

# The Purdy Crawford Chair

In Aboriginal Business Studies

## Case Studies in Aboriginal Business

Bearman AUTHENTICS

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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.**

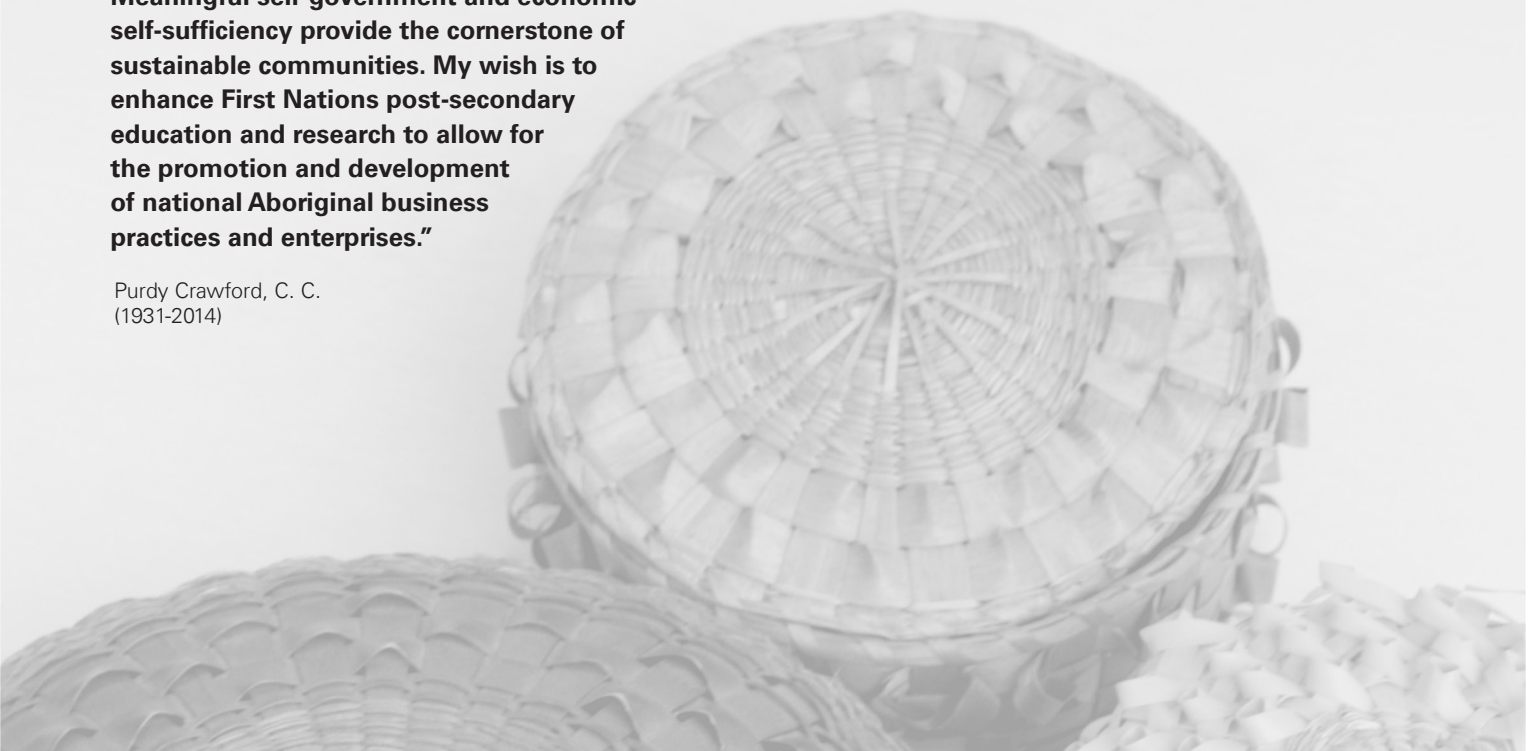
**Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada's Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.**

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)



# **BEARMAN AUTHENTICS**

After ten years in business, Clifford Paul, a Mi'kmaw craftsman from Membertou First Nation, was contemplating an expansion of his jewellery business. An itinerant salesman who frequented craft shows and powwows, in January 2015 he had to determine the best strategy to grow Bearman AUTHENTICS in a manageable way.

