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LOCAL

Fresh prospects

By Brandon Walker

Saturday, November 28, 2009

Eight young men may have a prosperous future due to Confederation College's Mineral Prospecting Program. Bending Lake Iron president Henry Wetelainen encouraged the graduates to dream beyond finding a job in the mining industry.

"Don't just work for Bending Lake," he said, "learn from what we've done and start your own company." The first graduates of the 15-week course celebrated their achievement on Friday at Bending Lake Iron Group's office, where they'll have a job starting Wednesday.

Students spent part of the course learning theory in the classroom and part in the field, working with officials from Bending Lake Iron.

They also learned the business aspect, such as how to become an entrepreneur.

Thomas Solomon, 21, of Fort William First Nation, is excited about starting his career. He was surprised at how much geology is involved in the job. "I thought I'd just have a pick and a shovel and a mining hat on, heading down in the tunnel digging," he said after the graduation ceremony.

For a minimum of three months, Solomon and his fellow grads will work for Bending Lake Iron. They will be in the bush cutting lines to make safe paths for geologists and getting samples using a rock saw. Solomon believes he's prepared to do both the hands on work and that he will have the knowledge about the technical aspects.

The eight graduates will help meet the need of a growing workforce in the mining industry, said MPP Michael Gravelle, Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry.

"Within the next generation, 25 per cent of the workforce will be Aboriginal people. "And, (this program) is a tremendous opportunity for young people," he said.

The provincial government put \$250,000 toward the course. Officials at Confederation College are hopeful the province will renew it for March of next year. "That's a goal we're working toward," said Riley Burton, program manager for training and development. Burton said there were some women interested in the course, but none took it. "All of our uptake was male," he said.