

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE 2 VOLUME 1

# MANITOBA

## Meat up downtown

### IN THIS ISSUE

Inside our Indigenous-themed issue  
First Nations are taking a leading role in shaping downtown

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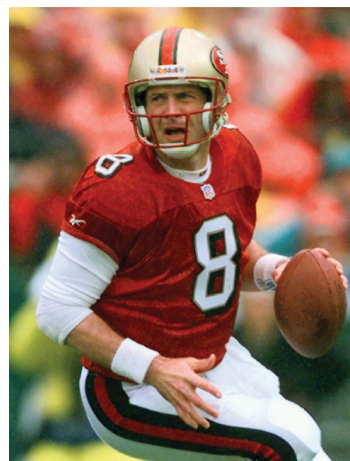
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# WALK OF AGES

**W**HEN Portage and Main opened to pedestrians on June 27, I drove downtown, parked and walked from corner to corner to corner.

It was glorious.

And it wasn't just me getting my steps in at Winnipeg's most famous intersection for the first time in 46 years. There were lots of people doing the same thing. I high-fived a couple of them as we passed each other for the second time. (The only danger of a collision was between the many street-crossers who were video taping their historic walks.)

It's been weeks since pedestrians have been co-existing with vehicles at Portage and Main and the primary result thus far is renewed life in the downtown core. There's a pulse that simply didn't exist when the God-awful concrete barriers were up.

(I overheard a few naysayers commenting about not wanting to cross the "death" intersection but so far, dead bodies haven't been the traffic bottleneck they predicted.)

Winnipeggers famously don't like change and I'm sure that's a big reason why there was opposition to the decision to open Portage and Main up to pedestrians after all these years. It's seems like such a no-brainer today. But we like to be on the winning side so I think we're just as famous for claiming to be totally in favour of something we once opposed after it turned out great.

Remember those people who gave the old Eaton's building a hug before it was demolished to make way for what is now Canada Life Centre? I bet a lot of them are Jets fans.

I know a couple of people who were vehemently opposed to an Academy Road restaurant opening a patio many



years ago. They even went door-to-door with a petition but their protests were ultimately in vain. So, imagine my surprise when I walked by the super-popular patio not long after it opened to see the two of them enjoying a glass of wine al fresco. The owner welcomed them with open arms and today, they're regulars.

Sometimes it just takes time to gain a new perspective and I hope that's the case with Portage and Main. Just ask Darren Yewchyn, who owns Smoke'n Bob's, one of the most recognizable street-food vendors in town.

I've always thought office vacancy rate studies from real estate companies were informative but if you wanted the real story, you needed to talk to people with boots on the ground.

I spoke with him in front of 201 Portage shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic hit and he told me foot traffic — and his sales — had plunged as companies moved to a work-from-home model.

He still has his finger on the pulse and says employees are returning to their offices in significant numbers as Smoke'n Bob's enjoys its 35th year in the heart of downtown Winnipeg.

"The offices are filling up. We've definitely had a better this year than last year and with the corner opening up, there should be a lot more walking traffic. It was mayhem (on the day Portage and Main opened). There's a lot of good buzz," he told me.

— Geoff Kirbyson, Publisher  
Manitoba Inc.



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**Publisher**  
Geoff Kirbyson

**Editor**  
Shel Zolkewich

**Art Director**  
LMD at MORE Creative

**Business Development Manager**  
Robert Zyluk

**Photography**  
Ruth Bonneville  
Lucas Kloeppel / Pixels  
Doug Little  
Cary Miller  
PomeGran, Inc  
Economic Development Winnipeg  
Emily Wood

**Contributors**  
Michelle Bailey  
Shelley Cook  
Eleanor Coopsammy  
Emma Honeybun  
Wab Kinew  
Angela Lovell  
Carly Peters  
Jeff Swystun  
Jim Timlick

**Advertising**  
Geoff Kirbyson  
204.771.0973  
geoff.kirbyson@manitoba-inc.ca  
Robert Zyluk  
204.770.7607  
robert.zyluk@manitoba-inc.ca

**Web**  
Manitoba-inc.ca

**Comments, Inquiries  
and Letters**  
info@manitoba-inc.ca

**Social**  
LinkedIn@Manitoba-inc  
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## ELEANOR COOPSAMMY

Eleanor Coopsammy has been telling Manitobans' stories for more than 25 years, primarily as a reporter, producer and anchor with CTV Winnipeg. She is currently the director of media relations and issues management at the University of Manitoba and she is also the co-host of the Manitoba Inc. Podcast.



## JIM TIMLICK

Jim Timlick has worked on the Manitoba media scene for the better part of three decades. He has reported on everything from amateur sports and agriculture to city hall and the local business sector. He is also a former manager of media relations for the CFL's Winnipeg Blue Bombers.



## SHELLEY COOK

Shelley Cook is an Anishinaabe kwe from Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and a graduate of Red River College's Creative Communications program, where she specialized in journalism. A storyteller at heart, Shelley's writing explores themes of identity, culture and community. Her work is grounded in lived experience and a deep commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices. She currently serves on several Indigenous advisory circles and community boards.



## CARLY PETERS

Carly Peters likes to tell stories. It makes sense for a communications professional with an extensive background in publishing and a passion for the non-profit sector. From crafting articles for trade and consumer magazines to penning press releases and speeches, she creates content that connects with audiences.



## EMMA HONEYBUN

Emma Honeybun is a Franco-Métis reporter who was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She graduated from the Creative Communications program at RRC Polytech in 2023 and has been writing for the Free Press Community Review ever since. Outside of writing, she is currently a volunteer ambassador with Apathy is Boring's RISE program and a WWOOFer.



## MICHELLE BAILEY

Michelle Bailey is a writer, a lover of current events, sports and is not too bad at golf. Known by most of her friends as Bailey, Michelle was a reporter and anchor at CKND [Global TV] in both Winnipeg and Saskatoon in the early '90s. She spent more than three decades in media, public relations, government relations and corporate communications.





## JEFF SWYSTUN

Jeff helps brands grow their influence and value through Swystun Communications. He was DDB Worldwide's chief communicationsofficer, Interbrand's chief marketing officer and a principal consultant at PwC. Jeff has spoken at more than 40 conferences and his book, *Why Marketing Works*, topped Amazon's advertising category. Jeff has appeared on CNBC, NBC, CNN, BNN Bloomberg and the CBC. His clients include the Tampa Bay Rays, BeaverTails, Bond Brand Loyalty, Ralph Lauren, Deloitte, Ascend TV, Mortgage Professionals Canada and Harvard Developments.



## RUTH BONNEVILLE

Local professional photographer Ruth Bonneville has been telling stories through her lens for many years. Her work has been recognized nationally, including illustrating breaking news, social issues, sports, entertainment and portraits, and has appeared in many Manitoba publications. She also loves giving back to her community and walking her nine-year-old dog, Ruffin.



## ANGELA LOVELL

Angela Lovell is an award-winning freelance writer based in Manitou, Manitoba. She has more than 30 years of experience writing about agriculture, environment, business and rural life.



## SHEL ZOLKEWICH

A journalist by trade and an adventurer at heart, Shel writes regularly about travel and food in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Explore Magazine*, *Travel Life Magazine*, *Matador Network*, *Lonely Planet* and *The Toronto Star*. She has a deep affinity for the snow and cold, but won't say no to a couple of days in a Mexican fishing village, photographing the morning's catch. She's an avid forager, gardener, hunter, angler, cook and foodstylist who makes her home on a farm in central Manitoba, Canada.



# BACK

to the downtown office





## OFFICE VACANCY RATES CONTINUE TO DECLINE IN WINNIPEG

BY EMMA HONEYBUN

**R**ECOVERY hasn't been easy, but in what's now the fifth year since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, downtown Winnipeg's lingering case of reluctance is beginning to taper off, little by little, at least when it comes to vacancies.

During an event celebrating the re-opening of the Portage and Main intersection on July 8 — which encouraged people from all corners of the city to give each other resounding high-fives as they crossed the nationally-recognized criss-cross — Darren Yewchyn, who operates a hotdog stand mere steps away, remembers what it was like in 2003 — a ghost town.

About 70 per cent of the regular business at this cart comes from workers stopping by on their lunch breaks. Customers have been steadily coming back on a year-to-year basis.

**“TRAFFIC HAS PICKED UP. THE CORNER (OF PORTAGE AND MAIN) OPENED UP RECENTLY, AND I THINK MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO MAKE NEW ADJUSTMENTS, TRANSITIONING INTO USING THE CORNER. I CAN DEFINITELY SEE MORE PEOPLE DOWNTOWN.”**

— Darren Yewchyn,  
owner of Smoke'n Bob's hotdog stand

## VACANCY RATES DOWN

According to a recent report by Winnipeg-based Capital Commercial Real Estate, 2024 was the first year office vacancy rates in Winnipeg went down since the shutdowns caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. This was largely due to the completion of large-scale projects, such as the new Wawanesa Insurance headquarters at True North Square and the first phase of Polaris Place in north Winnipeg, which added a collective 400,000 square feet of office space to the market last year.

Another report from CBRE, a national real estate company, predicted that vacancy rates would peak in 2025 and begin to recover by early 2026 — a similar trajectory to the economic recession in the mid-1990s — but recent numbers from Colliers Canada and the Winnipeg Downtown BIZ district tell a more optimistic story, with downtown rates on the steady decline and a prediction that things will hover in place for the foreseeable future.

A major game-changer, according to Capital, is True North Real Estate Development's just-started redevelopment of Portage Place mall. TNRED acquired the mall through a partnership with the Southern Chiefs' Organization in September of 2024. The mall is set to be transformed into a \$650-million multi-use facility, which will help improve the quality of life in the downtown community.

"Last year, I saw it (the foot traffic) getting a bit better when compared to the year before that (2024)," he says. "Last year, I was a lot happier. And this year — definitely happier, having more and more people in the office and back to work, out walking around and cruising around on lunch breaks ... and shopping in the little stores around here."

"Traffic has picked up," Yewchyn continued. "The corner (of Portage and Main) opened up recently, and I think more and more people are starting to make new adjustments, transitioning into using the corner."

"I can definitely see more people downtown," he says.

According to a report published by Colliers Canada in April, the first quarter of 2025 saw a 2.7 per cent rise in vacancies for the entire city, which is 10 basis points higher than last year.

But the Winnipeg Downtown BIZ (business improvement zone), which covers the economic landscape of the 730-acre downtown neighbourhood, has different numbers due to its tighter boundaries.







Winnipeg's skyline. Photo by Diane Hammerling

A report for the downtown BIZ found a 29.57 per cent hike in pedestrian foot traffic in the first quarter. That's up slightly from 2024, but remains a significant jump from a devastating low in 2023.

In the same report, the BIZ noted a slight decline in vacancy rates for the downtown area. Winnipeg and Vancouver B.C. saw the largest decreases in their downtown vacancies among Canadian cities, going from 18.7 per cent in the final quarter of 2024 to 18.2 per cent during the first months of 2025 (for Winnipeg). This is the biggest decline in vacancy rates since the first quarter of 2020.

Although he doesn't have a crystal ball, Peter George, co-founder of Show and Tell (formerly McKim Communications), says he isn't sure downtown will ever feel like it did pre-pandemic.

George owns part of the historic McKim building located at the corner of Main Street and Bannatyne Avenue and says he has noticed downtown getting busier.



Darren Yewchyn says 70 per cent of the regular business at this hotdog cart comes from workers stopping by on their lunch breaks. Photo by Ruth Bonneville

# “PART OF (THE RETURN) IS EMPLOYERS ... THEY WANT PEOPLE TO COME BACK TO THE OFFICE. IT’S EASIER TO REMEMBER PEOPLE YOU SEE EVERY DAY.”

— Peter George, co-founder of Show and Tell Agency



Winnipeg's Exchange District. Canadian Press photo

“Part of (the return) is employers ... they want people to come back to the office,” George says, adding that collaboration is easier and productivity is often better when people work together. “It’s easier to remember people you see every day.”

While some businesses work better in-person, others have been able to thrive in a remote setting.

Many advertising businesses, for example, have gone fully remote, while other professions, such as lawyers or architects will always need an in-person office, George says.



Gail Auriti

But now that many people have become accustomed to working from home — and all its perks — calling workers back into an in-person environment isn’t simple. How do you compete with home, sweet home?

In 201 Portage’s case, amenities are a big draw.

In the last year, vacancies have gone down nearly four per cent, falling from 11.3 in June of 2024 to 7.5 per cent today, according to Gail Auriti, a local broker at Harvard Developments, a Saskatchewan-based real estate company which manages property across western Canada, including the second-tallest building in Winnipeg.

“Our building (vacancies have) gone down for sure,” she says, adding that significant investments have gone into improving the building and making it an enjoyable place to work. It boasts a restaurant, a 2,500 square-foot food court, Uptown by 529, a 24-hour gym and fitness facility on the seventh floor, daily and monthly public parking as well as facility rentals for tenants.

“It’s the quality of our building that makes people want to work here,” Auriti says. “It helps bring people back downtown.”

