

## *For Immediate Release*

### TU partnership provides training for city's 'ambassadors'

People who travel on business or on vacation will often tell you the best ambassadors for a city are the front desk agents and room attendants in the hotels, and the food servers and line cooks in the restaurants. It is these people who will leave the first and lasting impressions on visitors. And in a city like Thompson, where visitors come from every continent, those impressions are important. That is one of the reasons why Thompson Unlimited initiated the 'Thompson's Best – Hospitality' pilot project.

Thompson Unlimited (TU) is the municipal economic development corporation tasked with ensuring the city's economy is diversified and sustainable long after a mining presence has left. To this end, it has worked on expanding Winter Weather Testing, supported tourism initiatives and provided assistance to small and emerging businesses. Underlying its efforts, however, is the city's need to attract and train more people to careers in the hospitality industry.

"We not only need to attract more people to build careers in hospitality positions, but we also need to keep and develop the ones we have," said Roxie Binns, Development Coordinator with TU. "To this end, we formed a partnership with several agencies and businesses and developed a project that could not only introduce people to the field, but also provide additional training for those already in it."

The list of partners is impressive: Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC), Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade, (Employment Manitoba and Industry Workforce Development), Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance, YWCA (Steps to Success/Entry to Work in the North), and Thompson Unlimited

Components of the 12-week program were open to anyone currently unemployed or underemployed, as well as those already employed. It began with the Entry to Work in the North (EWIN) training offered by the YWCA's Steps to Success program. EWIN covered topics such as attitude and its effects on job satisfaction, ability to learn, and success; basic employability skills such as numeracy, computer and problem solving; and a primer on the hospitality industry that included everything from the basics of customer service to handling lost and found concerns.

MTEC then moved the group into more specific hospitality/tourism training, covering such topics as safe food handling, customer service skills and job specific skills for Front Desk Attendants, Food and Beverage Servers and Line Cooks. Managers were also able to participate in the workshops, and had management-specific workshops available to them.

Other training topics included CPR, WHMIS, maintaining a professional appearance while at work, motivation, workplace expectation and cultural considerations.

“The commitment from our business sector was very impressive,” said Roxie. “The Burntwood Hotel housed most of the training and job shadowing, along with the Mystery Lake Hotel, Baaco's Pizza, Meridian and Country Inn. They also enabled some of their staff to participate in parts of the training. Without their support and participation, the course could not have taken place so effectively.”

“We would do it again,” said Keith MacDonald, President of the Thompson Chamber of Commerce and Assistant Director of Operations, Northern Properties of the Burntwood Hotel group. “We, of course, have a vested interest in and want people to see the hospitality industry positioned as a career choice. It helps when we can offer training which is valid across Canada. I would like to see this program offered again, and I would like to see it expanded to include the retail industry.”

As for the participants, they have offered positive comments on the quality of instruction, instructors and the range and relevancy of training topics, including life skills: *You have brilliant instructors. It has helped my self-esteem. I thought I knew everything about my job, but realize there are better ways to handle things. I learned things that had never before occurred to me. I have hope. The job shadowing brought things together.*

“Although the participation was lower than we had targeted, the feedback is positive and we have had several people asking about attending future training because of it,” said Cat Cogle of the YWCA’s Steps to Success program. Requests for training have also come from the Northern Spirit Manor and the City of Thompson.

“I think we have planted a lot of seeds with this pilot program,” said Luanne Christensen, Employment Services Coordinator with MTEC. “The willingness of business and organizations to participate is amazing. The job shadowing portion of the program was especially helpful in adding to non-working participants’ confidence level. Will we add to the workforce through programs like this? Yes.”

“Manitoba Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade funded this project in order to assist participants to achieve employment and to upgrade the skills of those currently employed. Everyone benefits when the Thompson service sector attracts and retains skilled people,” said Phil Chaddock, Regional Manager of Employment Manitoba. “It is particularly gratifying to have organizations and business partner to fill a need, such as we have in this sector, and to be able to bring together people already employed in the service industry, people on social assistance and others seeking employment.”

“I’m so excited that others are asking about this training,” concluded Roxie. “The potential to build our workforce and provide training to help them excel is wonderful. And as they excel, we will develop a service industry in Thompson that has a reputation for excellence.”

For more information on the Thompson’s Best – Hospitality project, contact Roxie Binns at [binns@thompsonunlimited.ca](mailto:binns@thompsonunlimited.ca) or 204-677-1903.