

2015 INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER

Cliff Fregin

New Relationship Trust, BC



Cliff Fregin, a member of the Old Masset Village on Haida Gwaii, has been involved in Aboriginal Economic Development for almost 30 years. He expanded his role in economic development from administration to management, all while serving his community as an elected Councillor for multiple terms. During his time as Executive Director for the Gwaii Trust Society, he worked extensively in policy and program development. He then served as the C.O.O. for the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association (NACCA), a network of Aboriginal Financial Institutions growing the economy for First Nations entrepreneurs.

Cliff has been in his current role as Chief Executive Officer for New Relationship Trust (NRT) since its establishment, and has been directly responsible for the creation of unique economic development, capacity development and community programs that provide annual funding support of \$6 million to First Nations individuals and communities in British Columbia. Programs such as the Entrepreneurs Equity Matching Fund (EEMF) Initiative and the First Nations Equity Fund provide much-

needed capital for BC First Nations' business initiatives, while promoting Aboriginal entrepreneurship. The Direct Support Funding program provides funding directly to BC First Nations to develop their economic development infrastructure and governance systems. In total, over 300 Direct Support projects have been funded, including Musqueam Indian Band's development of a Custom Election Code and Tsilhqot'in National Government's Mining Policy Implementation Plan.

In his role at NRT, Cliff has emphasized the importance of mentorship in Aboriginal economic development. NRT launched the Economic Development Support Team (EDST), comprised of Aboriginal business experts who work with First Nations to map out strategies and provide guidance regarding viable business opportunities. In addition, Cliff supports NRT involvement with the BC Aboriginal Business Awards. Cliff sees importance in recognizing successful Aboriginal businesses in BC and giving them an opportunity to share their stories with other aspiring entrepreneurs. He also supports the Young Entrepreneurs Symposium (YES), an annual event bringing together young aspiring entrepreneurs to learn from successful Aboriginal business leaders. YES has provided hundreds of Aboriginal youth from across Canada with the confidence and skills to succeed. He also works in support of NRT Scholarships and Bursaries, which has seen \$5.9 million awarded to Aboriginal students in various fields of study.

In addition to his corporate leadership, Cliff previously entered into entrepreneurship with two successful business ventures. In 1991, Cliff opened a sports card shop in his hometown of Prince Rupert, BC, inspired by an interest in sports memorabilia and Aboriginal professional athlete cards. This shop provided full time employment to many and had a captured market in the area. Cliff was also one of four partners that established and operated Haidabucks Café, a café in Masset, BC.

Cliff is often asked to provide his input in roundtables and conferences on Aboriginal Economic Development, governance, program delivery, or board diversity. Throughout his nearly 30-year career, he has worked in support of Aboriginal community economic development through countless programs and initiatives. The importance of his work to the promotion of First Nations governance and economic development cannot be overstated.