The Purdy Crawford Chair
In Aboriginal Business Studies

Case Studies in Aboriginal Business

Membertou Professional Centre Signs
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The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University in 2010 in response to Aboriginal community leaders’ expression of the need for entrepreneurship, business investment, and corporate skills training for the purpose of creating a model of self-reliance.

Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada’s Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies focuses its work in four areas:

- Research on what “drives” success in Aboriginal Business
- National student recruitment in the area of post-secondary Aboriginal business education
- Enhancement of the post-secondary Aboriginal business curriculum
- Mentorship at high school and post-secondary levels

“Meaningful self-government and economic self-sufficiency provide the cornerstone of sustainable communities. My wish is to enhance First Nations post-secondary education and research to allow for the promotion and development of national Aboriginal business practices and enterprises.”

Purdy Crawford, C. C.
(1931-2014)
MEMBERTOU PROFESSIONAL CENTRE SIGNS

In the fall of 2014, the Business Development Committee of Membertou Corporate Division had to address the issue of commercial signage for the new Membertou Professional Centre. The facility had been constructed in 2013 and already had tenants, and as more began moving into the building, the committee felt pressured to make a decision on the installation of exterior signage.

BACKGROUND

Membertou is an urban reserve located alongside Sydney, Nova Scotia with a population of 1400 people, approximately 800 of whom live on reserve. In recent years, Membertou has experienced major achievements in economic development with the construction of the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre (MTCC), Hampton Inn, Membertou Market, gaming facilities, an entertainment centre, and the Membertou Business Centre and Membertou Professional Centre (also referred to as business parks). Membertou is also committed to preserving and fostering Mi’kmaw culture, as seen in community development efforts. The community promotes its culture and heritage by holding various events, such as community gatherings and powwows, and investing in the development of infrastructure, such as the Membertou Heritage Park. Additionally, Membertou seeks to promote education within the community.

In September 2014, Membertou opened its new elementary school, Maupeltueway Kina’matno’kuom. Because the community prides itself on a commitment to conservation, sustainability of resources, and innovation in its economic and community development initiatives, numerous energy efficient features were installed in the school. For example, the school was insulated with energy efficient materials and a geothermal heat pump was installed. As well, fixtures such as low flow faucets, automatic light sensors, and solar panels were installed.

MEMBERTOU’S BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Membertou Corporate Division has been operating since 2000 with the goal of making Membertou more self-sufficient and less dependent on federal subsidies. Membertou established itself as a credible business partner when it became the first Aboriginal government to become International Organization of Standards (ISO) 9001 certified in 2002.

Membertou’s Business Development Committee forms partnerships in economic development initiatives and oversees these ongoing projects. Since its establishment, successful partnerships with private industry sectors in engineering, mining, energy,
construction, geographic information system (GIS), information technology (IT),
business management, consulting services, insurance, commercial fisheries, and real
estate have been formed. The Business Development Committee consists of the band
chief, the chief executive officer, a senior advisor, the chief operating officer, the chief
financial officer, the special projects coordinator, the two senior business development
officers of Membertou Corporate Division, and the director of marketing and
information technology. From time to time, additional staff in senior management
positions may be included on the committee to help achieve strategic priorities.

MEMBERTOU’S BUSINESS PARKS

As part of the community’s development strategy, Membertou’s business parks were
clustered within a few kilometres of other developments, such as the MTCC and the
hotel. The first business park, known as the Membertou Business Centre, opened in on
June 23, 2010. Containing ten Aboriginal and twelve non-Aboriginal commercial
businesses, the centre was part of Membertou’s larger economic development
strategy. The business park was constructed in the form of a strip mall (see Exhibit 1) in
order to encourage commercial businesses to lease the space. The project was funded
through the Community Development Trust Fund and received $3.25 million in federal
and $1.2 million in provincial funding. The business centre provided space for economic
development in Membertou and created additional employment in the community. It
attracted several important anchors, including Tim Hortons, Pharmasave, and Stantec
Engineering, as well as a variety of vendors with other products and services.

On September 6, 2012, Membertou announced it would continue to expand its space
for commercial development with the construction of a second business park. Known
as the Membertou Professional Centre, it would house an additional ten units and cost
$4.25 million to build. It was funded through a combination of public and private
contributions. The second business park, which featured 20,000 square feet of
commercial real estate space, was completed in 2013 (see Exhibit 1). The first tenants,
in May 2013, were the Cape Breton Heart Lung Wellness Centre and the Optimal Hip
and Knee Clinic.

SIGNAGE

When the first business park was built, outdoor lightbox signage was installed. Each
exterior sign was wired to its respective unit. Each unit was responsible to control the
timer on their own sign and pay for the power it consumed. This meant that there was
no consistency between businesses in terms of when the signs would come on in
each unit or how long they would be lit. In some cases, they were not lit at all after
dark. With the launch of the second business park in Membertou, the Business
Development Committee considered wiring the external signage so that it operated
independent of the individual units. This would give Membertou control over when the signs were lit, ensuring they were all lit at the same time for the same duration. This solution, however, would come at an additional cost to Membertou. For increased ease and visibility, the committee considered using a photodetector electronic eye, a timer, or other sensors to activate signs. This would allow signage to operate automatically, should they decide to operate all of the signage instead of making tenants responsible for it.

While deciding how the signs should be wired and who should be responsible for covering the cost of their operation, there was also a need to consider the type of lighting to install. The signs installed at the first business park operated using standard sign-grade fluorescent bulbs. Because tenants pay for their power, there has been no cost to Membertou to operate these signs. The committee wondered whether it should use alternative lighting options in the second business centre. More efficient bulbs, such as light-emitting diode (LED), and solar-powered signs could decrease costs, regardless of whether the tenants or Membertou were responsible for covering the energy to light them. If tenants were given control over the signage, as in the first business park, the committee believed that lower energy lighting options would encourage the tenants to light their signage overnight. If Membertou controlled the signage, it would result in lower operating costs in the long term, despite the increased costs upfront.

The Business Development Committee did not want to rush into making this decision as it had to consider a number of factors, including Membertou’s commitment to sustainability, conservation, and innovation, which was on everyone’s mind, given the recent construction of the new school. Other factors that also complicated the decision-making process were the impact to marketing and visibility, an internal policy preference to locally source products, and the ease with which they would be maintained given specialized parts. Despite these factors, with each day that passed, the need to make a decision became more urgent, as more and more tenants moved into the business park.

**CONCLUSION**

The new Membertou Professional Centre opened in 2013 and, by the fall of 2014, it already had an important anchor tenant. The issue of outdoor signs for the facility, however, had not yet been addressed. As more tenants began moving into the building, the Business Development Committee of Membertou Corporate Division, felt pressured to make a decision on the installation of commercial signage.
EXHIBIT 1
Membertou Business Centre
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Cape Breton University
Unama'ki College

Cape Breton
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