

Northern star lights way for Arctic teens

Tootoo displays corporate colours

*GORDON JAREMKO
EDMONTON*

Jordin Tootoo scored the second he walked into the boardroom Friday at Weldco Beales Manufacturing in northwest Edmonton.

Cheers and delighted smiles lit up a tour group of teenagers from the Arctic settlements of Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Kugaaruk, Cambridge Bay and Kugluktuk.

The first Inuit to skate into the NHL described the moment as a career high even by the grand standards of playing big-league hockey in roaring arenas.

"To see these kids with big grins on their faces is mind-boggling," Tootoo said in an interview.

"I want to be a role model for them. Hopefully they'll become role models for their brothers and sisters."

The visit by the winger, who made it all the way from his native Rankin Inlet (Kangiqiniq) on the western coast of Hudson Bay to the Nashville Predators, was a carefully staged surprise.

Such performances are part of his side job as official envoy to Arctic communities for their largest business conglomerate, NorTerra Inc.

Tootoo is a star recruiter for the 1,400-employee joint venture of Inuvialuit Development Corp. in the Northwest Territories and Nunasi Corp. in Nunavut.

Subsidiaries include the tugboat and barge armada of Northern Transportation Co. Ltd., Canadian North Airlines, crane and equipment manufacturer Weldco-Beales and newly formed Northern Industrial Supplies.

"It is very valuable for us to invest in individuals who have prospects," NorTerra president Carmen Loberg said in an interview.

Cont'd.....

(cont'd) Isolated youth don't realize their own prospects, says NHLer

[*From page F1*](#)



Nashville Predators forward Jordin Tootoo, centre, leads an Outward Bound tour for northern youth into the Weldco-Beales crane manufacturing plant in Edmonton on Friday. The factory is owned by the Arctic Inuvialuit and Inuit, and this leg in the Outward Bound program is intended to show aboriginal youth potential careers in fields from welding to finance

The teenagers visited the 225 employee Edmonton factory on a career guidance leg of a youth leadership expedition led by Outward Bound.

The annual summer event includes visits to NorTerra operations — after a 320kilometre whitewater canoe trip down the Horton River east of the Mackenzie Delta.

“I want to open the doors. I want to pave the way,” Tootoo said. “A lot of these kids are so isolated they don't see the job opportunities we — the Inuit — own.

The sky's the limit,” the 24-year-old professional hockey player said. “I didn't realize there are so many options.”

What will Tootoo do after age ends his on-ice career? Will he do it with NorTerra? “I'll tell you in 10 years,” he said. The northern youth leadership expedition gives the aboriginal participants ideas about making prosperous livelihoods in fields from welding to finance.

But the participants also receive a practical lesson for the immediate future that is hoped to spread among their peers.

“Finish school,” said Loberg and Weldco-Beales president Doug Schindel.

A high-school diploma has become the minimum qualification for all fields, including increasingly technical bluecollar trades, the executives emphasized.

“There is a change,” Loberg said. “We're seeing more kids in school.”

Successes like Tootoo's help, along with gradually growing numbers of northern natives climbing occupational ladders in NorTerra, Loberg said.

“They inspire kids with proof that, if you have drive and pursue something diligently, you can do it,” Loberg said.

“They're like magnets. People see them and go ‘hey, you can actually do something.’ ”

