
Ernest Chooney McKay

Pine Creek First Nation

The “higher road to success” for Ernest began at First Class Training Centre, Inc. in Winnipeg.

Not one to let a great training opportunity pass him by, Ernest heard of how he could get his Class 3 truck driving designation *with air* through the First Class Training Centre and he quickly seized that opportunity. He also found out through Sean Brass at Pine Creek’s employment and training initiative that he could be eligible to have his training costs covered, so he first applied at First Class Training and was immediately accepted. Once approved at First Class he then submitted his acceptance letter to Pine Creek and they also approved his request for funding.

“I grew up with guys that had a “work hard” mentality,” Ernest recalls. “We could have sat around collecting a welfare cheque too but we knew that was not what we wanted. There’s so much more to life than sitting around doing nothing and that lifestyle was not for me and my friends.”

Ernest started his training in September 2015 and weeks later he passed the test on his first try to obtain his Class 3 license with air designation. Six months later he was hired on at the Keeyask Hydro Electric dam operations in northern Manitoba. A mighty fine accomplishment, indeed. But it didn’t come without its challenges for Ernest. “It was real tough getting used to driving a big ol’ semi-truck pulling a trailer in a city like Winnipeg,” he said. “When using air brakes you have to do things by the book – and that’s a 31 step process and it’s not easy. Fortunately, I was able to nail that down in the last few days of my training.”

Ernest has plans to take the next step forward to obtain his Class 1 license designation. This would allow him to become a Foreman at Keeyask and to move further up the command chain. That plan will be initiated when the seasonal layoff comes in December. He will once again apply for ASETS funding from Pine Creek and hope that his dreams for bigger and better things will be realized.

His advice to others seeking to better themselves, “when you go after getting some good training or furthering your education you are going to be building up your self-esteem and your self-respect,” he said. “Don’t think it’s too far beyond you - because you have a lot of potential!”

To drive home the point that First Nation men and women have so much more they could attain, Ernest puts it rather bluntly when he said: “you know, it’s a darn good feeling bringing home a \$3000 paycheck and I’m sure proud of being able to do that because I worked hard for it. When you think of it – that one paycheck of mine adds up to a pile of welfare cheques back on the Rez!”

Keep on truckin’, Ernest!