According to both Colliers and Downtown BIZ, with no new major developments planned for the area, downtown vacancies will remain stable for the foreseeable future. ■



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# FIELD TO BOARDROOM

Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young wins International Distinguished Entrepreneur Award for his work as chairman and co-founder of Huntsman Gay Global Capital (HGGC)

Photo by Eleanor Coopsammy

BY GEOFF KIRBYSON

**W**HEN Steve Young was a young NFL football player, he had an epiphany that would ultimately serve him well on both the field of play and in the boardroom.

As the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers in the early 1990s, Young had the unenviable job of filling the cleats of the legendary Joe Montana.

Young was in Winnipeg in May to receive the International Distinguished Entrepreneur Award from the Associates at the I.H. Asper School of Business.

When Young would throw an interception, he'd feel badly when he got back to the sideline, where one of his coaches was inevitably waiting to find out what happened.

"Why did you throw it to the other team?" the coach would ask.

**"You need to have the vulnerability to recognize when you screw up, say sorry and then go fix it."**

Young would be quick to point out, for example, that one of his offensive linemen had missed a block and that his intended receiver had run the wrong route. When the coach asked the lineman and receiver for their versions, they'd often say, "that guy is no Joe Montana."

His teammates didn't respond well to Young's explanation. Eventually, he discovered that what solves the problem is finding the "truest truth." The ball was in his hands on every offensive play and he needed to take responsibility for the outcome.



"You need to have the vulnerability to recognize when you screw up, say sorry and then go fix it," he says.

The impact on the 49ers of Young's epiphany was significant. Now when he'd throw the occasional interception, he'd own up to what he could have done differently and the lineman and receiver would admit that they had missed their assignments.

The team went on to win the Super Bowl in 1995.

"The greatest way to inspire people around you is own your mistakes and go fix them. That's the truest truth. I'm responsible and I'm going to fix it. What solves the problem is finding the truest truth. Don't excuse accountability."

Young was quick to point out that while the receiver and lineman making mistakes was certainly true, neither incident was the truest truth. The truest truth was that he needed to adapt quicker and make a better play.

Today, he is the chairman of Huntsman Gay Global Capital (HGGC), a Palo Alto, California-based private equity firm he co-founded in 2007. It manages more than \$7 billion in assets and has completed more than 730 platform investments, add-on transactions and exits, totalling more than \$79 billion in enterprise value. (All figures are in U.S. dollars.)

HGGC operates in the mid-range market in the private equity space, investing in businesses with enterprise values up to \$1.5 billion. It targets four primary sectors—technology, business services, financial services and consumer.



Steve Young was quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers.  
Associated Press file photo

When investigating potential investments, Young says HGGC looks at the people first and foremost because he wants to underwrite and invest in them.

"There are all kinds of elements of businesses that make them capable of great investments in private equity. Most of it is making sure they can grow. It's building a good business into a great company. It's finding those good businesses that aren't broken—they're thriving but they need specific things to be a great company. We can help them do that," he says.

• Continued on page 17

**"The greatest way to inspire people around you is own your mistakes and go fix them. That's the truest truth. I'm responsible and I'm going to fix it. What solves the problem is finding the truest truth. Don't excuse accountability."**

• Continued from page 16

Young says another lesson he imported to the boardroom is the importance of realizing that you can't do it alone.

"In football, there's too many people. It's chaos. Yet, that's where the magic is. When too many people come together, that's business. How do we have all of these human beings subsume themselves, their personal goals to the team goal, to the company to make it successful?" he asks.

"Businesses that can do that—I call that transactional versus abundance. If it's just you getting a paycheque and going home, it's never going to be the place you care enough to really make

a difference. If I was going to look for a job today, I wouldn't care where it was as long as the culture developed me as a person and helped us see we could do great things together. It's so obvious but so many people don't put the time in to develop that kind of culture."

Young has made sure to surround himself with successful people who can do the things that he can't, such as assigning a value to a business and determining how much HGGC should pay for it.

"How do we see what the capacity of this business is? How do we recognize its potential? In private equity, that modelling skill is the superpower. I can say that because I don't have it," he says with a laugh. ■

**"In football, there's too many people. It's chaos. Yet, that's where the magic is. When too many people come together, that's business. How do we have all of these human beings subsume themselves, their personal goals to the team goal, to the company to make it successful?"**

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YES! Winnipeg is Economic Development Winnipeg's business development team, promoting our city as the ideal location for new business, expansion, investment and top talent. Our ability to make a strong economic impact on our city is contingent on our continued partnership with the business community and government. In February 2021, YES! Winnipeg launched its five-year Real Impact Campaign 2025 with the goal of creating 10,000 jobs, attracting \$350 million in capital investment and generating \$900 million in GDP.

We wish to thank our YES! Winnipeg investor community for making a Real Impact on Winnipeg's economy.

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# BUSINESS BRIEFS

**Highlights from Manitoba business**

## Business leaders admired, remembered for dedication, support

MANITOBA has lost a pair of business icons.

Leo Ledohowski, the driving force behind the Canad Inns hotel chain, died in the first week of August after a battle with cancer. He was 81.

After spending his formative years in Poplarfield, Manitoba, Ledohowski spent a half-century in the hotel sector, first with Ledohowski Hotels, then Hospitality Corporation of Manitoba and finally Canad Inns.

Far from a one-industry pony, Ledohowski served on the boards of the Development Bank of Canada and the Bank of Canada, the latter where he worked with Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Bob Mazer, president and CEO of Mazergroup, the Brandon-based farm equipment dealership, died on July 6 of cancer at the age of 75. He joined the family business in 1969 and oversaw its growth to 18 New Holland



**Leo Ledohowski**



**Bob Mazer**

dealerships across Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

He was a mainstay in southwestern Manitoba and a long-time supporter of trades programming at Assiniboine Community College.



### 'Bendy' buses set to hit roadways

WINNIPEG Transit is making transit history this summer. Its first 60-foot zero-emission bus hit the streets in early August and will be joined by seven more battery-electric buses by the end of the year.

Also known as "bendy" buses, they are the largest in Transit's fleet and have 50 per cent more capacity than 40-foot buses. The buses were built by Winnipeg-based New Flyer.

### Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada names new president, CEO

THE Royal Aviation Museum of Western Canada has appointed Peter George as its new president and CEO.

George, who has more than 30 years of experience in branding and marketing, succeeds Terry Slobodian.

"I couldn't be more excited for the opportunity to help this Canadian institution fulfill its potential," George says. "The RAMWC has been an icon in Manitoba for a generation. With the museum's beautiful new home at the Winnipeg Richardson International Airport, the sky's the limit to how we can further elevate its profile and celebrate the rich history and future of aviation in Canada."



# NOT ALL LOLLIPOPS AND UNICORNS

Resilient Manitobans still concerned about tariffs, healthcare, inflation and crime

**M**ANITOBA is a rock. According to new polling from Leger Marketing, residents of the Keystone province are brushing aside the panic, hysteria and anger revolving around Donald Trump's on-again, off-again trade war.

More than two in five Manitobans (41 per cent) believed the provincial economy is in "good" or "very good" shape when asked in June, up from 35 per cent in January, before the tariff talk started to heat up.

That's ahead of the national sentiment of 37 per cent (which rose from 29 per cent at the start of 2025), and that in Ontario (33 per cent) and British Columbia (32 per cent).

"We're pretty a resilient lot compared to the rest of the country," says Andrew Enns, Winnipeg-based executive vice-president for Leger's central Canada region. "A couple of big neighbours don't feel as good about things."

Manitobans are also bullish about their own households, with 63 per cent saying their personal finances are in "good" or "very good" shape, compared to 58 per cent across the country.

It's possible Manitobans are buoyed by the recently-announced investments in Churchill, which will could expand shipping capacity at the northern port, and leverage the growing interest in the province's supply of rare earth minerals, Enns says.

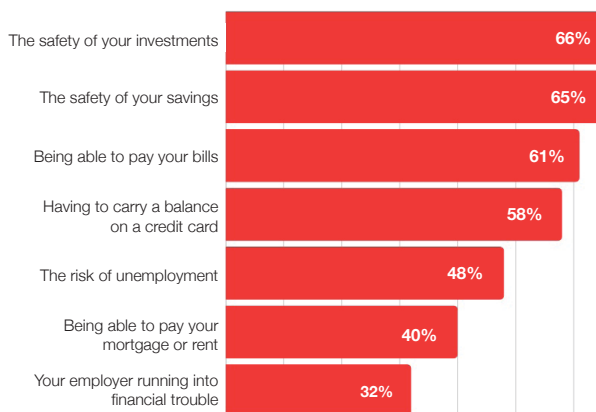
Of course, it's not all lollipops and unicorns in Manitoba, Enns notes. Tariffs are still a concern and will likely continue to be given the topic receives extensive coverage in the media, while healthcare, inflation, crime and housing affordability also keep some people up at night.

Looking out six months, 13 per cent of Manitobans believe the provincial economy will improve, 38 per cent think it will remain the same while 37 per cent believe things will deteriorate. Those numbers are down slightly from January when 16 per cent said they thought the economy would improve and 33 per cent said it would stay the same.



In the past couple of months, how much have you worried about the following:

June 2025



Worried frequently/occasionally/once or twice over past couple of months

Manitoba's diversified economy has long meant it doesn't lead or come up the rear in statistics or consumer sentiment. And while that doesn't necessarily create sexy headlines, there's a lot to be said for stability in turbulent times.

"We suffer a little bit because we don't hit the peaks. When oil hits US\$100 a barrel, the streets are paved with gold in Alberta. We don't hit those euphoric waves. But when oil falls to US\$40 a barrel, we're not running around worried about getting a paycheck," he says.

Leger's economic confidence report surveyed a sample of 400 Manitobans from June 13-16. It has a margin of error of 4.9 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

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**Leger**

# A Generational





# al Opportunity

**True North  
Real Estate  
Development**  
partners with  
**Southern  
Chiefs’  
Organization**  
with goal of  
transforming  
downtown  
Winnipeg

**T**HE freshly-started redevelopment of Portage Place is so much more than bricks and mortar; it’s an opportunity to transform downtown Winnipeg into a better, more inclusive and safer neighbourhood for everyone.

The long-underperforming mall was purchased last year by True North Real Estate Development (TNRED), but the Winnipeg-based division of True North Sports + Entertainment never had any interest in maintaining the status quo.

The 1.2-million-square-foot property will maintain a retail component, but two major additions give it the potential to become truly transformative. They are: a 265,000-square-foot Healthcare Centre of Excellence, featuring primary care with integrated mental health services, surgery, diagnostics and renal dialysis, which will also become the new home for expanded Pan Am Clinic programs; and a 19-storey residential tower with more than 200 units, up to 40 per cent of which will be rented at “affordable” rates, well below the market rents for the area.

The tower is being developed as part of a historic not-for-profit partnership between TNRED and Southern Chiefs’ Organization (SCO), named TN-SCO Housing 92 Inc., with future profits reinvested back into housing.

There’s already a walkway link between SCO’s former Hudson’s Bay department store and Portage Place, which is in the middle of



A rendering of the residential tower. Photo courtesy True North Real Estate Development



A rendering of a 265,000-square-foot healthcare centre, which will feature primary care with integrated mental health services, surgery, diagnostics and renal dialysis. Photo courtesy True North Real Estate Development

its own reimagining, a multi-use project called Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgohn.

"We're physically linked so it only makes sense that our developments are linked," says Kevin Sim, TNRED's Vice-President of Housing and Advisory Services.

"We're quite fortunate to work together and collaborate on how our developments can talk to one another. SCO is interested in revitalizing downtown as an organization and doing things for their communities but also for Winnipeg" he says.

Sim is quick to note the housing tower will be complementary with SCO's own housing component at Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgohn.

"It's adding 207 suites to SCO's 373 planned suites, so nearly 600 new

multi-family living units, with more than 40 per cent of them being deeply affordable units," he says.

The combined investment in the two properties is in excess of \$1 billion.

Jerry Daniels, Grand Chief of SCO, says its partnership with TNRED is a "generational opportunity" to reshape the involvement of Indigenous groups in urban development. He says TNRED has acted with integrity and he appreciates the steps it has taken to understand SCO's perspectives.

"SCO is not just at the table, we are co-developers and future co-owners. That distinction matters. It ensures that First Nations people have influence, equity, and a direct stake in the future of this project. We're working closely with True North to design a development that reflects

our communities' needs," he says.

"We saw an opportunity to do something unprecedented—to incorporate First Nations leadership, ownership and vision in a major urban redevelopment. It is a first-of-its-kind partnership between a First Nations organization and a private sector developer that is grounded in mutual respect, trust and a long-term commitment to economic reconciliation."

"Their willingness to walk this path with us is setting a new benchmark for how industry can be an active part of reconciliation in Canada through structure, equity and action and not just through words. What sets this project apart is that it's about creating lasting, structural change."

One of the crucial elements for downtown livability is a sizeable



grocery store that can service the community, something that has been largely absent for many years.

"A key component for us is having access to food and food security. We want to make it easy and livable," Sim says.

