



# Partnership Brings Essential Skills to First Nation Community

Career opportunities abound as does the promise of a stronger workforce for the Chippewa's of Nawash First Nation thanks to the introduction of the Wiigwaamnike program. "The opportunity for skilled trades is key to the times that we're in now," explains Pam Keeshig, executive director of the Huronia Area Aboriginal Management Board (HAAMB).

Huronia Area Aboriginal Management Board in partnership with the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) and supported by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), Blue Water District School Board, and the Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board have implemented the Wiigwaamnike program.

Targeting Aboriginal youth, the program provides senior high school students with the opportunity to get a head start in the carpentry trade. Up to 20 students will receive Level 1 apprenticeship training through Georgian College as well as hands-on training through a summer co-op with local employers. In total students will receive five high school credits and one college credit. Students will also receive CPR, first aid, fall protection, ladder safety, and propane safety training through the local general carpentry union. "We were approached by OYAP to see if we thought it could be a successful program and we thought that it would be a really good idea, especially if the union hall was involved as well as the college," says Pam.

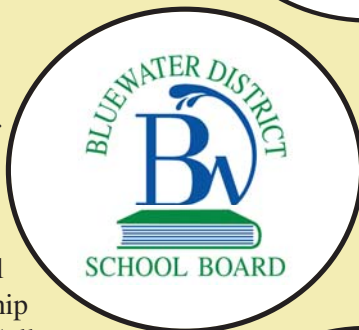
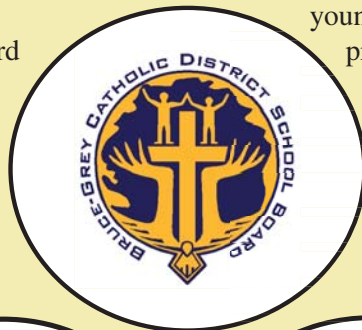
Barbara Wright, OYAP coordinator for both school boards says, "There's lots of opportunity for young people in the trades, it's just a matter of deciding which trade they want to pursue." While Wiigwaamnike focuses specifically on carpentry it is the hope of both Barbara and Pam that

students will branch out into other areas and influence others to seek out trades careers.

"We think that this could develop into self-employment instead of the Native community having to hire outside plumbers and carpenters," says Barbara. She adds, "Tradespeople love to say, look I built this and so I think the other young people will see it as well and it will help the pride ... Once they see that students are successful other students will want to follow as well." The time is ripe for the program with the Chippewa's of Nawash receiving a new school and funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada for the construction of new housing. With no shortage of work and a serious lack of new tradespeople, HAAMB and OYAP see the program as a solution to an aging workforce. "We have to start somewhere and this is the beginning of what we think is an opportunity for these communities," says Barbara.

In general it takes two to five years to train an apprentice, which is why OYAP is hoping to get students engaged early. "We have had very few Native students that registered as apprentices so we thought this would be a great opportunity for some of the students to be able to find work in their own community and get registered as an apprentice while they're in high school," says Barbara.

Apprenticeship is one of the most economical ways of getting a post secondary education since the MTCU pays for 80 per cent of the tuition. According to Pam, so far OYAP and HAAMB are speaking with guidance counselors and providing presentations to local high schools to promote the program. "We think this will give young people an opportunity to find work and pursue a career in their own area," says Barbara.



# Apprenticeship Feature

## Building your Future

Spending mornings high up on steel girders may not be everyone's typical workday, but for ironworkers the higher the better. Ironworking is not for the faint of heart. It involves working with heavy steel bars called rebar, which must be positioned and reinforced to create forms for concrete structures. In terms of construction, ironworkers are involved in nearly every stage from putting the first holes in the ground to adding flourishes on iron railings. You can find them working on freeways, erecting bridges or building skyscrapers. Up high or down low, ironworkers are anywhere steel beams are being connected or erected.

Ironwork requires strength, agility and balance with many spending days walking steel beams easily 300 feet in the air. Safety is always the highest priority whether working indoors or outside. Ironworkers work mainly in three sectors: heavy industrial construction working on industrial facilities; institutional and commercial construction working

on stadiums, schools, apartment buildings and hospitals; and civil engineering construction working on highways, dams, water and sewer lines.

Ironwork is usually project based with those working in the trade travelling for months at a time as new buildings are erected or bridges and highways are maintained.



## The Life of an Ironworker

### Work Environment

High, higher and highest is the name of the game. Ironwork is often performed up where only birds dare to travel. Most work is done outside whether rain or shine, in the blistering heat or the chill of winter. Forty hours is a typical work week though overtime is generally available. Because ironwork is project based ironworkers are expected to travel, often great distances.

