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## TODAY IN BUSINESS

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GLENN BAGLO/Vancouver Sun  
SITTING PRETTY: Calvin Helin has bounced back from plenty of failures

## Lawyer makes most of aboriginal roots

JENNY LEE  
*Sun Business Reporter*

Calvin Helin has crammed plenty of leadership activity into six short years.

For starters, he's co-chair of downtown Vancouver law firm Ferguson Gifford's Native Law Group, founding president of the Native Investment and Trade Association, founding vice-president of the National Aboriginal Business Association, leader of Canada's first all-First Nations trade delegation to China in 1994, leader of a similar trade mission to New Zealand, past chair of Canada's first native investment show, Nexus, and a past-director of the Vancouver Board of Trade.

This 37-year-old father of four fished for six years and made a living as a karate club owner (he has a second-degree black belt) before even setting foot in law school.

"You dream in technicolor," Helin says, his quiet, gentle voice in contrast to the mental and physical intensity.

"If you set your parameters in too small a radius, that's as far as you go. Most of the things I've accomplished have been by being prepared to fail."

And fail he has.

Helin, a member of the Tsimshian nation, comes from a Port Simpson fishing family but has lived in the Lower Mainland since he was 12, when school teacher Greg Millbank arranged for him to

live with Millbank's family and get an education that wasn't available up the coast.

After just one year of college he quit to get into commercial fishing with Millbank. The duo did well until they tried marketing their own automated fishing system.

"We went completely, absolutely broke and it was a really awful experience," Helin says. "We just worked like dogs for six years, sweat, blood and every waking moment thinking and living this business."

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Many of Helin's projects are concerned with fostering aboriginal success. His family taught him the importance of helping his own community, and as an astute en-

trepreneur, he also sees plenty of opportunity in that community.

With land-claims settlements, plus growing entrepreneurial interest among young native Indians, Canadian aboriginals are wielding increasing business clout.

"Within the next five to 10 years, Canadian aboriginal people will own land equal to the size of B.C., which is bigger than most countries in the world," Helin says.

Please see Helin, D2

# Helin sees 'huge opportunity' worldwide

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"Native people now have a need for investment expertise. Just about every major bank has an aboriginal banking group. Every major professional services company, from KPMG to Price Waterhouse, has aboriginal relations departments."

British Columbia's 100,000 native Indians are heavily involved in forestry, fishery and have a growing interest in tourism and resort development, he says. And the entrepreneurial spirit is evident across Canada.

In Alberta, the Samson Cree nation near Edmonton has established a trust and an insurance company. There are 1,200 aboriginal construction companies in Canada. Dave Tucaro's (a Helin friend) Fort McMurray-based Neegan Development Corp. Ltd., does \$10 to \$15 million annually and employs 100 people, of whom 85 per cent are aboriginal, Helin says.

Helin has just opened his own law offices on Squamish nation land in West Vancouver, is starting his own group of mutual funds (Aboriginal Global Investment Management Ltd.), is opening a national travel agency (Global Aboriginal Travel Inc.) specializing in group and business organization travel, and is forging business ties with aboriginal people around the world (Pan Pacific Aboriginal Trade Co. Inc.). He continues to work with Ferguson Gifford clients on exclusive referral.

Helin sees a "huge opportunity" in bringing business and development

expertise to aboriginal groups worldwide. He is currently in negotiations with the Maoris in New Zealand.

Doing business with aboriginal people is much like with Asians, Helin says. Face is important. There is also an emphasis on rank and status.

"In North America, you rely on agreements to ensure everybody is honorable. The Asian and aboriginal way is to learn who the people are. In China, the high-level people wanted to know about my family, what kind of person I am. I make part of my living out of being able to move laterally from culture to culture."

Helin has great hopes for his mutual-fund company. He has teamed with Vancouver-based securities dealer, Great Pacific Management and former Templeton Worldwide president and CEO Thomas Hansberger, who will be the international fund's investment adviser. Seventy-five per cent of the company's equity will be owned by aboriginal groups and individuals.

"For the first year, we're easily have over \$100 million in the fund."

While many aboriginal communities focus on big political issues or form organizations to qualify for government money, Helin wants to build self-reliance through business.

He founded the Native Investment and Trade Association while in law school. The original intent was to harness Asian investment in Vancouver.

"A lot of aboriginal groups are resource rich and cash poor. It made sense to try to marry the two groups

"We adopted a policy of not seeking any government core funding. We were investing in self-reliance. The

government isn't the only game in town as far as I'm concerned."

The non-profit organization now has seven employees and holds about 10 conferences a year to educate the aboriginal community on issues such as taxation, finance, law and health.

Although it receives federal assistance for specific conferences, it pays the rent by selling compiled information from its many conferences.

Lawyer Bill Ferguson of Ferguson Gifford says Helin is a bright, competent lawyer with good entrepreneurial and marketing skills learned though "the school of hard knocks"

"He had me speaking to native groups on separating business from politics. That's a successful initiative! I wouldn't have become involved in it if he hadn't suggested it."

Helin's early obsession with karate ("Sometimes when you really like something, it casts a spell and bewitches you and that's how it was with me") led to an interest in the Japanese language, culture and Daoist philosophy

"In a strong wind a tree will break, but a flexible reed will stand again." Helin says. He also tries to be unflappable and unfailingly courteous. When he's mentally beat, he goes to his Richmond home and practises karate in his gym.

He's just completed three years and half a million dollars worth of renovations. His family now has a 5,000-square-ft. home with a gym, gourmet kitchen, vaulted cedar ceilings and landscaped gardens. But he still drives a beat-up 1987 Nissan truck because, "it's dependable."

He's trying to live a balanced life.

Last weekend, he fixed the kids' bicycles. The weekend before, he built a treehouse

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