In the centre core of the building TNRED is advancing plans and programming to add neighborhood retail and community services, public green spaces including childcare, wrap around health and large format grocery with the design goal of opening up the monolith that has separated North and South downtown for decades - connecting communities and letting both sides off the neighborhood breathe together again.

These improvements will leverage inertia from the new health and residential towers and the Bay development re energizing a love for our downtown neighbourhood that deserves to flourish.

Fixing everything that ails downtown Winnipeg can't be done with a single silver bullet. Sim says collaboration is needed with all levels of government as well as the community.

"It's a collective challenge; it's not for one organization to solve on its own. We're in this together with SCO; with the City of Winnipeg, with the province on the healthcare component and with the federal government, as well. We need to figure out how we all work together to keep downtown as a place where people will want to come and visit and create a place where others can see the efforts being made to improve livability and safety," he says.

The TNRED and SCO partnership is also a significant step towards economic reconciliation. Sim says a significant part of the plan is to work with SCO to incorporate First Nations businesses and labour in the construction of the new tower.

"If we have enough hands working on the buildings we work in and live in, there will be a greater sense of pride in taking care of what we've built together. Perhaps now is as good a time as ever to start working closely with our Indigenous neighbours and relatives on how we can continue to grow that," he says.

SCO has programs already built into the Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn redevelopment project that are

giving its community members practical work skills and training.

"The more opportunities we have for people to work and participate in building what we want to build downtown, there will be an economic upside for them to live downtown and give back." Sim says.

TNRED is aware change can be disruptive, but the company is determined to keep the centre block of Portage Place open and vibrant during construction.

It has also taken great lengths to communicate changes in the building – to both patrons and downtown stakeholders.

"When we're dealing with that kind of change, we're looking at how it will impact the neighbours and how it's going to be a bit of an inconvenience for a bit of time," he says.

The combination of great partners, a carefully thought-out plan and a future that includes hundreds of new residents, workers and visitors is something TNRED believes reinforces its message to "Love Your Downtown." ■

## Portage Place By The Numbers

- The redevelopment is estimated to cost between \$650 million and \$700 million.
- The plan is for it to be completed in multiple phases over the next three to four years.
- Highlights include a 265,000-square-foot Healthcare Centre of Excellence and a 15-storey residential tower, featuring more than 200 units, up to 40 per cent of which will be at "affordable" rents.
- Construction of the housing tower is expected to begin in the first quarter of 2026, with completion by mid-2028. The healthcare component is expected to finish up a few months later.
- The mall is spread out over 6.4 acres of downtown land with about 930 feet of frontage along Portage Avenue.
- Conceptual planning has begun on the central core of the mall but there is no definitive timeline on it. One of the goals during construction, however, is to maintain visibility to businesses such as Prairie Theatre Exchange and Shoppers Drug Mart and accommodate them for their commitment to downtown.



MNP's downtown presence is reflective of its commitment to building strong, resilient communities across Manitoba.

# ROOTED IN MANITOBA, GROWING ACROSS CANADA

**M**NP has come a long way since establishing its first office in Brandon, Manitoba in 1958. Though its head office is now in Calgary, the firm remains deeply committed to its Manitoba roots and continues to invest in the region's growth and prosperity.

Formerly known as Meyers Norris Penny until 2011, MNP has evolved into a national leader in professional services. Today, the firm offers a broad spectrum of solutions that go far beyond traditional accounting and tax. These include business advisory, digital transformation, enterprise risk, human resources consulting, and Indigenous services—each tailored to help clients navigate complexity and seize opportunity.

"Other than wealth management and complex legal issues, we aim to be the go-to professional services partner for businesses in Manitoba," says Andrew Stibbard, Regional Managing Partner of MNP's Winnipeg office.

The firm took a significant step forward this spring when it acquired Winnipeg-based Lazer Grant. Its 45 people, headed up by managing partner Jeff Cochrane and partners Ann Fuller, Collin LeGall, Garry Chan and Neha Sahi, built their reputation with a traditional accounting and tax practice, as well as bankruptcy, corporate finance, business advisory and consulting. Lazer Grant officially merged into MNP on July 1 and its team will migrate from its Exchange District offices into MNP's space in True North Square later this year.

"Their reputation with their clients is excellent," Stibbard says. "They've provided great client service and value to their clients in the private enterprise space and with some Indigenous group clients in Winnipeg and throughout the province. They're a good team, a really strong group of team members who are dedicated to serving their clients and they've got a really client-centric culture, which aligns with who we are. We are the largest professional services firm in Winnipeg and Manitoba with access to lots of specialty services, such as valuation services, U.S. tax, consulting, corporate finance and debt financing that their clients needed but didn't have access to. It will be win-win for us and their clients. The world is no less complex today than it was a few years ago," Stibbard says.

Cochrane agrees, saying joining MNP strengthens his team's ability to support clients:

"We were looking for an opportunity to add more resources to our team, as well as more ways in which we can help give our clients the edge they need to stay competitive in the market. MNP complements and enhances our current service offerings and brings greater bench strength that will help us to service our clients," he says.





A culture of service at MNP is reflected in its team members' volunteerism and participation in local initiative.

## A Commitment to Community

MNP's presence in downtown Winnipeg reflects its long-standing commitment to building strong, resilient communities across Manitoba.

"Our clients are business partners, and we're focused on helping them grow and succeed," says Stibbard. "But our role in the community goes beyond business—we believe in showing up, giving back, and making a difference."

That belief is reflected in the firm's culture of service. MNP team members actively participate in local initiatives, volunteer their time, and support causes that matter to them. One of the most visible examples is the firm's annual United Way campaign, which is driven entirely by employee contributions.

"It's not about corporate dollars—it's about our people choosing to support causes that matter," Stibbard explains. "We run a fun, engaging campaign, and our team shows up with generosity and heart."

Whether it's through payroll deductions, one-time donations, or hands-on involvement in community events, MNP employees consistently demonstrate a shared commitment to social impact.

"We can't be everything to everybody, and we're not," Stibbard adds. "But we're always looking for meaningful ways to give back—ways that reflect who we are and what we value."

This spirit of community engagement is woven into the fabric of MNP's identity. It's not just about where the firm does business—it's about how it shows up for the people and places that matter.



Andrew Stibbard is the Regional Managing Partner of MNP's Winnipeg office.

## Creating Opportunities for the Next Generation

Stibbard isn't shy about his partisanship. He wants his firm, as well as others in Winnipeg and throughout the province, to continue to create opportunities for new university and college students. MNP continues to invest in the future of Manitoba's workforce, offering co-op placements and career opportunities for students from institutions like the University of Manitoba's Asper School of Business.

"We're anchored in Winnipeg. We're a firm that started in Brandon and we are absolutely grounded in Manitoba," he says. "I have three children. If they decide to leave Winnipeg, that's their decision, but I never want to hear them say, 'dad, there aren't any opportunities in Winnipeg.' I want them to have the same opportunities that I had. I have a huge bias," he says. ■



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[www.mnp](http://www.mnp)



# A STORE WITHIN A STORE

If Palliser Furniture was a clothier, its staff would increasingly have tailor tapes at the ready to measure inseams and hips so its customers wouldn't have to buy off the rack.

The Winnipeg-based furniture manufacturer's personalized experience continues to expand as it recently opened its 144th studio, just two years after launching its "store within a store" concept.

Palliser studios range from 3,000 square feet to more than 14,000 square feet of dedicated retail space and feature the Palliser Interactive Designer (I.D). The cutting-edge tool uses 3D modelling technology, live pricing and a multitude of options, including furniture covers (fabric or leather), accessories and leg finishes to help the customer better visualize their ideal configuration before they purchase.

"The momentum we're seeing with our studio program is incredibly exciting," says Steve Ambeau, Palliser's president. "Starting at zero and growing to 144 studios installed across North America in just a few years shows that this model is working. And we're just getting started."

"Bridging our digital and physical experiences is key to building lasting customer relationships. Our technology investments

reflect our belief in meeting customers wherever they are, with the same quality and design expertise they expect from Palliser."

Palliser's digital configuration experience from its industry-leading "Interactive Designer" is now connected to [Palliser.com](https://www.palliser.com) providing all of its customers with a very similar personalization experience.

Palliser is "doubling down" on the studio concept and plans to expand into "untapped" markets. As part of that course of action, it will debut a slightly smaller footprint at the High Point Market - the world's largest home furnishings show — this October in High Point, North Carolina.

"It's part of our larger strategy to make the Palliser experience more accessible than ever before," Ambeau says.

Palliser's studio retailers include EQ3 Polo Park, Wien's Furniture in Niverville and Sawatzky's in Morden and Winkler.

Palliser has more than 2,000 employees in Winnipeg and in two cities in Mexico, Saltillo and Matamoros.

## PALLISER





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New survey shows  
childcare helps  
employee retention,  
reduces absenteeism

# Childcare is good for business

BY CARLY PETERS

**N**O matter what business you're in, everyone depends on someone who depends on childcare. A new survey from Probe Research and the Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) makes this mutual reliance clearer than ever, revealing agreement among Manitoba business leaders that, despite recent strides made in the province, more needs to be done to strengthen this critical sector that impacts more than just the families who use it.

According to the findings, there is a strong consensus among businesses about the importance of childcare to their sector, with more than eight in 10 agreeing a strong childcare system helps businesses. Aside from improved employee retention, reduced absenteeism, and the creation of a dependable workforce, a strong early learning and childcare system drives the local economy and better educational outcomes for future generations, explains Jodie Kehl, executive director of the MCCA.

Then it's no surprise that 78 per cent of Manitoba business owners and managers indicate that a lack of childcare is a very or somewhat serious problem in the province. This is up from 76 per cent in 2016, when MCCA conducted a similar survey.

Business leaders are also becoming more aware of the day-to-day operational impacts of childcare shortages. Fully one-quarter, up from 15 per cent in 2016, agree that absenteeism due to childcare is a serious issue. One in five think employees coming back to work late (or not at all) from parental leave due to lack of childcare is a problem, with the same number (up from about one in 10 in 2016)

agreeing that employees who are distracted or less productive due to childcare issues is a concern.

These growing pressures on the workplace have paralleled a broader shift in how childcare is viewed across Canada. The pandemic played a role in changing the public perception of childcare, which moved from a social service to an economic necessity. In response, in 2021, the Trudeau government committed to investing \$30 billion over five years in Canada's early learning and childcare system. The funding from Ottawa helped Manitoba move towards \$10/day childcare, including spaces for school-aged children, an extension that was added in December 2024 and is unique to the province.

However, as childcare has become more affordable, waitlists have become longer. In some cases, parents are waiting 17 months for their preferred spot. "Families can see it and they want it, but they can't access it fully," says Kehl. Anecdotally, MCCA members report waitlists of 500 to 800 names. "Some kids just likely age out before getting a spot."

In May 2025, the Manitoba government, in partnership with the federal government, announced a substantial increase in wages for early childhood educators and a two per cent increase to base operating grants for licensed childcare facilities as part of a broader strategy to expand the childcare system and enhance the quality of care. In their 2025 budget, the province specifically committed to creating 4,600 childcare spaces over the next two years.

But staffing remains a key concern, with Kehl estimating the province is short 900 to 1,000 early childhood educators. The hope is that higher wages will help attract and retain qualified professionals to fill new positions.

## STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

The study between Probe Research and the Manitoba Child Care Association revealed more than just business attitudes towards the sector. The survey also ranked feelings from the workforce, families, and Manitobans at large. Some of the highlights include:

- 37 per cent of families have turned down a job because of problems finding childcare.
- 52 per cent (up nine per cent since 2016) have delayed returning to work because of problems finding childcare.
- 17 per cent have quit a job because of issues with childcare.
- 63 per cent of families have turned down extra hours at work because of a lack of childcare.
- 70 per cent of parents agree that \$10/day childcare is working.
- 95 per cent of licensed childcare centres are non-profit, making the sector more akin to the public school system.
- 81 per cent of early childhood educators are satisfied with their work, helping to boost employee retention.
- 54 per cent have seen a noticeable increase in their wages (even before the wage grid announcement in May).

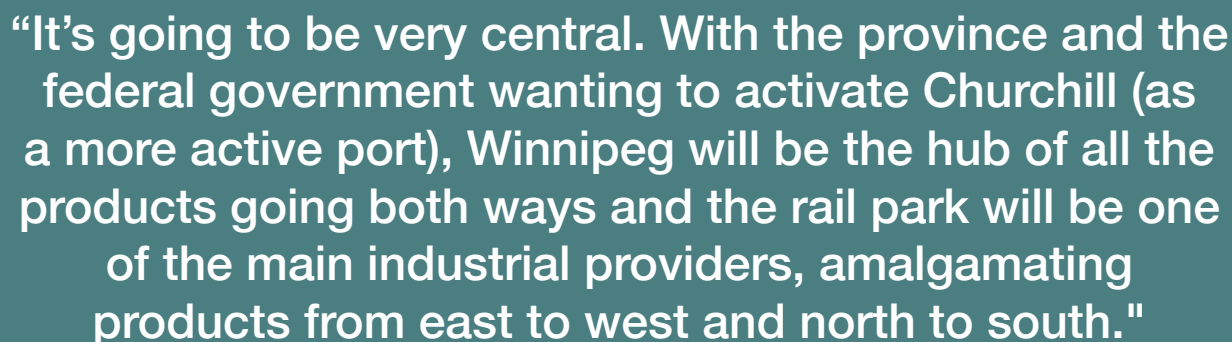
Still, despite acknowledgment of the system's importance, business leaders appear more hesitant to use financial incentives to fund or create childcare spaces. Only 50 per cent agree they would pay more taxes to fund a universal childcare system, while one in 10 (down from one quarter in 2016) express definite interest in taking advantage of government incentives to create child care spaces for employees.