### Where Will it Take You?

Apprentice ironworkers can take a number of avenues in their career path including becoming a journeyman, ironworker welder, foreman, site supervisor, and estimator. Journeyman ironworkers can work in a number of areas including reinforcing and post-tensioning ironwork, rigging and machinery moving, ornamental ironwork, structural ironwork, and welding and cutting.

### Are You the Right Fit?

Are you strong with an uncanny sense of balance? Are you comfortable working at extreme heights? Can you use quick thinking to solve problems while maintaining safety practices? As an ironworker you will be part of building communities and cities. You can take pride in seeing a structure take shape and knowing you had a hand in building it. You work well in a team and appreciate working outdoors in all types of weather.

As with most trades, in order to be an ironworker you must be at least 16 years old and have a Grade 12 education. Those who think they would like to become an ironworker should focus on courses in mathematics. Those who want to work in other provinces should consider obtaining their Red Seal licence. Related work experience or completion of an ironworker program at a technical institute may reduce the

time required to complete apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are 80 per cent on-the-job training and 20 per cent classroom training.

### How Much Can You Earn?

Ironworkers can expect to make between \$21 and \$43 an hour depending on experience and area of expertise. With overtime, many ironworkers earn up to \$2,000 a week. Apprentices will make a percentage of the journeyman's rate, usually 50-60 per cent in their first year and go up in wages at each level of apprenticeship.

### Job Prospects

Employment for this occupation is steady as the construction industry will have to replace more than 15 per cent of retiring ironworkers in Ontario in the next 10 years.

# Strong tradeswomen building a strong workforce

**S**tereotypes in the workplace are being broken everyday with women assuming more and more powerful roles, showing they've got what it takes to work alongside men. This is becoming most evident in the trades with women like Jenelle Jacobs of Six Nations pulling her own weight as an ironworker.

“A lot of them think you can't do it but once they see that you are there to do your job and you are there to put in a days work they have a greater respect for you for just getting in there and doing your part too,” explains 33 year old Jenelle. What began eight years ago as a way of making a living to support two young children has become a lifetime passion sending her to various locations across Ontario. “I was supporting two kids on my own so I needed an option where I could work if I wanted and take time off if I needed to and had a high paying wage.”

“You can stand back and look at it and say I was up there, I did that, I put that together.”

With a father already in ironwork, Jenelle thought she had a feel for the trade but says she never really understood what it was all about until she was immersed in it. “Every job is different, nothing is ever the same. No two days are the same,” says Jenelle, adding, “It's hands-on. You operate the tools, you operate the torch it's all mechanical stuff, the mechanics of how things work, you see how they're put together, how to repair it, how to build something new and make it look like the old piece.”

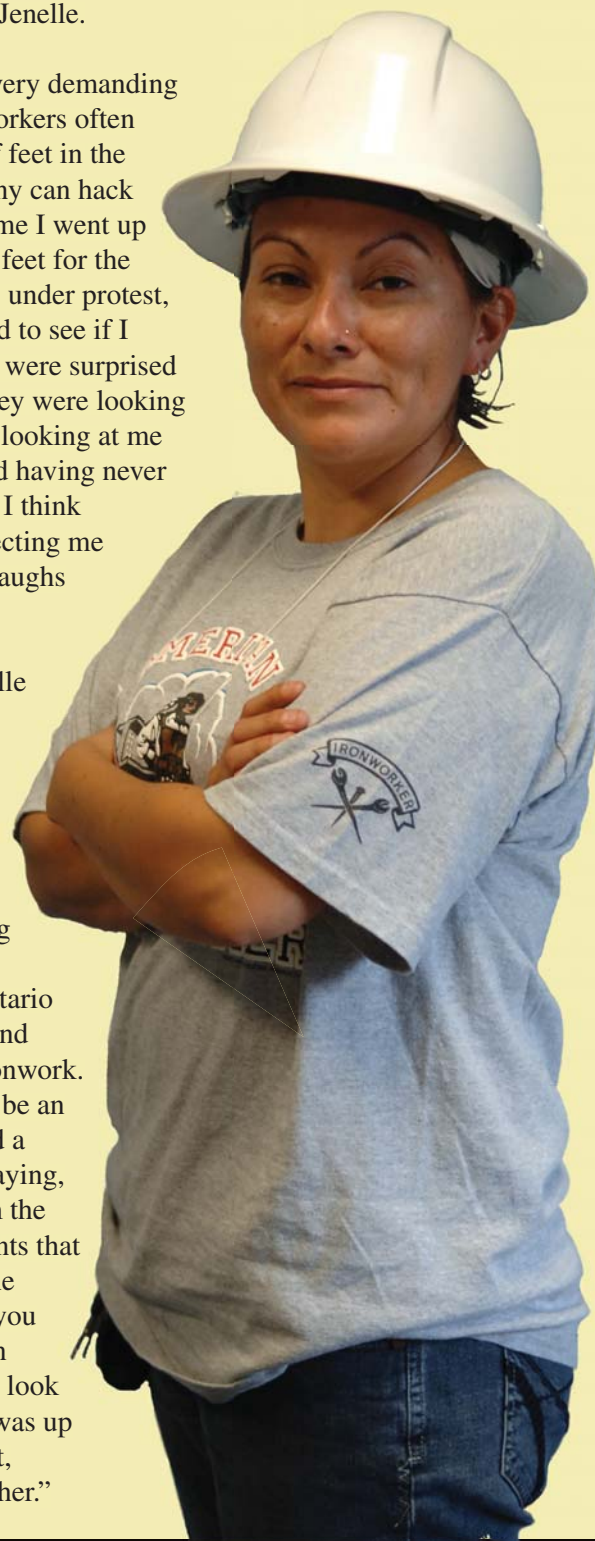
Since 2002 Jenelle has worked in the industry for companies like Dofasco, Stelco, Toyota in Woodstock and Cambridge, the Inco mine in Sudbury, and Chrysler in Sudbury and Windsor. While on some jobs she is building the main structure of a building or reinforcing cement work, others like Toyota involve changing production lines as they switch from one model to the next.

