

## **ABORIGINAL STUDENTS WIN AWARD FOR BUSINESS**

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A potential entrepreneurial hotbed may be growing in a North End aboriginal high school.

Four Grade 12 students from Children of the Earth high school won third place out of about 70 presenters at a national aboriginal entrepreneurship competition in Ottawa this week.

And for the first time ever, some of the graduates of the school are keen to pursue a career in business and hope to attend the Asper School of Business at the University of Manitoba.

"I don't think that has been the case in the past," said school principal Lorne Belmore.

The four Winnipeg students won a bronze medal at the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)-sponsored E-Spirit Competition, an aboriginal youth business plan competition.

Brittany David, Amber Fontaine, Joshua Mousseau and Matthew Shorting developed a business that will produce snugs for new mothers and babies of aboriginal descent. As they say in their presentation, their snugs are "made to "ginawendaan abinoojiens abaaawaa" (keep babies warm). The idea is to create a modern version of the traditional and authentic style of Ah tikinugen, a snug made from stronger material and sewn with bark.

The students have been working on the project as part of their regular curriculum for a year and a half. The fact it is part of their class work is because of an arrangement Children of the Earth has with the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, a non-profit initiative established by former prime minister Paul Martin and his family to identify issues that affect the aboriginal community in Canada.

The Winnipeg school is one of six schools in the country that have an association with the MAEI.

Belmore said the school has been sending students to the E-Spirit Competition for years, but this is the first time in many years a Children of the Earth entry has come home with a winner. The bronze award includes a \$750 cash prize.

Another group from a Winnipeg school called Skaabe Technology Training won an award for the best use of technology.

The E-Spirit Competition is a 16-week Internet-based competition featuring interactive business planning resources, online access to mentors and a chance to meet and network with other students from Canada, online and in person. The Children of the Earth students were coached by teacher Leigh Brown.

While the E-Spirit competition is ostensibly a business-plan competition, in the case of the Children of the Earth students, they intend to produce and sell the product through powwows and on their website. Belmore said the program used to be an after-school extra curricular program, but a couple of years ago the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative made Children of the Earth one of its sponsored schools.