"I think businesses understand it's not as simple as just opening a place for employees to bring their children. In Manitoba, we are highly regulated with staff and curriculum requirements. It's uncharted territory. So, we're not surprised by this response," she states, adding businesses can still help create a stronger early learning and childcare system by engaging in policy discussions and supporting workplace flexibility that eases the burden on working parents.

The MCCA is also calling on the business community to support efforts to raise quality across the sector. "We are so privileged to be in a place where there is room to improve staff skills and knowledge with subsidized training opportunities. We want early childhood educators to be able to pick a quality centre that aligns with their values and interests, rather than just looking at pay. Parents have the right to access systems with the quality that gives them peace of mind when they go to work," she says. "We understand the system wouldn't be built in the five years of post-pandemic funding. It's not a sign of failure. We're taking the time to build a better system that has roots and will be entrenched for the betterment of the community for years to come." ■







30 MANITOBA INC. Summer 2025

**T**WO kilometres of railway track won't take you very far unless it's at the CentrePort Canada Rail Park, in which case it can springboard you to the world.

Chris Reiter, senior development manager of Victoria-based Focus Equities, which owns the industrial rail park located adjacent to the Richardson International Airport, says work will begin on the Phase One 2.2-km stretch of track this summer. When the \$20-million Phase One rail line installation project is done, with financial support from the National Trade Corridors Fund, rail cars will be able to move on transfer tracks and connect to mainline rail and other modes of transportation with international destinations.

"It makes the rail park a rail park. Otherwise, it would just be an industrial park," he says.

Reiter hopes as the rail park evolves and starts to reach its potential, that Manitobans will realize how crucial it's going to be for the province's economic future.

"It's going to be very central," he says. "With the province and the federal government wanting to activate Churchill (as a more active port), Winnipeg will be the hub of all the products going both ways and the rail park will be one

of the main industrial providers, amalgamating products from east to west and north to south," he says.

The first phase of the rail park is about 70 per cent sold. The most recent land purchaser is Bulldog Truck Centre, which is the Mack Truck dealer for Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, who recently purchased a 10-acre land parcel within the 200-acre Phase One development.

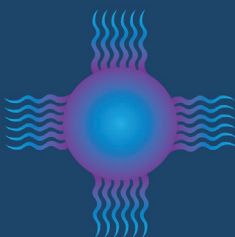
Mack Trucks earned its trademark nickname, "The Bulldog," during the First World War when the British government purchased the Mack AC model to supply its front lines with troops, food and equipment. In honour of that history, the Bulldog Truck Centre will be built adjacent to the newly-constructed Bulldog Way.

The rail park's second phase will be about 100 acres, with one 40-acre land purchaser already confirmed. When everything is said and done, likely in about 10 years, the 665-acre site will have about \$1 billion worth of infrastructure, including four million square feet of buildings, plus water, roads and sewage. ■

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# OPTIMIZE YOUR COMPRESSED AIR SYSTEM TO SEAL IN SAVINGS

**C**OMPRESSED air systems are very common in industrial settings. By storing pressurized air, these systems can be used on demand and in a controlled way to power a wide variety of machines, devices, and pneumatic tools. Despite their versatility and many other advantages, compressed air systems require a significant amount of energy to operate. In fact, 10 per cent of most industrial energy costs are related to the energy inputs required for these systems. That's why it's crucial to ensure yours is working at peak efficiency.

Optimizing your system is a worthwhile investment. Doing so can reduce energy consumption by an average of 30%. In some instances, reductions upward of 85% can be achieved!

In this article, we'll share the benefits of improving your compressed air system, the ways in which Efficiency Manitoba can help you improve your system, and how one Manitoba facility is saving big with Efficiency Manitoba's programs and incentives.

## EFFICIENCY MANITOBA'S PROGRAMS FOR COMPRESSED AIR

Efficiency Manitoba has the expertise and incentives you need to make the process of improving your compressed air system simpler and more affordable. They take a collaborative approach with you, your contractor, and other vendors to identify the best solutions and energy efficiency approaches for your unique operations. Plus, their technical experts assist from the beginning of your project all the way to completion, from estimating potential energy savings and calculating incentives to completing application forms.

Efficiency Manitoba has two offers that can help you with your compressed air system:

### Benchmark studies

As a free service, Efficiency Manitoba will perform a benchmark study of your compressed air system to identify energy-saving opportunities. They work with pre-qualified compressed air specialists who will visit your facility and perform a baseline logging of your system. Efficiency Manitoba's technical experts will analyze the collected data and provide you with a report that has valuable information about your system; this will help you identify the appropriate



size of your replacement units as well as other areas for improvement. Then, they'll work with you to identify energy efficiency upgrades to your compressed air system that can qualify for incentives through their Custom Energy Solutions Program.

### Custom Energy Solutions Program

Once you're ready to upgrade your compressed air system, Efficiency Manitoba's Custom Energy Solutions Program will provide you with incentives to make the upgrade more affordable and lower your monthly energy bills for years into the future. They'll consider all technologies that save electricity or natural gas, including compressed air system upgrades. The incentives are based on energy performance, so the more energy your upgrade saves, the higher the incentive you'll receive!

### LEAKY BUSINESS?

**Here's a surprising statistic:** leaks can represent 30% of compressed air loads when not managed properly. They can also be easy to miss in noisy industrial environments, and pinpointing the source of the leak is often a challenging task. At the same time, neglecting a leaky system can cause issues for you and your facility, such as reduced system capacity and production, unnecessary energy consumption, lower system pressure, and a reduced lifespan of your equipment.



**The good news is that there are professionals who can help:** both with detecting leaks and repairing them to ensure your system is operating as efficiently as possible. A comprehensive assessment of your compressed air system will let you know if it has any leaks and provide you with quantitative data regarding the potential energy savings associated with repairing them.

**Once any leaks have been pinpointed, you'll want to remediate the issues and improve your compressed air system. There are plenty of measurable benefits to doing this:**

- You'll enjoy lower energy costs.
- Your system will be more reliable, leading to fewer production outages and less downtime. This will make your operations even more productive, which is good for your bottom line.
- You'll see improved air pressure and reduced moisture in your air lines, allowing your system to run more efficiently.
- Identifying and eliminating these leaks will reduce your energy consumption and costs — and Efficiency Manitoba can help.

## PROJECT FEATURE: MAPLE LEAF FOODS

Maple Leaf Foods, a food products manufacturer located in Brandon, had an aging compressor that was consuming significant amounts of energy and impacting their operations. Rather than shouldering the resourcing and financial burden on their own to address the issue, they reached out to Efficiency Manitoba for help.

"Efficiency Manitoba responded to our request in a timely manner and gave us lots of great information on how to move forward," says Tyler Henry, the Maintenance General Supervisor at Maple Leaf Foods. "They immediately made us feel confident that we were in good hands."

### The project

First, Maple Leaf Foods conducted a benchmark study of their compressed air system, which identified numerous energy-saving improvements. Based on the results of the study, they elected to upgrade their aging compressor to improve their energy efficiency.

Upon reviewing the original design of the replacement system, Efficiency Manitoba's technical experts identified a problem known as "control gap." The system couldn't match supply to demand, causing energy inefficiencies and increased wear on the compressors. Efficiency Manitoba's modelling helped illustrate and quantify the financial impact of this problem.

Maple Leaf Foods implemented the recommended solution. The upgrade involved purchasing a new 300-horsepower variable speed compressor, three new 250-horsepower

fixed speed compressors, a new heated blower desiccant dryer, and a central system controller.

During the verification process, Efficiency Manitoba's analysis identified control issues with the system. The supplier worked with Maple Leaf Foods to find the source of the control issues and corrected the problem. This correction saved nearly 200,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) alone, which aligned the system performance with the original estimates.

### The savings

With a more efficient compressed air system now in place, Maple Leaf Foods is enjoying several benefits. First, they received more than \$256,000 in incentives through the Custom Energy Solutions Program. "The incentive amount Efficiency Manitoba calculated for us made it easy to decide to move forward with the upgrade," Tyler told us.

The savings don't end with incentives, though. Maple Leaf Foods is estimated to reduce their electricity consumption by over 1.7 million kWh every year, resulting in saving nearly \$99,000 annually on their energy bills. This doesn't even include additional benefits like energy bill tax savings, lower maintenance costs, and improved reliability. A simple payback calculation shows that the project will essentially pay for itself in 2.6 years.

"Working with Efficiency Manitoba made so much sense, from both a financial perspective and a long-term operations perspective," Tyler says. "We're seeing the real impact of this decision on our energy bills and our everyday work. It's made a world of difference, for the better, in how we operate our business."

## START SAVING ENERGY TODAY

Efficiency Manitoba is eager to work with you to explore energy efficiency solutions for your industrial facility. Whether you're looking at starting with a benchmark study to identify opportunities to save, or are ready to start your energy efficiency upgrade, they can help with financial incentives and technical expertise. Get started by emailing [customsolutions@efficiencyMB.ca](mailto:customsolutions@efficiencyMB.ca), indicating that you're interested in improving your compressed air system. Efficiency Manitoba will contact you to see if you qualify and start coordinating your project.

To learn more about their offers for energy-efficient industrial technologies and systems, visit [efficiencyMB.ca/industrial](http://efficiencyMB.ca/industrial). ■





# MANITOBA MÉTIS FEDERATION

**Making economic waves  
in Winnipeg and beyond**

Manitoba Métis Federation president David Chartrand says he wants his government to be an economic engine for change.

BY JIM TIMLICK

**F**OR much of its 58-year history, the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) has flown under the radar when it comes to the economic impact it's had in this province.

That's changing.

The MMF's economic profile has risen considerably over the past several years. It began with the acquisition of the former Bank of Montreal building at 355 Main St. in Winnipeg five years ago, a space that will soon be home to the Red River Métis National Heritage Centre. Since then, the federation has acquired office towers formerly owned by Bell MTS at 333 Main St. and 191 Pioneer Ave. It has also expanded its footprint in downtown Winnipeg with the recent purchase of the former Wawanesa Insurance building at 200 Main St. and an adjacent property at 165 Fort St.

The official government of the Red River Métis has also taken on the role of property developer. It has developed several seniors' housing complexes in Winnipeg and elsewhere in Manitoba. The most recent is a six-storey, 77,900-square-foot, 55-plus complex on Eveline Street

in Selkirk that is home to 49 Métis seniors and elders. Construction of two additional seniors' apartment blocks in Winnipeg is slated to begin over the next couple of years.

### **An economic injection**

So, how much has this injected into the Manitoba economy? A recent report conducted on behalf of the MMF estimates the federation's core operations and programs alone generated \$479.1 million in economic impact from 2018-2022, a number that has surely climbed since.

MMF president David Chartrand says all these recent projects are part of his government's strategy to be an economic engine for change in Winnipeg's core and elsewhere in the province.

"We've been fortunate enough to be successful with some of our ventures so we said, 'OK, let's start investing in the downtown,'" he explains.

"I'm a strategic thinker and I made sure that we were investing and stashing away our resources and building our economic strength and putting ourselves in a position where we can make decisions of this nature. We're not looking for a handout. We're coming in with our pockets full, ready to invest."





The MMF has developed a six-storey, 77,900-square-foot, 55-plus complex on Eveline Street in Selkirk that is home to 49 Métis seniors and elders.

The centrepiece of those efforts will be the Métis National Heritage Centre on the corner of Portage and Main. It is expected to attract more than 25,000 visitors annually when it opens to the public in 2027. More than \$33 million is being spent on renovating the structure that was built in 1913.

Chartrand is excited about the centre's potential for raising the profile of Métis people and the lands they call home.

"This is going to tell the story of who we are, but it's also going to tell the story of our Prairies," he says. "It's truly going to be a place that will be seen and sought after not only by our people in our province and in Canada, but by people around the world."

### **Repopulating downtown Winnipeg**

Chartrand acknowledges that acquiring the two former Bell MTS towers comes with some risk. Vacancy rates in Winnipeg's downtown remain fairly high and Bell MTS has already indicated it plans to move most of its staff out of the buildings.

However, he maintains the MMF has an important role to play in the ongoing efforts to revitalize the city's core and needs to do more than just pay lip-service to the challenges the downtown is facing.

"I could be out there saying this should be done or that should be done. That's the simple thing to do," he says.

"But if you're not investing or not planning to really jump in there and take that risk, you're not doing anything. It's easy to be a critic. But to be a solution-oriented pathway, that's a whole different challenge. You need to put your money where your mouth is and actually show that you are serious."

