

[Aboriginal] University & Community Partnership in Action: Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre Opens Doors

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Today The University of Winnipeg and its Foundation officially opened the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre and announced the pledge of \$100,000 from The North West Company and the generous corporate support of \$300,000 from the RBC Financial Group. These funds enhance the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement grant of \$295,000 announced April 25, 2005.

Bridging the digital divide and providing Aboriginal students and community members with opportunity to explore their past and navigate their future are just two of the exciting components announced today at the opening of The University of Winnipeg Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre.

Rooted in the idea of partnership-Wii Chiiwaakanak means "partners" in Ojibway-the new centre is open to the community and to University of Winnipeg students and is a collaborative effort between the University, the Southeast Resource Development Corporation Council, the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, and a growing number of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups and organizations. The Centre is located just across the street from the University Duckworth Centre at 509-511 Ellice Avenue.

"The University of Winnipeg is committed to the inner city, our neighbours, and our students," said Lloyd Axworthy, UWinnipeg President. "Developing a collaborative and consultative Aboriginal Education Strategy for the University includes innovative projects like Wii Chiiwaakanak. Providing UWinnipeg's more than 800 Aboriginal students and the neighbourhood's growing Aboriginal population with the technology and resources to fully engage with their rich heritage and today's realities, are integral to a future of possibilities and opportunities."

To kick off the official opening, Axworthy thanked a network of partners with Elders, community and business leaders, and organizations like the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, the Assembly of First Nations, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the Manitoba Métis Federation, and over a dozen more government, community, and education partners, as he announced that The University of Winnipeg would be providing its recently developed "A Strategic Approach for Aboriginal Education Success in Canada" as a policy paper at the First Ministers meeting later this month.

Providing a dedicated space for resource materials, reading, and reflection was the motivation behind the creation of The North West Company Heritage Room. As the Centre's inaugural corporate supporter, The North West Company today announced their pledge of \$100,000 toward the establishment of the room providing opportunity for Aboriginal students to learn about their heritage. The NWC Heritage Room is a lounge and educational area where University students, staff, and faculty, as well as community members can meet, read, reflect, and learn.

Students and members of the community will have opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture through workshops and displays created by the University's Anthropology department using artifacts appropriate for teaching purposes. Inuit sculptures on loan from the Winnipeg Art Gallery and art from the University's collection.

"We are very pleased to support this initiative that will heighten awareness and promote greater appreciation of the Aboriginal community's rich cultural heritage," said Edward Kennedy, President and CEO of The North West Company. The North West Company is the largest employer of Aboriginal people in Canada outside of the Federal Government and is a business partner with dozens of Aboriginal communities across the North. "As a leader in promoting Aboriginal participation and advancement within our workplace we also recognize our potential to contribute to opening life-changing opportunities for our all too often overlooked urban neighbours and Winnipeg's growing Aboriginal community."

Central to today's celebration was the announcement of The RBC Community Learning Commons. The

Centre's largest corporate funder to date, RBC Financial Group generously pledged \$300,000 in support of the RBC Community Learning Commons, as well as to scholarships and bursaries for The Collegiate, the University's high school division.

Computer-based learning, mentoring, and urban distance education for Aboriginal children and adult learners is the prime focus of The RBC Community Learning Commons. A weekend Kid's Club fosters a safe and structured learning environment where neighbourhood children can come for help with homework and use of a computer.

"Our donation to the University of Winnipeg is a reflection of RBC's commitment to education and youth. We consider our support of education, not only as an investment in communities, but also in Canada's future," says Kirk Dudtschak, regional president, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and NW Ontario for RBC Financial Group. "The RBC Community Learning Commons will help to bridge the 'digital divide' by providing access and instructional support to computer technology for everyone in the local community. As well as making learning fun, the RBC Community Learning Commons will help to nurture the next generation of computer confident literate learners."

In addition to neighbourhood children, their parents and extended family, as well as members of the public and UWinnipeg students will be able-in a supportive environment- to read news, do homework and research, and access information on jobs, health, housing, and other vital online services. The RBC Community Learning Commons will be open to the public Monday to Friday, with plans to expand to Saturdays within the near future.

"The North West Company and RBC Financial Group," said Susan Thompson, President and CEO of the University of Winnipeg Foundation, "are shining examples of corporations becoming engaged with community. Their generosity of spirit and resources, along with the vision and expertise of The University of Winnipeg, have the potential to enable Winnipeg's inner-city children to become active, engaged citizens-leaders of tomorrow. We are grateful for their gifts and leadership."

In addition to support from the corporate sector, Wii Chiiwaakanak has received substantial funding from the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement (WPA). The WPA is a tri-partite agreement in which the three levels of government are working collaboratively to build a more vibrant and dynamic capital city.

"I am pleased to bring congratulations on the opening of this remarkable facility," said Gary Doer, Premier of Manitoba. "The province is joining with the other governments and the private sector to ensure a culturally appropriate education option is available to Aboriginal Manitobans."

"The Government of Canada is proud to support our urban Aboriginal people through the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement," said Anita Neville, Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South. "This learning centre is an excellent example of how working in partnership can produce success in our community. Investing in our neighborhoods today is an investment in our future."

"The participation of our Aboriginal Community is so important to the future of Winnipeg. The Learning Centre will provide Aboriginal Youth with the skills they need to ensure they are able to reach their full potential, and to become active participants in the successful development of our city," said Councillor Smith.

Vision, commitment, and collaboration are integral to the mission of The University of Winnipeg-both in the classroom and in the community. Said Axworthy, "Wii Chiiwaakanak is a living, evolving example of University and community-private, public, and corporate-working together to provide the resources and tools essential for the development of the human potential of Aboriginal young people. Partnerships in education are essential for a healthy future for our University and our local, national, and global communities."

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is the federal department responsible for administering this agreement, including coordinating funding on behalf of the Government of Canada's Urban Aboriginal

Strategy.

Located in the heart of downtown, The University of Winnipeg is a compact, diverse, multicultural academic community committed to access and excellence. Home to more than 8,900 full- and part-time students, UWinnipeg has been ranked by our graduates in the Top Ten of all Canadian universities when asked about their "Entire Educational Experience" (Maclean's Graduate Survey, November 2004). The Globe & Mail 2005 Report Card gives The University of Winnipeg an overall 'A' grade in the areas of teaching quality, class sizes, faculty-student interaction, and the availability of faculty outside classroom hours. Find out why. Visit www.uwinnipeg.ca

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