

MARTIN SHOWS PASSION FOR FIRST NATIONS INITIATIVES

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Thursday, February 26, 2015 5:03:30 EST PM

As students enrolled in the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneur Program at Saugeen District Secondary School looked on, former Prime Minister Paul Martin (front, second from right) took part in a signing ceremony at the school Feb. 25 to formalize the program created by the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative. The students included, from left: Taylor Cameron, Nolan Keweshig, Hayley Carter, Savanna House, Destiny Roote and Miranda Misquadis. Front: SDSS principal Meslisa McEwen, Bluewater District School Board Director of Education Steve Blake, Saugeen First Nation Chief Vernon Roote, Martin, and Harry Hall, Bruce Power.



One day we may wear jeans created by Saugeen District Secondary School student Taylor Cameron, who is developing his entrepreneurial dream in an innovative course created by the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative.

Cameron got to pitch part of his business plan to former Prime Minister Paul Martin during his visit to SDSS Wednesday to formalize an agreement establishing and supporting the Aboriginal Youth

Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP), offered in partnership with the Bluewater District School Board, Saugeen First Nation, SDSS, Bruce Power and the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative.

Since leaving politics in 2008 Martin, the Liberal prime minister from 2003 to 2006, has stoked his passion for Aboriginal affairs, including development of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative that offers business apprenticeship programs, which qualify for high school credits, to young aboriginals.

Cameron is one of five local students -- there were 11 last semester -- challenged to produce a business plan to offer a product or service. In the Grade 12 E-commerce course, he's developing a web-based Redwood Jeans Company, and the confidence to think big, and develop a "professional level" of creativity, communication and perseverance.

Martin met with AYEPE students, was entertained by a boys' drum group from G.C. Huston and St. Joseph's schools, and Saugeen First Nation hand drummers and dancers during his morning visit.

"The future of our land doesn't just depend on the resources that lie in the ground, it depends on the talent of those who walk upon it," Martin said to approximately 50 students, since bad weather cancelled school buses.

Martin said he was a "little embarrassed" and "deeply touched" when told a number of Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries had been established in his name to further Aboriginal entrepreneurship.

Aly Boltman, with the Grey Bruce Community Foundation, unveiled an annual scholarship, based on achievement, and an annual bursary, based on need.

Both awards will be made in perpetuity to Saugeen First Nation students. Acknowledging that Bruce Power has a "lack of diversity" vice-president of supply chain Harry Hall said they were "laying the seeds" to increase diversity in Martin's name with student awards.

In each of the next three years, Bruce Power will award six \$1,000 scholarships totaling \$18,000 over three years, to AYEPE students at SDSS, St. Mary's High School, and Peninsula Shores Secondary Schools.

Martin's Aboriginal Education Initiative offers the AYEPE program in approximately 46 schools across Canada, and Martin said it's success is due, in large part, to the commitment of the teachers and community mentors.

Martin stressed entrepreneurship is not something settlers brought to this country, but something we inherited from the First People -- a story that is just now being told through the students enrolled in Aboriginal entrepreneurial programs.

"Our ability as a nation to compete with the rest of the world is going to depend very heavily on the graduates of this school, and others like it, across the land, so God Speed, let's make it happen," Martin said.

In response to questions from students, Martin said his proudest accomplishment is the 2005 Kelowna Accord, which forever changed First Nation- government relationships. Martin said the AYEPE is a small part of the solution to problems with Canadian education systems which have left Aboriginal students behind for generations.

Martin's visit to Grey Bruce also included a meet and greet at Aunt Mable's Country Kitchen with federal Liberal candidate Allan Thompson, a stop at the Kincardine Tim Hortons, and a fundraising dinner for Thompson at the Goderich Legion.