The MMF's investment in downtown Winnipeg isn't slowing down.

It is on the verge of acquiring two more properties on the fringes of the city's core that should be announced soon. It's also moved 600 of its employees downtown to provide a boost to restaurants and other area businesses and is looking to add to its stable of childcare centres with a new downtown location. In addition, the MMF's cabinet recently approved a proposal to build a number of electric vehicle charging stations at several of the downtown properties it owns.

Chartrand says he hopes those efforts will help convince city hall and the provincial government to follow the MMF's lead and have all of their employees return to their downtown offices full-time and help recreate the hustle and bustle of pre-COVID times.



The MMF's First Time Home Purchase Program provides qualifying Métis individuals with a five per cent down payment toward the purchase of a home.

### Homes for all

It's no secret that Manitoba, like most parts of the country, is experiencing a housing shortage. That's what led the MMF to introduce its First Time Home Purchase Program (FTHP), which is now in its fifth year. The program, delivered through the Louis Riel Credit Corporation, provides qualifying Métis individuals with a five per cent down payment towards the purchase price of a home up to a maximum of \$18,000 as well as up to \$2,500 toward legal and land transfer fees.

To date, nearly 2,200 families have purchased a home through the program. It's estimated the FTHP has resulted in new mortgages valued at more than \$390 million and tens of millions of dollars in home improvements.

"Banks are now knocking on our door and saying, 'can we come in and be the lender of choice?' That didn't happen years ago," Chartrand adds.

The MMF decided to make seniors' housing a priority after conducting an analysis a few years ago that showed many seniors in the Métis community were struggling to find affordable housing.

The apartment complex in Selkirk is the latest in a series of seniors' housing projects the MMF has spearheaded. It joined several other completed projects in communities such as St. Malo, St. George, St. Eustache and Brandon. Construction of two other complexes is slated to begin soon. The first will see the former Roxy Lanes on Henderson Highway in Winnipeg demolished to make way for a 50 to 60-unit affordable housing facility for seniors. The other will see the Métis Child, Family and Community Services building at 2000 Portage Ave. razed and replaced with a new, multi-unit apartment complex.

"We saw after we did our analysis is that our seniors ... have worked all their lives, paid their taxes and are now struggling to live. We said we can't have them living in conditions where slum landlords take advantage of them or where they find themselves homeless," Chartrand says.

"This is something that we owe to our people. They give us their full life during their working career. Now we want to make sure they leave the working world or retire from it in a state of pride." ■

## STEPPING UP TO FIGHT WILDFIRES

The Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) played a key role in assisting Manitobans who were displaced earlier this spring and summer during the worst wildfire season in at least 30 years.

The MMF opened a reception centre for wildfire evacuees at 406 McGregor St. in Winnipeg. The centre was closed when the situation in many northern communities improved but reopened July 10 when it once again worsened.

The federation also set up a donation centre where it accepted a variety of items including adult and children's clothing, strollers and diapers.

It also provided temporary housing for people who had been evacuated from their home communities at two locations in Winnipeg. One was an apartment block operated by the Métis Child, Family and Community Services on Edison Ave. The other was a building on Notre Dame Ave. that normally provides temporary housing and supports to individuals who have left their home community to receive medical care in Winnipeg.

"We just said we've got to do our part," Chartrand says of the MMF's relief efforts.

"Manitoba has a big heart and the response we got from our citizens was just fantastic. I've got to give our staff all the kudos in the world. Our people have been working around the clock. It's been remarkable the way they've turned things around."



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# Indigenous-Owned Tourism



Bistro on Notre Dame owner Dean Herkert (left) sources many of his ingredients from Indigenous suppliers. Photos by Shel Zolkewich



BY SHELLEY A. COOK

**A**CROSS Manitoba, Indigenous-owned tourism businesses are offering travelers more than just beautiful scenery or good food. They're creating experiences grounded in story, community and connection to the land, redefining what tourism looks like in the province.

In Winnipeg's West End, Bistro on Notre Dame has built a reputation for its inventive, locally sourced menu—but it's the deeper values behind the business that truly set it apart. Métis chef and owner Dean Herkert designed the space and the menu with sustainability, culture and community in mind.

"When I opened the restaurant, I wanted to really keep an eye on sustainability and being part of the community," Herkert says.

That intention can be seen in the details. The furniture is made from reclaimed wood that calls to mind historic Métis road allowance homes, while the dishes are inspired by what Herkert calls country foods—ingredients Indigenous to the land, used for generations by First Nations and Métis people. The result is a menu that blends tradition with global influence, offering a fresh but familiar experience.

Herkert sources many of his ingredients from Indigenous suppliers.

"My bison is from a Métis couple who are ranchers. I use Fireweed Food Co-op, which relies on Indigenous foragers. That part of it is just starting to build now," he explained.

For Herkert, sourcing locally and from Indigenous businesses isn't just a culinary choice—it's part of a broader commitment to economic reconciliation.

"Developing those relationships is just as important as the food," he says.

Standout dishes at Bistro include shareable plates like Lake and Steak, with steak, duck breast, onion rings, cranberry chutney, honey butter fries and smoked mushrooms. Another favourite is the Tomahawk, a four-course bison dinner curated by the chef.

Herkert sees Indigenous cuisine as an important piece of Manitoba's tourism puzzle.

"If you want people to experience something unique, you have to give them something rooted in where they are," he says.

**"When I opened the restaurant, I wanted to really keep an eye on sustainability and being part of the community."**

— Métis chef Dean Herkert, owner of Bistro on Notre Dame

# ism Experiences in Manitoba

FEATURE

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IN Riding Mountain National Park, Turtle Village offers something very different—a quiet, off-grid retreat designed to help guests reconnect with nature and culture.

Ashley Smith, who is from Gambler First Nation, didn't plan to work in tourism. She started her career as a housing manager, where she saw first-hand the need for safe, movable housing solutions for her community.

"That's what led to the prototype for our turtle shells," Smith says. "They're low-maintenance, movable and safe. We wanted to build something that could be used during emergencies like floods or fires."

Today, those same structures form the heart of Turtle Village — eight solar-powered, minimalist glamping cabins tucked into the woods, not far from shops and washrooms for those looking for a balance of off-grid and comfort.

Smith and her family live in one of the cabins year-round.

"Five of us in 400 square feet and we're still married," she laughed. "The kids still call me mom."

The site offers year-round experiences. In summer and fall, guests can hike, bike, stargaze or explore the nearby town of Wasagaming. In winter, the area transforms into a peaceful fishing village, where guests can ice fish in cozy wood-stove-heated tents with pre-drilled holes and solar lighting.

Guests can also take part in cultural and culinary experiences like bannock-making kits, fire-cooked charcuterie and guided workshops that explore Indigenous food, medicine and storytelling.

Smith recently expanded into Winnipeg with Turtle Tours at The Forks. These walking tours share more than 6,000 years of Indigenous history and include a "Taste of Survival" experience focused on women's roles in pre-contact trade and food systems.

"People don't always know where to find authentic Indigenous experiences," she says. "We're trying to build something that helps people learn and feel connected—whether they're at Riding Mountain or The Forks."

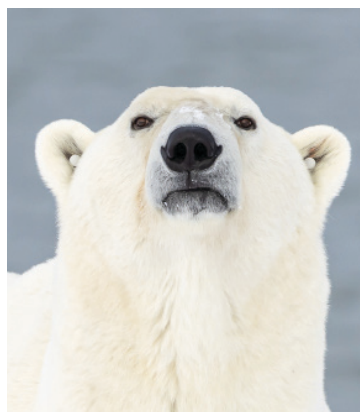


Turtle Village in Riding Mountain National Park offers a quiet, off-grid retreat. Photos by Shel Zolkewich

**"People don't always know where to find authentic Indigenous experiences. We're trying to build something that helps people learn and feel connected—whether they're at Riding Mountain or The Forks."**

— Turtle Village owner Ashley Smith





**"I want to build a bridge between visitors and Indigenous culture."**

— Leroy Whitmore,  
founder of Sub-Arctic  
Tours in Churchill



IN the far north, Sub-Arctic Tours is helping visitors see Churchill through Indigenous eyes.

Founder Leroy Whitmore, who is Inuit, launched the company in 2017 with little more than a logo designed by his daughter and a dream to share the beauty of his homeland.

Today, Sub-Arctic Tours runs roughly 400 tours each year, guiding visitors to see polar bears, beluga whales, northern lights and migratory birds. Guests travel by truck, van, or snowmobile to explore sites like Cape Merry, the polar bear holding facility, the famous Miss Piggy airplane wreck and the shores where the Churchill River meets Hudson Bay.

Whitmore brings every tour to life with storytelling. He shares traditional knowledge from Inuit, Cree, Dene and Métis perspectives, explaining the meaning behind Inukshuks, ancient tent rings and local landmarks.

"I want to build a bridge between visitors and Indigenous culture," he says.

## Plan Your Visit:

Quick Facts About These Indigenous Tourism Destinations

### Bistro on Notre Dame

**Location:** 1324 Notre Dame Ave.,  
Winnipeg (Treaty 1 Territory)

**Known for:** Métis fusion cuisine, locally sourced ingredients

**Hours:** Open Tuesday to Saturday for dinner  
[bistronotredame.ca](http://bistronotredame.ca)

### Turtle Village

**Location:** Riding Mountain National Park  
(Treaty 2 Territory)

**Accommodations:** Eight solar-powered glamping cabins

**Seasonal features:** Ice fishing tents with wood stoves and LED lighting (winter); hiking, biking, and beach access (summer)

**Add-ons:** Bannock kits, fire-cooked charcuterie boards (\$45), cultural and culinary workshops  
[turtlevillage.ca](http://turtlevillage.ca)

### Turtle Tours at The Forks

**Location:** The Forks, Winnipeg (Treaty 1 Territory)

**Tours:** Guided walks focused on Indigenous history and culture; "Taste of Survival" experience  
[turtlevillage.ca/tours](http://turtlevillage.ca/tours)

### Sub-Arctic Tours

**Location:** Churchill, Manitoba (Treaty 5 Territory)

**Experiences:** Polar bear viewing, northern lights, beluga whales, cultural storytelling  
[subarctictours.ca](http://subarctictours.ca)

Despite the challenges of running a business in the north—including rail line outages, blizzards and the pandemic—Whitmore has kept going. He still works at the local propane company to supplement his income, but his passion is guiding visitors and sharing his home.

He dreams of expanding with a shoreline lodge that could host more visitors and create more opportunities for cultural exchange.

Whether it's fine dining in the city, an off-grid retreat in the forest or northern adventure on the sub-Arctic, these three Indigenous-led businesses offer more than a place to visit. They invite people to connect—to the land, to history and to community. They are reshaping Manitoba tourism with heart, intention and deep respect for the stories that came before and the futures they're helping to build. ■



# A SYMBOL OF HOPE AND PROSPERITY

ICI and Treaty One Development Corp. are partnering on a number of high-profile projects in Winnipeg. From left: Ken Jones, vice-president of ICI, Brennan Pearson, executive vice-president of ICI, Shane Ki, chief financial officer of TODC, Kathleen Bluesky, CEO of TODC, and John Pearson, president of ICI.

## New economic development zone represents a big step towards economic reconciliation

**B**RENNAN Pearson believes Winnipeg has never before seen so many business partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous companies.

The executive vice-president of ICI Properties, a Winnipeg-based commercial real estate brokerage and development company, isn't just talking the talk. ICI is one of a growing number of non-Indigenous firms, such as True North Real Estate, collaborating with Indigenous groups on major projects that are changing the city for the better.

He's particularly excited about the Wiitahnookiinitaw Tahshkayzing Entrepreneurship Centre (WTEC), Canada's first fully Indigenous-led business incubator, which opened earlier this summer. (The name means "Working Together to Succeed" in Anishinaabemowin.)

ICI found more than 5,000 square feet in the former head office of Wawanesa Insurance at 191 Broadway for the 15 government, academic and industry partners that will provide invaluable tools for Indigenous entrepreneurs—capital, legal and financial guidance, mentorship, marketing support and global business connections.





A rendering of the lobby in the newly constructed Wiitahnookiinitaw Tahshkayzing Entrepreneurship Centre.  
Photo courtesy Number Ten Architectural Group



**“The WTEC is looking to create an eco-system that can be replicated in other provinces. Anybody can go there and access consulting services and have experienced entrepreneurs and specialists answer important questions about signing contracts or accounting. We’ll do anything to ensure it’s a success.”**

— Brennan Pearson, executive vice-president of ICI Properties.  
Photo courtesy ICI

ICI is also one of those industry partners and will be providing strategic real estate and development consulting, business mentorship and training support to budding entrepreneurs. Other partners include Red Leaf Capital/Xcel Capital, Wawanesa, Deloitte, Fillmore Riley LLP and the Asper School of Business.

Indigenous entrepreneurs at WTEC will be surrounded by a team of dedicated advisors, mentors, and experts who walk alongside them through each stage of their business journey.

“It’s very exciting,” Pearson says. “The WTEC is looking to create an eco-system that can be replicated in other provinces. Anybody can go there and access consulting services and have experienced entrepreneurs and specialists answer important questions about signing contracts or accounting. We’ll do anything to ensure it’s a success.”

