

'Just do it,' says native author

■ Calvin Helin is urging First Nations to shake off their culture of dependency

By STEVE MacNAULL
The Daily Courier

"Wai wah" in the Tsimshian aboriginal tongue means 'just do it.'

Author Calvin Helin used both the famous Nike motto and the Native translation Tuesday in Kelowna to urge First Nation peoples to dump the welfare state and go for self-reliance.

"I'm not going to sugarcoat it," Helin, the author of *Dances with Dependency*, told the Okanagan Nation Alliance Business Opportunities Conference at The Grand hotel.

"Most bands have massive dysfunction and the only way to get out of it is to own your problems and solve them with a change in attitude, self-discipline, moral leadership, better education, better jobs, better health and better family."

To make such a shift, Helin said bands have to stop relying on welfare and transfer payments from the government and participate fully in the economy.

"The private sector has to be the focus," he told the crowd of 200.

"Bands can create their own business communities and partner with non-aboriginals for mutually beneficial businesses and joint ventures."

Helin was happy to see that about half the crowd was non-aboriginal, indicating that the wider community is interested in doing business with the Native community.

Helin, who is from the Tsimshian

Nation near Prince Rupert, said the Okanagan is ahead of most regions of Canada when it comes to First Nation enterprise and entrepreneurship.

The Westbank First Nation reserve lands are home to 400 members, but 8,000 non-aboriginals.

The Westside's retail boom has happened mostly on First Nation land, as well.

The Osoyoos Indian band owns Spirit Ridge Resort, Nk'Mip Winery, Sonora Dunes Golf Course and the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre.

Helin now lives in Vancouver and is a lawyer who also has various business interests.

Dances with Dependency (313 pages, Orca Spirit Publishing, \$34.95) is available at Chapters or from www.spiritorca.com.

Penticton band gets strategic

Residential and commercial development, tourism enterprises, forestry, agriculture, wind and other alternative energy and external joint ventures are all possible in the Penticton Indian Band Development Corporation's new strategic plan.

The corporation announced the spring 2008 strategic plan and new corporation manager Mike McGee at the Okanagan Nation Alliance Business Opportunities Conference.

"Anything is possible," said McGee. McGee. "The band is well positioned."

The Penticton Indian band already owns and operates Westhill Aggregates, Coyote Cruises, motels and RV parks, a sawmill, housing, a riding stable, a gas station and a convenience store.



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Scrub the welfare state and become self-reliant, *Dances with Dependency* author Calvin Helin told the Okanagan Nation Alliance Business Opportunities Conference Tuesday in Kelowna.