

Resisting welfare to build Aboriginal success

Conference looks to build capacity for Aboriginal economic independence

By SHAWN BELL

Margaret Dumkee, head of Aurora College's Business Development Program, was amazed when she first read Calvin Helin's book *Dances with Dependency: Out of poverty through self-reliance*. As head of a program teaching business skills to mostly Aboriginal students from across the NWT, Dumkee said the book resounded with what her program had been trying to instill in its students for years: the need to start looking after their own communities by developing economic opportunities and creating jobs.

So Dumkee was delighted when a chance email inviting Helin to be the guest speaker at the program's conference on Aboriginal business was accepted; even more delighted when Helin cut his speaking fee from \$50,000 to



Calvin Helin

\$5,000 to accommodate the college's limited budget.

"I think it is really time for the people who claim this as their land to start taking control, to make the North able to manage itself," Dumkee said. "That's why it is so important to have someone like Helin come here. He's a lawyer, knows about business, but he is also very in touch

"How long are we prepared to leave the plight of Aboriginal children and youth in the unkind hands of the welfare trap? How many more families need to fall as casualties of a fatal 'welfare syndrome,' one that is literally stealing the lives and hopes of our future generations? We have to shake off the apathy of what has become an all too comfortable 'cloak of welfare' and act to fix the problems now."

- Calvin Helin, *Dances with Dependency*

with his Aboriginal roots. He speaks a lot about where he came from, about the lessons his grandparents taught him. There is an authenticity there that is very valuable."

Helin, a member of the Tsimshian Nation from northern British Columbia and president and CEO of a range of companies, will be the keynote speaker at the college's one day conference on March 22. Called *Breaking the chain: Achieving Sustainable Independence*, the conference brings a diverse range of leaders together to discuss what needs to be

done to build self-sufficiency and independence in Aboriginal communities and populations across the North.

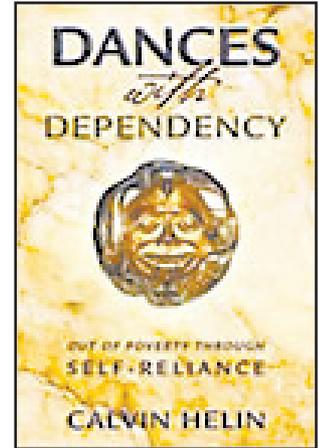
Helin's book, *Dances with Dependency*, on the plight of Aboriginal people and the need for self-reliance, has sold over 35,000 copies in Canada and recently been re-released in the USA.

Helin will be joined by Darrel Beaulieu, President and CEO of Denedeh Investments, Steven Nitah, Chief of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, and Michael Miltenberger, Deputy Premier of the NWT at the conference.

The conference, organized as part of Aurora College's Business Development program, has involved students in the planning and organization from day one. Students picked the name, helped identify the main theme, and now are finishing the last minute details of organizing something of this nature for the first time.

"It is very much a learning experience for all of us," Dumkee said.

Besides the experience of organizing an event like this, Dumkee said the main goal is to expose students to the ideas people like Helin, Beaulieu,



Nitah and Miltenberger will bring to the conference, and make them realize they are the future leaders of the North.

"Hopefully this will get the conversation going," Dumkee said. "Unless the people who live here develop the skills to manage the resources here, other people will continue to walk all over them."