ICI is also collaborating with Treaty One Development Corp. (T1DC), a company owned by the seven

First Nations signatories to Treaty 1 in 1871, on a \$2.5-billion urban economic development zone called Naawi-Oodena. A gas bar and convenience store opened earlier this summer on Taylor Avenue but it’s just one small piece of what will ultimately be more than 100 acres of development on the site of the former Kapyong barracks on and around Kenaston Boulevard.

The master blueprints include more than 4,000 units of single-family and multi-family homes, a hotel, a 130,000-square-foot Class A office building and retail stores.

A 15,600-square-foot multi-tenant retail building, including professional, medical, insurance and a pharmacy, is slated to start coming out of the ground as early as late summer. The full build-out of the development will occur over the next 10 years to 12 years.

Kathleen Bluesky, CEO of T1DC, says the ability to open such a game-changing project under its own jurisdiction represents a shift in the power dynamic and decision-making for First Nations people.

"We have always been an economically-driven people. Historically, we've always been at the forefront of the evolution of trade. Due to colonial imposition, a lot of things changed. We're trying to bring it back and get our people back into entrepreneurship, managing businesses and building businesses like this. That's our focus," she says.

The initial buzz about Naawi-Oodena has generated a lot of interest from other entrepreneurs wanting to work with Treaty One on other projects.

"We've been exploring acquisitions with other companies and we're looking at other properties. The more people participate, the more they understand why it's so important for us to be involved," she says.

E.J. Fontaine, chief of Sagkeeng First Nation and president of T1DC, says Naawi-Oodena is going to present countless opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

"This parcel of land is about prosperity. We're working with some of the (non-Indigenous) wheelers and dealers in the city. We're demonstrating that we're viable business partners and we can develop just as well as anybody. Naawi-Oodena is a symbol of hope and a symbol of promise for our people. We're looking forward to a much brighter future with this property, not only for First Nations but for the city," he says.

Indigenous businesses across Canada generate more than \$100 billion in revenue each year and contribute more than \$30 billion to the country's GDP. Fontaine says Naawi-Oodena will have a positive contribution to the Manitoba economy through tax revenue plus

having more Indigenous people on payrolls. He predicts there will be thousands of jobs associated with the project over the next two decades with a strong focus on hiring as many Indigenous people as possible.

"There has to be because our people are wanting work. This is an opportunity for them to get long-term, meaningful work," Fontaine says.

He's also optimistic that a new era can begin with Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in the heart of Tuxedo, Winnipeg's most affluent neighbourhood.

"We're looking to change attitudes and change the behaviours of people. We're looking at developing first-class assets here. It's going to be a beautiful property and blend in nicely with the neighbourhood," he says.

ICI has also worked with Southern Chiefs Organization, helping it find temporary office space while it reimagines and redevelops the old Hudson Bay Building on Memorial Boulevard. Working with Indigenous businesses isn't just about doing what's right, Pearson says. With every shovel that goes into the ground on joint projects, economic reconciliation becomes less of a theory and much more of a reality.

"It's a real opportunity to make things better for everybody. These partnerships open doors to new markets, offer fresh ways of thinking and help us do business in a more respectful, community-focused way. It's also a meaningful step towards economic reconciliation, showing that we value relationships built on respect, trust and shared success," he says.



**"We have always been an economically-driven people. Historically, we've always been at the forefront of the evolution of trade. Due to colonial imposition, a lot of things changed. We're trying to bring it back and get our people back into entrepreneurship, managing businesses and building businesses like this. That's our focus."**

— Kathleen Bluesky,  
CEO of T1DC

"Manitoba is doing more than just talking about reconciliation. It's starting to show up in the work that's happening, from changes in how contracts are awarded to major projects and local community-led initiatives. There's a lot of movement. If we keep breaking down barriers and building strong partnerships, there's a real opportunity to build lasting change that works for everyone." ■



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# The rise and fall of Con

BY JEFF SWYSTUN

**I**N the golden age of mid-century retail, Consumers Distributing was a household name and celebrated Canadian business. Launched in 1957, it expanded to 560 locations across North America. It was a force, buying up other chains and growing organically. By 1996, this darling was gone.

This is a familiar tale in Canadian commerce. Retailers like A&A Records, Bretton's, Eaton's, Agnew-Surpass and Simpsons once ruled their sectors—trusted names, embedded in the culture. Like many, Consumers Distributing was ultimately doomed by the same force that made it successful in the first place: its business model.

## A model from the past, positioned for the future

In the early 1900s, grocery stores didn't have aisles or carts—you handed over a list and staff fetched your items. Consumers essentially revived that system. No flashy showrooms or crowded shelves. Just a catalogue, a clipboard and a counter. It was cost-effective with savings passed on to consumers.

Customers browsed the latest offerings in the seasonal catalogue—a printed version of Amazon—and filled out an order slip. Behind the scenes, warehouse staff retrieved the items. Efficient, affordable and oddly futuristic. In a 2017 *Toronto Star* article, the model was dubbed “Internet shopping before the Internet.” That was a romantic notion but oversimplified and wrong.

## The magic faded

Canadians loved it. Catalogue culture ran deep, thanks to the iconic Eaton's catalogue, operating from 1884 to 1976. It was more than a shopping tool; it served as a window to the outside world and an escape for many Canadians, particularly in rural areas. People famously used the thick publications for home insulation, they were fashioned as hockey pads and they've been credited with teaching kids to read.

But the Consumers' promise often fell short. Customers waited in line only to be told the item from the catalogue was out of stock. Instant gratification—something retailers now build entire strategies around—was missing.



Consumers Distributing

# Consumers Distributing

Even kids, usually easier to please, were left disappointed at Toy City, Consumers' toy store chain that made the baffling decision to remove the ability to touch and try the very products it sold. Toy stores without toys in your hands? That's not magic—that's frustration.

It didn't help that the catalogue was printed every six months and the company had to honour prices even when costs inevitably rose. They eventually put out more frequent, shorter editions, but the damage was done.

## Too little, too late

Customer complaints were in danger of outpacing purchases. To fix its flaws, Consumers launched several bold—but costly—initiatives:

- “Super stores” where in-stock items were visible
- Free home delivery and stock transfers between locations
- A real-time inventory system (ahead of its time) to suggest alternatives

All this did was paper over endemic problems. Perhaps the biggest problem stemmed from headquarters that failed to instill a service culture. It was a case of ‘they need us, more than we need them.’ Ultimately, Consumers Distributing failed at the most important job in retail: keeping the customer happy.

Operating costs ballooned. Consumer expectations changed. Retail competition—especially the arrival of Walmart—was fierce. Add in a recession, price deflation in electronics and mounting logistical challenges, and the hole was too deep.

Today, former Consumers locations are home to dental clinics, pizza joints and real estate offices. Thousands of people drive by them every day without a thought or nod to the brand.

In this era when nostalgia is both fond reminiscence and lifeline to a time when things made sense, Consumers is largely forgotten and not regaled to the same extent as other defunct retailers. Even its last decade, it was a dinosaur, made extinct by ever-more savvy customers who avoided its Soviet-like retail experience. ■





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# RIPE FOR SUCCESS

Vermillion Growers is a 17,000-square-foot state-of-the-art greenhouse facility.

BY MICHELLE BAILEY

**T**HE Vermillion River that flows through Dauphin is known for its distinctive red-orange hue. And it was the inspiration for Vermillion Growers, a greenhouse facility in Manitoba's Parkland region that spans more than 10 acres.

"The name came from the Vermillion River that runs through the edge of the property," says managing director Maria Deschauer. "Vermillion is also a deep red colour, which walks hand-in-hand with our focus on tomato production."

Vermillion Growers is currently in its second crop season. The first tomato crop was planted in September of 2023 inside the 17,000-square-foot facility.

"Coming into our third year of production we are aiming to grow close to 10 million pounds of tomatoes but this will only happen if we are very efficient and we don't have any hiccups with the crop," Deschauer explained.

Controlled growing agriculture allows for the perfect climate and environment for veggies to prosper, she says





Tomatoes are allowed to ripen on the vine at Vermillion Growers.

"It also provides the opportunity to grow and harvest fresh tomatoes all winter long — when central Canada needs the fresh produce the most. Controlled environment agriculture is more efficient while using fewer inputs such as water and nutrients."

With a management team of seven (six team members hailing from Manitoba), Vermillion Growers employs approximately 40 people.

Tomatoes on the Vine (or TOVs) and Romas are the varieties of choice at this greenhouse.

"What makes our tomatoes stand out is that they are allowed to ripen on the vine. This produces a much tastier tomato and one filled with nutrients," she says.

Vermillion's plan is to introduce other vegetables such as peppers and cucumbers and grow the facility to 30 acres over the next few years.

Deschauer says Dauphin was strategically chosen for logistical purposes.

"It's within five hours of several major grocery store distribution centres located in Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg. This means our tomatoes can get to market quickly. Additionally, Dauphin had the required infrastructure (electrical, gas, water) to



Vermillion Growers employs approximately 40 people

support this venture. For our employees, the quality of life in Dauphin is excellent and the cost of living is less than larger urban centres."

The cost of phase one was just under \$42 million.

Deschauer says Manitoba's Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit Program offered in partnership with the Province of Manitoba was instrumental in getting this project built and operational.



"Coming into our third year of production we are aiming to grow close to 10 million pounds of tomatoes but this will only happen if we are very efficient and we don't have any hiccups with the crop."

— Vermillion Growers managing director Maria Deschauer



"Our fellow Manitobans stepped up and invested over \$6.5 million into Vermillion Growers via this tax credit program, and this opportunity is still available for accredited investors."

In Canada, the average person consumes about 14 kilograms of tomatoes annually. This includes juices, sauces and salsas.

Deschauer says the team at Vermillion Growers takes great pride in the product and that includes how it should be stored once in the hands of consumers.

"Tomatoes should be stored on your counter at room temperature until ready to eat and that is where the fun starts with endless culinary opportunities. Bite into a tomato like an apple for a juicy, messy culinary experience; slice the tomato and drizzle with oil and balsamic vinegar, create sauces and of course enjoy baked or grilled," she says.

As for the debate "is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable?"

"A tomato is a fruit by science and a vegetable by cuisine," says Deschauer. "In my opinion it's a fruit, but it works undercover in the vegetable aisle." ■



## Investing in growth

Building the \$42-million greenhouse took an attractive investment strategy. Deschauer explained that investors received a credit equal to 45 per cent of their investment thanks to a Manitoba tax credit.

"For example, if \$100,000 was invested, that individual would receive a tax credit equivalent to \$45,000 and this tax credit could be applied to three previous income tax years and carried forward for 10 years. Additionally, the investor receives preferred shares in the company as security for their investment. These preferred shares receive an eight per cent dividend. It is a win-win for everyone involved," she says.



The \$42-million greenhouse in Manitoba's Parkland region spans more than 10 acres.

# Diversity and Dollars

## Doubling down on diversity for the bottom line

BY ELEANOR COOPSAMMY

**A**S the Trump administration continues to double down on stamping out initiatives around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) across the U.S. government and businesses they work with, experts and business leaders this side of the border say, "not so fast." Diversity is good for the bottom line and they have research to back it up, while others say what's happening in the U.S. may not translate here for another reason.

"Our DEI policies are not based on quotas. They are based on the general principles that a society should treat all of its citizens fairly and equally—and not allow the systemic barriers that currently exist, whether they be based on race, gender or ethnic origin, etc., to continue to work against people," Soma Ray-Ellis told Canadian Lawyer magazine in April. Ray-Ellis, who is a partner and chair of the employment and labour law group at Gardiner Roberts in Toronto, also said the ultimate goal for Canadian workplaces was to ensure they had the best people in their companies.

Here in Manitoba, some business leaders agree and say the reason they invest in diversity is because it means increased innovation and better profits.

"Companies with more gender-diverse teams see 25 per cent higher profitability. The reality is DEI should not be viewed as a cost-centre, but rather it's an innovation driver. Diverse teams

solve problems faster and outperform homogenous teams," says Raj Patel, co-founder of Seva Capital Canada.

With more than 20 years' experience in commercial corporate banking, Patel is referencing a 2020 McKinsey & Company report, which also found that ethnically-diverse companies also saw a 35 per cent increase in profitability over companies that were not as diverse. A follow up report by the company in 2023 saw those numbers increase to 39 per cent higher profitability for companies with gender and ethnically diverse teams.

Diversity is broad in its meaning. It goes beyond ethnicity, gender identification or religious backgrounds. Patel says it's also about diversity of thought, socio-economic factors, abilities and life experiences.

"Ultimately, it helps an organization avoid groupthink. It fosters resilience. Diverse leadership is more adaptable and able to more quickly identify emerging risks or opportunities."

Marty Maykut, president, Anvil Management with Price Industries, says overcoming bias can also lead to achieving a larger goal that could help society.

"I think as groups, we should all understand the biases we have. It could make us better. We need to shrink the income equality gap. We need to have working people better off. I think of everything we could do, if we can do that, it would be the biggest social change for positivity in Canada or elsewhere."



