

# LEADING THE WAY FOR ABORIGINAL CEOs, BUSINESSES

BY HOLLI MONCRIEFF FOR THE FREE PRESS

**Brenda LaRose has made a science out of finding exactly the right person for the right job at the right time.**

The managing partner of Leaders & Co. (formerly Higgins Executive Search) has found CEOs and high-ranking directors for organizations in every province and territory except P.E.I. She's also worked with companies in the United States and around the world.

"We're not just Aboriginal-based, but we're the experts in placing Aboriginal executives or finding the right people for Aboriginal companies," said LaRose. "We had a good name in the community, so that part of our business took off pretty fast. It's all been through word of mouth and referrals."

Since LaRose started her company in 1999, her business has grown by leaps and bounds. Leaders & Co. focuses on finding people for jobs at the board, CEO, vice-president or director level. They are a bilingual company, working in English and French.

"Aboriginal business is growing at five times the rate of mainstream business, which is exciting. Aboriginal businesses

have a huge impact on our economy," she said. "We expanded our own business when we joined with Leaders & Co."

LaRose's clients include the Royal Bank, IBM, Queen's University, Red River College, CBC, and the University of Manitoba. Her company has found CEOs for hospitals, governments, the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and the Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of Canada (AFOA Canada).

The federal government hired her to do a search for The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

"That was a very sensitive search. We placed Justice (Murray) Sinclair and two new commissioners," she said.

Two of her company's biggest success stories are the placements of Mary Jane Loustel as the National Aboriginal Program Executive at IBM, and Doris Bear as the VP of Aboriginal Banking BC at Royal Bank.

LaRose first realized she had a talent for executive search while working for mainstream organizations and said she developed an executive search process for other companies before starting her own business.

LaRose spends much of her time flying

all over the country, meeting the people she recommends for top-ranking positions. She meets every single candidate in person.

"I am absolutely passionate about what I do," she said. "I just love meeting clients and candidates and becoming part of their success. The people we've placed make a huge contribution to their organizations."

She is proud to see so many First Nations businesses finding high levels of success.

"In October and November, I did two talks for the Conference Board of Canada about diversity in an executive search," said LaRose. "When I mentioned that we (First Nations people) weren't allowed to vote until 1964, 90 per cent of the people in the room had no idea. It's good for us to share information like that because it gives people a good perspective of the challenges our community has faced."

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BRENDA LAROSE, MANAGING PARTNER OF LEADERS & CO. Photo by Darcy Finley