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As a student at the University of Manitoba, Terry Brown never thought that one day he might be the leader of an award-winning company.

"I was just trying to find my own way," he said.

More than two decades later, the company Brown co-founded, Okimaw Community & HR Solutions, will be honoured next month in Winnipeg at the 20th annual Visionary Indigenous Business Excellence Awards.





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Terry Brown, co-founder and CEO of Okimaw Community & HR Solutions, will be honoured next month in Winnipeg at the 20th annual Visionary Indigenous Business Excellence Awards.

The awards are presented by Indigenous Business Education Partners, which offers tutoring, mentoring and financial aid and more to Indigenous students pursuing a degree at the U of M's Asper School of Business.

During his studies, Brown availed himself of IBEP's services.

"To have a company we built recognized by the same community is pretty special," he said. "Someone opened the door for me and now part of our responsibility is to keep opening doors for the next generation."

Okimaw specializes in providing skills-based training, advisory services and

secretariat support to First Nations. Brown co-founded the company in 2019 with Miranda Kennedy. Since then, Okimaw's national team has worked with staff and leadership from more than 200 First Nations across North America.

IBEP is presenting Okimaw with a VIBE award for organizational impact.

Darrell Brown, president at Kisik Commercial Furniture, and Kendra Inglis, executive director at Makoon Transition Inc., will also be honoured.

Darrell Brown, who will receive the award for entrepreneurship, said he's planning to bring more than a dozen of his employees with him to the event.

"The award is as much theirs as it is mine, for sure," he said.

The entrepreneur started Kisik in 2003 with the goal of filling a gap in the Prairies market for an Indigenous-owned commercial furniture supplier. Since then, he's worked primarily with Indigenous organizations and federal government clients, offering cost-effective solutions for health-care, education and office environments.

Additionally, Brown is the president of Kisik Clean Energy, an organization

working with industry leaders and Indigenous communities to create new sources of renewable energy.

He's also a founding member and past chair of the Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce.

"I learned through my network of Indigenous business people that giving back is how you establish your brand and also your reliability and trust," he said.

Today, his advice to entrepreneurs is to give back and to find mentors: "Business mentorship was really important to me. It guided me through a lot of decisions."

Inglis will receive the VIBE award for leadership. More than six years ago, she took a settlement from her Indian Day School claim and started Makoon, with a mission of keeping children with their families and out of care.

The organization's 100-plus employees work with families as they navigate the challenges of the child welfare system, supporting them with transitional housing, life skills training, parenting support and addiction services.

Inglis brings a wealth of experience to her work. She became a mother at a young age and experienced challenges

that shaped her understanding of the barriers some families face. She later spent years working within Child and Family Services.

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Since opening its doors on Sept. 1, 2020, Makoon has helped reunite more than 400 children with their families, Inglis said.

“For the last six years, I’ve just been so focused on doing my best ... that I don’t stop and look and see what I’ve accomplished,” she said. “I really believe this award means that people are recognizing that Makoon is doing the work and that we are changing lives.”

The awards will be presented at a gala at the Fort Garry Hotel on Nov. 5.

The gala doubles as a networking opportunity for students and a fundraiser, said Riley Proulx, director of IBEP. All proceeds from the event

benefit students through scholarships, bursaries and academic support.

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Aaron Epp

Reporter   

Aaron Epp reports on business for the Free Press. After freelancing for the paper for a decade, he joined the staff full-time in 2024. [Read more about Aaron.](#)

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