“My kids are very supportive of everything. They understand when I can't be there and enjoy the times when I can be there,” says Jenelle. While she loves her work she admits she doesn't like when jobs take her away from her children for extended periods of time. Luckily, she has a sturdy support system through her mother and father as well as

other female ironworkers. With only 10 female ironworkers in her union she says it's rare to run into another woman on site but they keep in touch with text messaging. “A lot of the female ironworkers encourage each other to keep going and we compare jobs and stuff like that. Kind of along the same lines as guys and how they have their buddies,” says Jenelle.

Ironwork is a very demanding trade seeing workers often up hundreds of feet in the air and not many can hack it. “The first time I went up was about 180 feet for the first job. It was under protest, but they wanted to see if I could and they were surprised when I did. They were looking at my size and looking at me being a girl and having never done it before; I think they were expecting me to freeze up,” laughs Jenelle.

Currently Jenelle is enrolled in a welding apprenticeship through Ogweheweh Skills and Trades Training Centre in Ohsweken, Ontario hoping to expand her skills in ironwork. She's proud to be an ironworker and a tradesperson saying, “It comes from the accomplishments that you make or the buildings that you put up. You can stand back and look at it and say I was up there, I did that, I put that together.”



# Keeping in the Loop with Apprenticeship

The recent fear of Canada's economic recession had many tradespeople wondering how their jobs would fare. Thanks to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF), tradespeople and employers received valuable tips on how to handle the downturn. "We hold national forum dialogues so each one is a different topic. For example in February we held one regarding retaining investment in apprenticeship in light of the economic situation," says Danielle Matheusik, researcher for CAF.

This valuable information provided through employer engagement programs and national forums is what makes CAF such an integral part of the industry. That, coupled with the fact that CAF is the only inclusive national body which brings together all the

players of the apprenticeship community, proves CAF's significance in the industry. "CAF provides an opportunity for the leaders of the various jurisdiction bodies to come together and it allows the variety to meet and talk about not necessarily just their own jurisdictional areas but also the broader apprenticeship community that applies to Canada," says Danielle.

Established in 2000, CAF is governed by a board of directors consisting of approximately 42 representatives of the apprenticeship community across Canada, and a staff of seven based in Ottawa. It is a vibrant organization seeking to arm youth with the tools to become an apprentice. "We do have the guide to apprenticeship which is a handy booklet, we've got information on five steps to becoming an apprentice, tips on how to find an employer sponsor, examples of trades in the various categories, information on [trades], for example welding or auto mechanic and hair

styling," explains Danielle. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum's Making it Work booklet, geared towards an Aboriginal audience, provides interested individuals with key information on becoming an apprentice in the trades.

For employers CAF focuses mainly on employer engagement, looking at ways to encourage the employer community to take on apprentices and invest in training. "We have conducted employer engagement focus groups, that's where we meet with employers and talk about the business case for apprenticeship and we've also conducted two studies," says Danielle. Both studies work to support the claim that there is a strong business case for apprenticeship and helps when encouraging employers to take on apprentices.

Currently CAF is gearing up for World Skills Calgary 2009, a four-day competition for youth in skilled trades in September. As well they are focusing on starting a Canadian Apprenticeship Journal which will include research articles and feature articles on issues around apprenticeship. Together with AABO, CAF is in the planning stages of a project regarding learning and essential skills in apprenticeship.

## Apprenticeship Resources

**Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario**  
www.aabo.ca

**Construction Sector Council of Canada**  
www.csc-ca.org

**International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental  
and Reinforcing Iron Workers**  
www.ironworkers.org

**Canadian Apprenticeship Forum**  
www.caf-fca.org