For others, like Katie Hall-Hursh, vice-president of McGill-Stephenson, the pushback against DEI is mind boggling.

"I can't reconcile how companies that are marketing to the masses are not emphasizing the importance of DEI because that's what their customers are all representative of, those various groups. That's no different in a number of our businesses that are consumer-facing. We need to be able to have our patrons, our customers, see themselves in the business they are buying from."

Hall-Hursh points to the success subsidiary companies, True North and the Winnipeg Jets, have had by embedding DEI into their community outreach.

"You look at True North and the work being done to have a number of different communities represented on dedicated nights. It's remarkable the reach the team and the club have had into our broader community. We're tapping into those who previously didn't feel welcome or see themselves in the space there and there is a concerted effort to try and open up the circle and include everybody," says Hall-Hursh.

Michelle Cameron, the owner of Dream Catcher Promotions, says understanding barriers and bringing them down has been a recipe for success for her apparel company, the largest Indigenous-owned promotional operator in Canada.

"There are so many opportunities for Indigenous peoples. For me, every time we get a big contract, I look at it as an opportunity to grow the company and grow the workforce. Within our company...we spend our time investing in them and training them. A lot of Indigenous people coming from communities have a lot of barriers coming to the city and working, so we work with the people that we hire."

Patel says it's that kind of thinking that's needed now more than ever.

"Canada has a great opportunity to unlock its potential by tapping into underutilized talent pools, whether it's newcomers, women, Indigenous talent. There is a productivity gap that needs to be closed. We know the GDP per worker has stagnated here in Canada. The only way to unlock that is inclusive growth."

In the end, he says embracing inclusivity will allow Manitoba and Canada to move past potentially tumultuous times that may be just ahead of us. Research also shows that when companies have a strong mission, led by values and DEI embedded into their overall strategy, they are better positioned to not only innovate, but adapt and grow.

*This story was adapted from Episode 5 of the Manitoba Inc. Podcast. To listen to this episode in its entirety or any other episode, go to Spotify or Apple Music. ■*



# WHY ROBOTS WON'T REPLACE US

## AI and the Existential Crisis of Modern Business



BY MARTY FISHER

**T**HERE are two types of business leaders in 2025 – those who worry about how to use AI and liars. Across every industry, from finance to manufacturing and retail to consulting, AI is not just a trend, it's a tsunami. And it's providing us with the tools to amplify productivity AND creativity.

### WAVES OF CHANGE

AI is everywhere. It's in our spreadsheets, our customer service chats and even our supply chains.

We are well past the novelty phase. As Seth Godin, American author, marketing expert, entrepreneur and a former dot-com business executive, said recently on The Tim Ferriss Show podcast (the No. 1 podcast on Apple), "AI is the biggest thing since electricity."

And AI is powering everything from funny Sasquatch videos to investment portfolio analysis. The revolution isn't coming, it's already here.

But here's the existential question: as AI gets better at doing what we do, what's left for us?

The answer is EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS.

### PRESSURE COOKER

Running a business has always been about juggling, whether it's clients, competitors or the occasional crisis. Leaders face all kinds of pressures and right now it's the urgent need to find productivity gains. Today, we're juggling chainsaws.

Do I rationalize, upskill or hire staff?

Here's an audacious thought: the companies that survive—and thrive—won't be the ones running from AI. They'll be the ones running toward it, investing in technology, training staff and using AI to amplify what makes us human.

### THE ROBOT'S RESUMÉ

AI is really good at many things—analyzing numbers, augmenting workflows and automating repetitive tasks. It can crunch data at a pace that would make an actuary blush. It can manage inventory, help predict demand and even craft a decent e-mail. And in a life-improving way, it can automate the kind of mind-numbing, soul-sucking tasks, such as coming up with five variations of advertising copy within an Instagram post that has a 125-character limit, that cause us humans to procrastinate like crazy.

### ALL THE FEELS (AND BRENT SPINER)

But here's what AI can't do: it can't read the room or sense the subtle tension in a meeting. It can't inspire a team or forge the kind of trust that comes from years of shared wins and losses. It doesn't start conversations, have ideas of its own and it certainly can't make you laugh so hard you snort hot coffee up your nose.

The real value of humans is our humanity: love, curiosity, empathy, strategic thinking and the ability to navigate the unpredictable. For those of us who are old enough to remember Star Trek: The Next Generation, Commander Data (a humanoid robot played by Brent Spiner) struggled to understand irony and humour. Today's AI is no different.

### HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW?

Many pundits believe if you're not adapting, you're screwed. They compare this moment in time to Kodak's infamous failure to adapt to digital photography. (The one-time industry behemoth emerged from bankruptcy in 2013.) Forrester, a global research and advisory firm, predicts that millions of jobs will be lost to AI automation in the next decade.

This prediction can be seen as terrifying,

But here's the daring counterpoint: business has always been in the business of reinvention. We've survived the rise of the internet, the virtual death of print (with this fine magazine being one of the few exceptions) and the explosion of social media. AI is both the latest challenge and the latest opportunity.



AI generated

There will be new jobs that have yet to be conceived. Think back to the invention of combine harvesters. Would we ever go back to swathing wheat with a scythe? (Ask a farmer.)

## PART TECHNOLOGIST, PART PHILOSOPHER, PART STORYTELLER

Tomorrow's employees won't just be number crunchers or creative geniuses. They'll be part technologist, part philosopher and part storyteller. They'll need to be more agile, think more critically, be more creative, and ironically, more human than ever.

They will be generalists who know the questions to ask and how to challenge the output, people who are able to discern between shit and shoe polish.

Companies that master AI integration will be able to offer enhanced services at scale, automating routine tasks and freeing up their teams to focus on high-impact strategies and innovations that AI can't replace.

And they'll do it all while embracing the messy, unpredictable and deeply human process of collaboration.

## THE EXISTENTIAL QUESTION: WHAT'S LEFT FOR US?

So, what's left for business in the age of AI? Everything that matters. The ability to think critically, to challenge output and assumptions, to build trust and to create work that resonates on a human level.

The ability to adapt, to innovate and to find opportunities in chaos.

AI is a tool, not a replacement.

It's a catalyst for change. The companies that flourish will be the ones that use AI to amplify their humanity—not the ones that try to out-robot the robots.

## THE BOTTOM LINE: DON'T PANIC. GET AUDACIOUS.

If you're running a business right now, you have two choices: you can resist change or you can get audacious. You can hide from AI (good luck with that) or you can lean in—hard.

Let the machines take over the boring stuff so you can focus on creating more magic.

The magic isn't in the machines, it's in the people. It's in the shared experiences, the inside jokes and the unspoken trust that comes from seeing how your team handles pressure, success and the occasional disaster.

That's something no algorithm can replicate. And that's why, no matter how smart the robots get, the future of business will always be human. ■



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# QUEER-OWNED BUSINESSES ARE IN IT FOR MORE THAN THE MONEY

**“We’re in it to provide opportunities we didn’t have when we started”**

BY CARLY PETERS

**T**HE hole in Amanda Kinden’s business plan has brought a lot of success. Before she started Oh Doughnuts in 2014, Winnipeggers had limited options when it came to their crullers and other doughy delights. Thankfully, instead of focusing on her environmental studies, she turned her weekend passion for dessert making into a full-time career that has transformed the city’s sweets scene.

More than a decade ago, Kinden began crafting her first batches in the shared kitchen at Knox United Church. Six nights a week, she would cook, clean, box and deliver to coffee shops hungry for local, gourmet doughnuts. The demand soon outgrew the church basement and in 2016 she opened her first storefront on Broadway Avenue.

The grandiose boulevards were perfect for foot traffic and downtown’s office snack culture. But turning a nail salon into a food space was the first learning curve for the budding business owner. The next was realizing she still couldn’t do it all. Her recipes called for handcrafted dough, curds and icings—the key ingredients to her defining doughnuts. And with growing demand, she had to bring on staff to specialize in each.

Then began a cult-like following. Customers checking Oh Doughnuts’ socials daily to see the fresh lineup of flavours—everything from classic vanilla with pink icing and sprinkles, to botanical creations, to savoury experiments like taco, everything bagel and even ketchup chips. The shop regularly sells out.

That popularity led to a second location on Taylor Avenue in 2018, where the team continues to craft doughnuts as labours of love. It takes six hours from combining locally sourced, organic ingredients, to frying, filling and hand-decorating the fresh confections.



Oh Doughnuts owner Amanda Kinden serves up an array of flavours at her two Winnipeg storefronts. Instagram photo

Today, Kinden estimates they hand-cut 1,400 to 3,000 doughnuts daily. Taylor is the sweeter end of the city, while Broadway focuses on more brunch options. Their poached egg-stuffed doughnuts are a fantastic breakfast on the go, or sop up some soup with doughnut croutons and a side of fried pickle spears coated with doughnut breadcrumbs.

But beyond the flavours and fans, one of the most meaningful outcomes of Oh Doughnuts’ success has been its impact on community, especially the queer community. At any given time, she estimates that 30 to 50 per cent of her staff identify as queer. She’s worked hard to create an environment, both in-store and online, where everyone can see themselves, be themselves and feel safe.





**"By providing resources, programming, networking opportunities and through partnering with local queer organizations and businesses to increase our capacity and offerings, we aim to address the challenges our queer business community faces."**

— Jenny Steinke-Magnus, executive director of the Manitoba LGBT\* Chamber of Commerce

"That's just how I navigate life," she says. "We're not only one thing. I'm a baker, I'm a local business owner, I'm a queer person. This can all exist together. We can all exist together."

She's hoping to spread more of the love. Her plans include turning the Taylor location into a fully gluten-free bakery (currently, shared fryers mean they're only gluten friendly) and opening a centralized commercial kitchen to support satellite shops across the city. Just a few more holes to add to the business plan.

## MANITOBA PROUD

There are more than 100,000 businesses owned by members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community across the country, generating more than \$22 billion in economic activity and employing 435,000 people. Behind those numbers are entrepreneurs driven by resilience, creativity and community.

Jenny Steinke-Magnus, executive director of the Manitoba LGBT\* Chamber of Commerce, says that same spirit is thriving right here in Manitoba. With a renewed focus on helping queer entrepreneurs and businesses flourish within the province's economy, the chamber has recently experienced a revitalization in both membership and the range of support it offers.

With a boost in funding through the federal government's first-ever 2SLGBTQI+ Entrepreneurship Program, a \$25-million effort to break down barriers and build a more inclusive economy, the chamber is focused on deepening community connections, reaching out to current and past members, while engaging queer-owned businesses to help shape a refreshed membership model.

Along with bringing back community events for 2SLGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and professionals to network, the organization is also launching the EMERGE Queer Entrepreneur Development Program. The six-month mentorship program will provide hands-on learning, one-on-one guidance and a supportive network to help 2SLGBTQ+ entrepreneurs grow their businesses with

confidence.

"By providing resources, programming, networking opportunities and through partnering with local queer organizations and businesses to increase our capacity and offerings, we aim to address the challenges our queer business community faces. We look forward to finding more opportunities to support the community in new ways in the coming months," says Steinke-Magnus.

"Above all, the best way to support 2SLGBTQ+ businesses is to frequent them and encourage others to do the same. Supporting queer-owned businesses is a tangible way to show your support/allyship."

## BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR AND THEN SOME

In the summer, a short, white picket fence lines a section of the sidewalk on Sherbrook Street. Enclosed in it is a neat square of vibrant green turf and sets of classic, blue folding lawn chairs. It's a familiar and comforting scene that makes you want to sit down and stay awhile. And Amber Sarraillon and Morgan Wielgosz sure hope you do.

The pair opened Good Neighbour Brewing Co. in 2023 as an inviting hub for the West Broadway and broader community. Sharing a courtyard with Next Door restaurant, it's an accessible gathering space where people can walk up, bike up, bring their families (furry members included) and enjoy time with each other over some really good local beer.

It's exactly the vision they'd set out to achieve when they met at the beginning of their brewing careers. Both Sarraillon and Wielgosz started on the East Coast working for big-label brands. Their love of beer took them around the world, tasting as they went, but they found themselves back in Winnipeg during the pandemic.

Sarraillon says while the world stood still, they dared to dream of what their beer and brewery would look like. Inspired by Manitoba's support for and pride in local businesses during COVID, they knew community would be the cornerstone of their craft brewery.



**Beer brewers Morgan Wielgosz (left) and Amber Sarraillon opened Good Neighbour Brewing Co. in 2023.**

In 2021, they began producing small batches out of Oxus Brewing, some of which, like their Hazy Pale Ale, are still being produced today. As their brand and beers expanded, they continued to collaborate with other like-minded businesses in the city—Good Neighbour was introduced at The Beer Can, a popular pop-up beer garden just outside the historic Granite Curling Club, while a spot inside Next Door restaurant allowed them to put more innovative pours on tap.

Finally, in 2023, they set roots at 110 Sherbrook, the same year they won New Brewery of the Year at the Annual Canadian Brewers' Choice Awards.

The pair may also have the distinction of being the first all-female and LGBTQ1+-owned and operated brewery in Manitoba, and one of few in Canada, but it's bringing people together over a pint, hosting a community event or producing a beer that gives back that means the most.

