

"It's important to believe in yourself"

PHOTO BY KEN KERR

Warren Salmon computer network

Warren Salmon, 32, established Black Board International, a black computer network and software company, in 1991 after attending a black youth conference at the University of British Columbia where challenges facing black youth and the community were discussed.

"After that weekend I wondered what would happen," he recalls. "I didn't see the dialogue continuing. So I set up a computer network to continue the dialogue and to address the issues we were speaking about."

Black Board International documents black culture and achievements. Once linked to Salmon's system, a wealth of information is at hand: Learn the capital of Zaire, get a listing of black banks in Chicago, discover where to find West Indian food in Ottawa, discuss Garveyism with a penpal in California

The company offers an online service, business, organization and event listings, a job bank, encyclopedia, and electronic mail facility, as well as software

instruction on African contributions to the arts and sciences.

"This material can be used by anyone inside or outside the community to help increase knowledge and understanding."

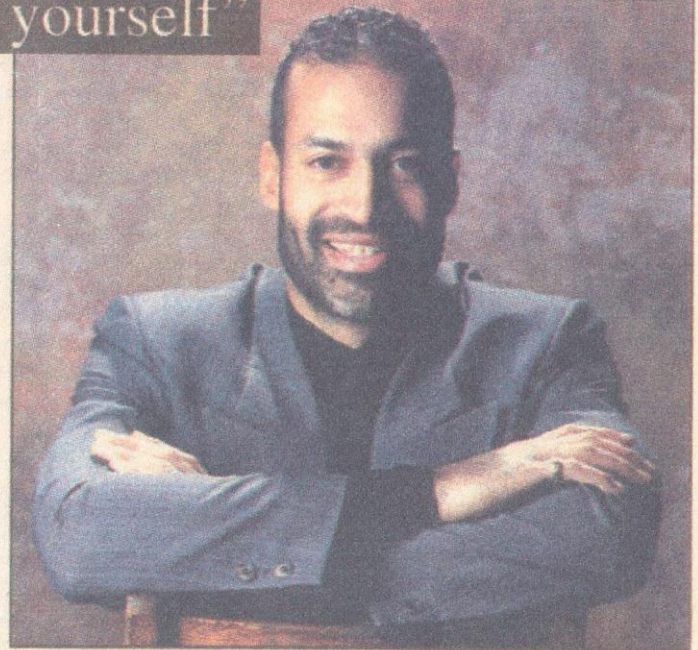
Salmon says his business, which has doubled in size every year since its inception, now registers six-figure sales annually. His clients include individuals, businesses, school boards, government, non-profit organizations and libraries, with 80% of his business originating in the U.S.

"It's getting better here, but the market there is so much larger. In a city like Chicago, the black population is double all of Canada."

Salmon says the black community is about 25% behind the average in terms of computer usage, which he considers a "definite concern."

"A lot of that has to do with access to computers in the home or even exposure to them in the schools."

Salmon intends to offer training and education programs to show people how and why they can use computers. He encourages black youth to pursue careers



in science and technology, telling them: "It's important to believe in yourself. You can't listen to anyone else. Just prepare to work hard and be persistent."

He also passes on the values his mother, Metro councillor Bev Salmon, and his surgeon father instilled in him about getting a good education and owning a business.

The second-generation Canadian says Black History Month is

important because it addresses major challenges he faced growing up: "Not feeling included in the material that was provided in the school system and the negative portrayals in the media of people of African descent."

"It's good to have emphasis placed on African history and heritage. It helps to increase knowledge and understanding ... (but) it shouldn't be a one-month thing, it should be an everyday thing."