This is just a brief summary of my impressions from this gathering. I will be focusing on the positive results of this conference, as there are many! Its difficult to capture everything in words as the enormity of the conference was overwhelming somewhat, at least for me. Let’s just say, this gathering was slightly bigger than my expectations. The conference had more of an international flavour than national and the title of this gathering did somewhat of an injustice to some of the people participating. Not only Aboriginal Canadians and their workers were present, but the conference was attended by Aboriginal people from the South and Central Americas, the United States and Mexico as well. As a result we had to call on our “Super Mex” for assistance in times of need. Thanks Ricardo for helping out. “No entiendo....Senor? Mucho Gracias ! ”

Our SMART staff members participating in this program did justice in representing our people and program. Most of us had no experience at this level, but our good work and contributions were acknowledged by many of the other participants. We were lucky too that Dan provided us with his experience in this sort of a setting. I didn’t know what he was talking about half of the time in French, but he was pointing here and there. That was good enough for me :) .

Considering that this gathering was about Connecting Aboriginal Canadians our team, which represented the Aboriginal component of the Smart Project in Canada, the other organizations and countries expressed their appreciation of us for sharing our work and the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools applied in our First Nation communities.

The work implemented in the K.O. communities by our e-centre staff and all the interest shown by the people in our communities is key to the success of this project. It reflects well on the questions asked regarding how the communities are accepting and taking advantage of this opportunity presented to them through this technology. Sometimes we tend to forget the bottom line objectives of this initiative, to showcase how the Aboriginals in our communities are using these tools.

The team represented a good cross section of our organization, not only as per our SMART program, but other interests of our First Nations as well. Darrell, as Multi-media Producer was kept busy by demonstrating his role(s) and responsibilities in the Deer Lake community. Angus Miles, a Computer Technician from Fort Severn, explained all he had done since the implementation of the program in his community. Most people had no idea where Fort Severn was located, but they know now! Our Network Manager, Dan Pellerin, did what work had to be done in making sure all wiring and cabling was completed for our display booth and connections with other sites were confirmed. As for me I just did as I usually do, try to keep everything flowing, as Peter would say, “just managing”.

As most of you know in this type of conference one difficulty that occurs in running an information booth is the scheduling of the activities where the plan doesn’t always work out. Due to the on-going workshops in different rooms of the building, a few people will drop by
briefly just to pickup information that interests them from our booth. But, during the breaks they come in waves of large groups. It was hard to talk and cater to everyone’s questions, but as a team the four of us jumped in and did what we could. I think we did very well. The most important part of my experience through this process that I’d like to share with everyone is the amount of work you people made us do :) in this program did not go unnoticed.

For the leadership in our communities and people at the Keewaytinook Okimakanak offices and Knet, I am proud to say I am honoured to be part of this program and the leadership you have provide us to make this happen. I wish you could have seen the enthusiasm and heard first hand some of the comments that came out at this conference.

I am not talking about comments from the workers in the other organizations but words from Ross McCleod, the “big show” with the Smart Projects in Canada and Bob Nault, who was impressed with our continued success in this program and commented, “you guys know how to do things right.” Actually the exact words he used were, “You guys attract people like _ _ _ _ attracts flies!” Just kidding.

Many of the other organizations attending expressed an interest in using the Kuh-Ne-N Smart Demonstration Project as model to follow. The participants referred to us as “Champions.” The only reply I had was, “We aren’t the champions, our community leaders are! They gave us their approval to fight for the project and had confidence in our people to be successful in the implementation of this first stage of the future capacity building at the community level.”

Sometimes, as I struggle to make little things happen, I question myself and wonder if my efforts in small way have any impact in helping our people enhance their well-being. I am sure the rest of our staff feel the same at times. But, consider this, the lightning flashed, the thunder roared, the visitors and guests at our booth saw and heard what you have accomplished and they have set their sights on what they want to achieve based on our winning experience.

My experience there on your behalf was both fun and emotional !!

Meegwech !

Les