

# College conference geared at Aboriginal self-reliance

By SHAWN BELL

Indigenous author and businessman Calvin Helin brought his message of Aboriginal economic independence to Aurora College's Thebacha Campus Mar. 22.

Helin, the author of *Dances with Dependency*, spoke to an audience of business administration students, college staff and Fort Smith community leaders of the need for Aboriginal communities to get out of the "welfare trap" of government dependency.

"Young Aboriginal people say they've inherited a system with no hope," Helin said. "We can not even look after our own children under this system. We have

got to start looking at things differently, doing things differently."

Helin discussed a range of solutions, mostly geared at educating young Aboriginal people to become the future leaders of communities.

He also noted the essential task of developing natural resources that are increasingly coming under the jurisdiction of Aboriginal governments under land claims and treaty rights.

But the key first step, he emphasized repeatedly, is for Aboriginal people and the broader Canadian society to start having the conversation about what to do about the growing levels of funding being provided

to a rapidly increasing Aboriginal population.

Helin bounced between discussing his first book, and the realities of the reserve situation in Canada, and providing glimpses into his second, upcoming book. The new work delves into the dependency model seen by populations around the world, from blacks in ghettos in USA to East Germans under communism.

"What I realized is if you put anybody into enforced dependency they act the same way, no matter who they are or what their background is," Helin said.

Helin was prefaced by Denedeh Investment's CEO Darryl Beaulieu of Yellowknife. Beaulieu focused

on how to build successful Aboriginal businesses, including a point he kept repeating – Aboriginal governments have to have stable leadership with a long-term vision.

"Stable governance is the number one determinate for Aboriginal business success," Beaulieu said. "If you look at Esso, they plan 100, 150 years down the road. We have to think the same way."

The one-day conference, called *Breaking the Chain*, was created and organized by Aurora College's Business Administration Program. The students and staff of the program came up with the idea, the name and the program for the conference.



Calvin Helin, author and businessman spoke at the "Breaking the Chain" conference at Aurora College in Fort Smith on Monday, March 22.