## **BACKGROUND**

Clifford Paul grew up in Membertou, a Mi'kmaw reserve in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia surrounded by the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. Clifford thought of Membertou as a community of builders that encouraged independence. He learned a strong work ethic from his father. When he worked with his father on construction sites as a young boy, he was taught that you must do the best work you can, because your name is attached to your work. Clifford carried this attitude with him throughout his career with various organizations, such as the Union of Nova Scotia Indians (UNSI).

When his position with UNSI was eliminated in 2003 due to a jurisdictional shift, Clifford decided he would help his sister in her store while looking for another position. One day, a man came into the store looking to sell his jewellery there. Clifford was quite taken with the man's work and bought a bear tooth necklace for himself; however, the cord on the piece was too short for his neck. When Clifford asked the man if he could extend it, he offered to teach Clifford how to do it himself. The interaction inspired a new hobby.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A BUSINESS**

With his newly acquired skillset, Clifford began to make his own jewellery. He developed his own techniques and patterns, drawing upon both contemporary and traditional elements. Soon Clifford realized that some patterns were coming back to him from his past experiences crafting with his grandmother and other Elders in the community when he was younger.

He began selling his own products in his sister's store with immediate success. After securing a new job as the moose management coordinator at the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources (UINR) and producing more product in his free time than he had realized, he decided to turn his new hobby into a business.

Clifford began travelling the Atlantic Canadian powwow trail to sell his jewellery. Throughout the summer, there is a powwow in a different community almost every

weekend and many participants and spectators travel to each location. These powwows tend to attract large audiences and are often attended by non-Aboriginal tourists or residents of the local surrounding communities. Powwows feature a wide range of First Nations dancers and drummers, and sometimes include competitions. In addition to the drumming and dancing, there usually are a wide range of vendors present selling crafts (like baskets, carvings, and beaded jewellery), food, and other products (such as photographs, drums, and home-recorded CDs). With predominantly Aboriginal customers, the powwow trail has been one of Clifford's most successful venues.

Because Clifford follows the powwow trail, which became a very successful means of networking, relationship building, and developing his business, he often describes Bearman AUTHENTICS as "a show on the road" business. He relies on his powwow family as he travels from one powwow to another. There is a sense of camaraderie between the vendors as they meet up at each powwow to share in their culture and traditions.

## **PRODUCTS**

Bearman AUTHENTICS primarily produces necklaces. All of Clifford's pieces are strung with leather cord. He sources this leather cord from India in various colours, ordering it by the kilometre. He makes his own fused-glass pendants, which feature Inukshuks (see Exhibit 1). Other pendants, which are purchased already made, feature turtles, arrowheads, and various geometric shapes. Flanking each pendant are a number of small bone beads, glass beads, and/or bone hair pipes with varying designs (see Exhibit 2). A key feature to Clifford's work is a loose bead that slides along the cord to make the length of each necklace adjustable.

Clifford has a commitment to quality and craftsmanship. He has developed techniques that he sees as unique to his work and, despite having tried to teach others, he feels as though something is lost if he does not complete each piece himself. The product comes from his hands and, just like his father taught him, his name is attached to his work.

## **EXPANSION**

The customer base of Bearman AUTHENTICS is largely Aboriginal buyers; however, Clifford does very well selling at conferences, craft shows, and trade shows throughout the year. His products have travelled around the world, as conferences in particular often attract an international clientele. Clifford places significant value on the opportunity to meet each person purchasing his products. There is not only a monetary

exchange made between Clifford and his customers in the purchasing of a product, but also an exchange of stories and cultural knowledge.

Over the years, the business has experienced modest, incremental growth. Clifford began importing complementary products, such as bracelets, rings, and flags, to sell alongside his handmade necklaces. These additional items are especially popular at powwows and provide additional profit.

Clifford sees his business as a part of his “beautiful life” which consists of family, his position with UINR, and Bearman AUTHENTICS. With previous successful manageable expansions under his belt, Clifford wanted to expand further; however, he also wanted to ensure that any expansion would not take him away from his family, job, or the experience of the powwow trail.

## **CONCLUSION**

Clifford Paul, a Mi'kmaw craftsman from Membertou First Nation, was contemplating an expansion of his jewellery business in January 2015. An itinerant salesman for ten years who frequented craft shows and powwows, he had to determine the best strategy to grow Bearman AUTHENTICS in a manageable way.



**EXHIBIT 1**  
Fused-Glass Inukshuk Pendant



**EXHIBIT 2**  
Sand Dollar Necklace



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