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Sean Toulouse: Working with Nature

By **L.M. VanEvery**

Sean Toulouse, 45, worked in the manufacturing industry for many years. In 2007, when the company he worked for closed, he knew he needed a career change. "I saw a drop in manufacturing," he said. "And I wanted to work on the reserve." He didn't know exactly what kind of work he was looking for and decided to visit **GREAT**.

Sheila Hill, Program and Services Officer, informed Sean about the Horticultural Technician Pre-Apprentice Training program offered at **GREAT**. Sean used to watch his grandmother when she gardened and knew he had an interest in horticultural work but hadn't thought of it as a career. He thought he'd look into it further.

He enrolled in the Horticultural Pre-Apprentice Training program at **GREAT** which runs for 15 weeks. During his in-class training, Sean credits instructor, Ken Parker with raising his interest in

horticulture. "He really sparked my enthusiasm for the job," says Sean. "His enthusiasm sparked my enthusiasm." The Pre-Apprentice Program is an overview of the Horticultural Technician Apprenticeship program Sean would later take at Humber College. "It was in **GREAT's** program that I learned a lot about the identification of trees and native plants," he said. "We had to learn the common names and the botanical names which were in Latin." Sean learned over 80 plant names during the course. "It's a science, really," says Sean. He was also schooled in the business side of the industry with job estimation, marketing and customer service.

After completing the program at **GREAT**, Sean was referred to Colin Harper Landscaping in Dundas to work as an apprentice. There, he learned on the job about everything from garden installation to interlocking stone design. Sean enjoys working outside. "There was lots of learning my first year," he said. Although the hours are long, Sean advises that his job is a good way to get and stay in shape. He does miss family time in the summer months but has high job satisfaction in "doing something good for the environment."

During the winter months, Sean attended the Horticultural Technician Apprenticeship at Humber College. During this time, he studied plant identification, landscape construction, irrigation and turf management. Sean found that by taking the program at **GREAT** first, he was further ahead in his studies at Humber College. He attended Humber College for two winters and completed his studies in March 2010.

Currently working his third season at Colin Harper Landscaping, Sean is looking ahead to fulfilling his long-term goals. He wants to specialize in the knowledge of Indigenous species of plants and trees. Sean plans to write the test needed to acquire the Red Seal designation in horticulture in the next few weeks. He currently consults for local businesses that need ideas in landscape design. Sean hopes to open his own business next summer. "I see a need for this type of business on the reserve," he says. For anyone wanting to study horticulture and work in the industry, Sean encourages them to pursue it if they have an interest. "It's intense," he says.

For more information on the Pre-Apprenticeship Program, contact **GREAT** today.

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