thank you to our 2009 Sponsors:

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Manitoba Legislature Recognizes Vision Quest

MLA Bidhu Jha, a member of the Manitoba NDP caucus, delivered a member's statement in the Manitoba Legislature this year about the Vision Quest conference. Here are some excerpts from his statement:

"On May 12, I had the pleasure to attend the 2009 Vision Quest Conference on behalf of the Premier (Mr. Doer). This year's conference marked the 13th year of bringing people together to discuss and promote Aboriginal business, community and economic development. This event was very well organized and very, very successful."

"Each year, the Vision Quest Conference plays an important role in shaping tomorrow's entrepreneurs, entertainers and the labour force; the main focus being youth and entrepreneurship. This year's conference was especially, very, very important given the ongoing global financial crisis and global recession."

"There is an old proverb that states: Where there is no vision, the people perish. This is true of the business world. In times of uncertainty, only those with a vision for their future will successfully navigate their path. I am proud to be part of a government that invests in the potential of Aboriginal business."

MARK YOUR CALENDAR for the 2010 Vision Quest Conference, MAY 18 to 20 at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. Hope to see you!

Got News? Vision Quest wants to know your good news! If you made special connections at Vision Quest in 2009, discovered a new opportunity, or found the conference to be a great place to "seal a deal"... we'd love to feature your success story on the Vision Quest website.

Please share your story by sending an email to visionquest@mts.net. Everyone who submits will be entered in a draw for a complimentary Delegate pass in 2010. Deadline for submissions is December 31, 2009.



Vision Quest Conferences Inc.

Phone: (204) 942-5049 Fax: (204) 943-1735

Email: visionquest@mts.net

200 - 208 Edmonton St. Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1R7

Web: www.vqconference.com