"We have a choice and we get to connect with communities that align with our values and need support," says Sarraillon, pointing to their GAYtorade sour series that gives back to Rainbow Resource Centre or Pet Pals Pilsner that raises funds for the Winnipeg Humane Society.

"We're not in it to become millionaires. We're in it to provide opportunities we didn't have when we started. We understand the privilege and we want to do what we can to open doors and support."

## FLYING THE FLAG IN SMALL-TOWN MANITOBA

A job rejection was one of the best things to happen to Scott Carman. For more than 10 years, the owner of the Ship & Plough Tavern in Gimli, Manitoba had been working in journalism and communications. An unfortunate layoff left him with time to travel and when we came back to re-enter the field, he found himself at the end of a "no" from a hiring communications company.

"I asked the interviewer to give me some feedback about why I didn't get the position and he said, 'It just seemed like you didn't want the job.' And he was right. I wasn't interested in going back into that line of work," says Carman.

He moved to Gimli and noticed the local tavern was for sale. Having lived in England for a time, Carman appreciated the pub culture of the friendly, local gathering place where you could bring your whole family, have a pint and enjoy the company. So, in 2013, he bought it.

He had been working in communications his entire career and taking on a tavern came with a steep learning curve, but Carman was determined to jump in and learn from his mistakes.

One thing he knew would be a success was to add live music and events to the line-up. No one else in town was doing it at the time, especially in the off-season when the summer bump of events and attractions turns into a winter slump.

He started with winter concerts—a band a month—which turned into a year-round series that saw more acts on more days. The momentum began to build and soon artists from across the country were coming to Gimli to play the pub. The Arkells popped by for a karaoke night; Elliott Brood made a point to book the Ship & Plough on their Canadian tour; while The Grapes of Wrath performed in the beer tent one summer. "I used to watch them on Much Music, and now they're playing my bar," he says.

While the big bands bring people in, the small menu keeps them coming back. Carman pairs comfort food and pub favourites with local flair. The ribs are a top seller, as are the fish tacos, and of course, a Gimli staple of pickerel fish and chips.



The Ship & Plough Tavern in Gimli. Travel Manitoba photo

Together, it creates an atmosphere where everyone is welcome. Carman made that clear when he hung a Pride flag during his first June owning the tavern — a first for Gimli. He also introduced the town's first drag shows and helped establish Gimli Pride. Carman has been recognized by the Manitoba LGBT\* Chamber of Commerce as a community builder but he's quick to note the credit belongs to Gimli. That spirit was especially clear in his recent Pride post, where he reflected on the challenges he's faced as a 2SLGBTQIA+ business owner. The likes, shares and comments—"we're behind you," "you make our town better"—were a reminder that both the town and the tavern are exactly where he's meant to be.

Find more businesses at the Manitoba LGBT\* Chamber of Commerce at [mb-lgbt.biz](http://mb-lgbt.biz) ■



## Albert McLeod: Indigenous Cultural Facilitator

FOR Albert McLeod, the path to becoming an Indigenous cultural facilitator unfolded naturally over three decades of community work and deep cultural learning. With roots in both Scottish settler and Woodland and Swampy Cree ancestry, McLeod includes historical knowledge and lived experience in his presentations to educate people about the complex history of colonization, cultural adaptation and identity.

After years of full-time work with non-profits and as an advisor about Indigenous knowledge for research projects and national Indigenous organizations, McLeod launched his consulting practice just as the pandemic began. From Zoom calls at home to presentations across the country, he now shares knowledge shaped by a lifetime of involvement in the Indigenous HIV/AIDS response, the 2Spirit reemergence and national healing processes like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

A proud 2Spirit trailblazer, McLeod was part of the early activism that formed the Nichiwakan Native Gay & Lesbian Society — now 2Spirit Manitoba — in the 1980s. He's witnessed massive growth in the community, from 200 people marching in Winnipeg's first Pride in 1987 to 13 Indigenous floats in 2024 and Pride events now happening on-reserve across Canada.



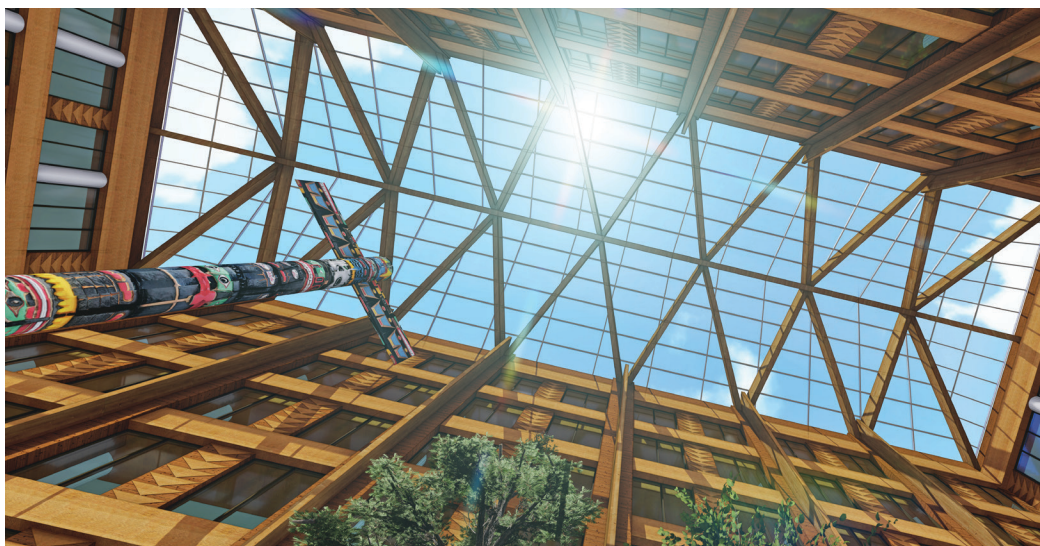


The former Hudson's Bay Company is being transformed into a multi-use facility that will promote social reconciliation.

# The Bay becomes WEHWEHNEH BAHGAHKINAHGOHN

From tokenism to true partnership  
and from past harms to future prosperity





The design will include a spacious atrium lit with natural light from skylights.

BY ANGELA LOVELL

**N**EW life is coming to the former Hudson's Bay store in downtown Winnipeg.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is leading the ground-breaking Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn project — transforming the former Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) heritage building into a multi-use facility that promotes social reconciliation and restores economic self-determination for First Nations people.

"The project is about correcting generations of exclusion, and the economic deficit that flowed from that exclusion, and ensuring that First Nations have equitable access to opportunities and also the ownership and decision-making power around those systems that help support economic prosperity," says SCO's grand chief Jerry Daniels.

After acquiring the building in 2023, SCO began bringing its vision to life, developing the site into a facility aimed at providing long-term economic, cultural and social prosperity for First Nations, while helping revitalize Winnipeg's downtown core. The project, one of the largest of its kind in Canada, is a partnership between SCO and all three levels of government with an expected cost exceeding \$300 million.

The design for the 655,000-square-foot building, led by Number TEN Architectural Group, includes approximately 370 affordable residential units, each offering either an exterior view or overlooking a spacious atrium lit with skylights and featuring artwork and designs by First Nations communities. The blueprints also include SCO offices, a daycare and restaurants on the main floor, as well as commercial office and retail spaces for lease that will prioritize First Nations businesses and entrepreneurs.



A rendering of the Vaughan Street lobby on the main floor.

### Creating employment for First Nations

Creating employment opportunities for First Nations people has been a priority for SCO, which represents 32 Anishinaabe and Dakota nations across southern Manitoba. SCO's new Miikahnah Connect employment program gives First Nations trades professionals the opportunity to apply to work on the Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn Project. As a result, SCO says First Nations employees have made up three-quarters of the 1,380 workers on the project and have clocked more than 145,000 hours of work since the project began.

Environmental sustainability and conservation are also being incorporated into the design to align with First Nations values.

"We have integrated First Nations' design principals throughout, including natural materials, community connection and energy efficiency," says Daniels. "This project includes energy-smart retrofits and a green rooftop that will reduce our environmental footprint by reducing energy consumption by 35 per cent and greenhouse gas emissions by 81 per cent. That aligns with First Nation values of treading lightly on our planet, on our Mother Earth."



SCO's Grand Chief Jerry Daniels says First Nation's design principals will be integrated throughout.

### Providing economic sustainability

Economic sustainability is equally important, with the project designed to create and support employment and entrepreneurship both now and for future generations.

"The Southern Chiefs' Organization has been very focused on vitality and creating better quality of life," says Daniels. "We've been working to create long-term career paths in the trades working with Build Winnipeg and Build Manitoba. This development will build pride, prosperity and intergenerational wealth. It's about restoring a place, purpose and power for First Nations right in the heart of the downtown core."

### Conserving as much as possible

As much of the original building architecture and materials as possible are being conserved, including the concrete and reinforcing steel removed from the ground floor, which was salvaged by a First Nations company that separates the steel for reuse and repurposes the concrete as granular fill.

"In a building like this, we use the word 'deconstruction' because you're taking pieces or elements of it apart," says Kelly Wallace, vice-president and Winnipeg district manager at PCL Construction, the contractor overseeing the project. "It is a structurally sound building so we are extremely mindful of how we disassemble it and are trying to recycle as much as we can."



The fifth floor community room features natural materials.

Wallace says the project has been a valuable learning experience and PCL is proud to be part of it.

"I am learning something new about First Nations culture every day working with the SCO team. It's been an enlightening experience for me," Wallace says. "Building strong economic and cultural relationships with First Nations in this province can be a real differentiator for Manitoba and this project has the potential to be a beacon for what is possible."





This project includes energy smart retrofits and a green rooftop that will reduce its environmental footprint by reducing energy consumption by 35 percent.



Grand Chief Jerry Daniels of the Southern Chiefs Organization.

### A name with meaning

The name Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn, meaning “it is visible” was chosen thoughtfully to highlight the critical role of the original people of Turtle Island in the fur trade—an important part of history that has been largely invisible in the Canadian narrative.

“The project sends a clear message that First Nations are drivers of growth, culture and innovation,” Daniels says. “We want to create vitality. We want to create a cultural shift in the mindset of not only our society broadly and within First Nations but really within our relationships with one another.” ■

## A World-Changing Idea

IN 2023, *Fast Company* magazine recognized the Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn project as the “Best World-Changing Idea, North America”.

“That recognition reflects the transformative nature of what we’re doing,” says Daniels. “It’s not just for First Nations people but how Canada thinks about development, heritage and equity when it comes to the relationship with First Nations. It’s world-changing because it represents a shift from exclusion to leadership, from tokenism to true partnership and from past harms to future prosperity. We believe this project will inspire others across Turtle Island to re-imagine what reconciliation can truly look like. This is a blueprint for how economic reconciliation can be done right for major projects across Canada.”

# WORKING TOGETHER



BY WAB KINEW  
PREMIER OF MANITOBA

**T**HE economic horse pulls the social cart – and here in Manitoba, Indigenous Nations are starting to do some heavy lifting.

So as we face a changing, unprecedented economic climate, the path forward has to be one of collaboration – between governments and nations, and with the business community – so we can grow our economy and create good, family-supporting jobs for all Manitobans.

By partnering with Indigenous Nations to grow wind power, we're building up the next generation of affordable energy in our province. The Indigenous Loan Guarantee Program will create thousands of jobs and share the economic growth and benefits with Indigenous Nations.

Our government is deeply committed to real Nation-to-Nation collaboration and we're already seeing success from this approach.

Working together with the Southern Chiefs Organization and True North, we're transforming Portage Place into a hub that will include homes and healthcare and help revitalize Winnipeg's downtown.

Earlier this year, we came together with Marcel Colomb First Nation, Mathias Colomb Cree Nation and Alamos Gold to break ground on a new gold mine in Northern Manitoba that will create hundreds of good jobs and grow our mineral sector.

Indigenous peoples, communities and nations have always played a big role in leading the way for our province. Right now, there are so many exciting Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs, who have the expertise and the energy we need to build up Manitoba for the next generation.

Projects like Naawi-Oodena are a great example of this. Treaty One Nations, supported by other levels of government, are creating a new economic hub at the old Kapyong Barracks. With the recent opening of Oodena Gas & Convenience, we can see the first signs that big transformations are coming.

As the provincial government, it's our job to make sure that we're creating opportunities, breaking down barriers and engaging as real partners with Indigenous governments and businesses. This is the work we've been doing since Day One and it's the work we're going to keep doing because it's good for our communities, it's good for reconciliation and it's good for Manitoba.

As we continue to focus on big nation-building projects across our country, we must remember that there is no Canada without Indigenous Nations. And there is no progress without real collaboration.

When we work together in this way, we can achieve great things as a province, and as a nation. It's the only way we ever have.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, COMMUNITIES AND NATIONS HAVE ALWAYS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN LEADING THE WAY FOR OUR PROVINCE. RIGHT NOW, THERE ARE SO MANY EXCITING INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS, WHO HAVE THE EXPERTISE AND THE ENERGY WE NEED TO BUILD UP MANITOBA FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.**



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