

June 12, 2006

Marathon and Region Attendees
North Superior Training Board Community Consultation May 2006

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On May 26, 2006 the North Superior Training Board traveled to Marathon to conduct a Trends, Opportunities and Priorities labour market community consultation for Marathon and surrounding First Nation communities. Those attending came from the health, education, government, mining, forestry, First Nation and economic development sectors. The consultation took place in the Council Chambers of the town from noon to 2 p.m. and was followed by a tour of the Williams Mine, Hemlo Operations. The gold mine tour provided the Board and a number of teachers involved with the Passport to Prosperity program, an opportunity to learn first-hand the vast array of careers available in the mining industry. Williams Mine has an excellent apprenticeship program in place with a clear commitment to training and providing opportunities for new apprentices.

The consultation commenced with an introduction on the mandate and work of the Local Board, its projects and partnerships, an explanation of how to identify and prioritize issues within the labour market and a summary of the Marathon Business Retention and Expansion survey conducted in 2005. Delegates were asked to identify local labour market issues with the goal in mind of developing a community partner's action plan to address these issues.

The following issues were identified at the consultation:

In the health care sector in Marathon, over 50% of nurses are over the age of 45 and will be retiring within the next 10 years. The hospital is anticipating a severe shortage of professional staff. Opportunities to be educated or participate in upgrading courses in their own geographical area are limited and the cost to send staff for training to other centres is often prohibitive. Hospital administration is currently seeking an agreement with Confederation College and Lakehead University to implement nursing training in this region such as can be found in the Dryden area. The challenge of meeting numbers or quotas to introduce training programs in the area needs to be re-assessed. A college representative advised that the implementation of this is currently under review as is the introduction of multi-skilled training in the Skilled Trades. The model of the CITC or Community Industrial Training Committees was recommended to be re-introduced as this worked particularly well for smaller communities attempting to access training and funding.

In the mining sector the need for multi-skilled training was identified as essential to the short and long term survival of the mining industry. Exploration along the north shore is moving fast and potential for new mine development is very positive but a pool of skilled labour to draw upon is critical. There is a shortage of accessible training, both for specialty and common core mining and affordable training that does not require the employee to have to travel lengthy distance e.g. Sudbury to access. Employment changes in the mining sector are directly related to the level of exploration expenditures. Lower environmental standards, low taxes, cheaper labour have led to more exploration and investment in South America than in our region which has reduced Northern Ontario's share of production. The David Bell Mine is expected to close in 2009 and the Williams Mine has a life expectancy of 3-5 years with an opportunity for exploration to extend the life of this mine.

*Winner of the 2006 Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce Commitment to Quality Award and
the 2005 Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce Business of Excellence Award Not-for-Profit*

Aboriginals living in the area do provide a pool of labour for industry but are experiencing their own challenges in meeting the educational levels required to meet the qualifications necessary for apprenticeship or employment opportunities. The region's Aboriginal population not only represents a significant percentage of the region's population, but is younger than the overall population and demand for sustainable employment opportunities is growing. While there are individuals working in the local mine from Pic Moberg there is ample room for growth. Issues include such basics as not possessing a driver's license, a grade 12 diploma, low literacy levels, lack of sufficient funding for training, lack of information on how to acquire job requirements and what employment opportunities are available were cited. Pic River now has its own high school and is looking to create co-op work opportunities to allow people to work, learn and earn at the same time. Training in the mining industry could provide significant opportunities for the educational institutions e.g. the college here in the region. Professional development opportunities for administration/management for Native Bands are limited due to cost and travel required to access training. There is recognition of the challenges of capacity building within First Nations as people are hired to do jobs they haven't been trained to do.

It was recommended that a list of jobs available in the community be made available to all grade 9 students so that they can start to plan early in their high school years to pursue a course of action that will allow them to remain in the area. It was suggested that we do a disservice to our young people by discouraging them from a career in the Skilled Trades – “not everyone is meant to go to university”. It will require all parties to work collectively to address issues such as co-operative work experience, affordable training, multi-skilled trades training and upgrading without having to travel long distances to access. An inventory of assets that each community has should be developed which can be used as a recruitment tool to attract new people and retain those already living there. Entrepreneurship training should be started at the grade 6 level. Private training companies are needed in the region and many agreed that ‘we need to start the training ourselves.’ As well, there is a need to provide training and a culture of the worthiness and encouragement for young people to get involved in the political arena at all levels – municipal, provincial and federal. Other issues cited included the need for tax incentives for employee training and more flexible Workplace Safety and Insurance Board policies. The cost of living is very reasonable and the lifestyle is fantastic all of which has to be promoted by the municipal leaders in the area to “sell the advantages”.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the North Superior Training Board I would like to extend our appreciation to all those who attended the Community Consultation meeting in Marathon. The feedback received was very positive and all found it a useful event in which to bring together a broad range of community partners to discuss local labour market development needs. It was noted that this forum provided an excellent opportunity for First Nations and community stakeholders to discuss labour market gaps and barriers that impact all and that need to be collectively addressed. We look forward to returning to the Marathon region in the near future.



Marg Scott
Executive Director