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University of Lethbridge introduces Charles Weaselhead as 14th chancellor and first of Indigenous descent

The University of Lethbridge Senate has elected Charles Weaselhead as the University's 14th chancellor – the first time in the institution's 52-year history that the chancellor position will be held by an Indigenous person.

Situated in the heart of traditional Blackfoot Territory, the U of L has a shared history with the Indigenous community. From creating one of the nation's first Department of Native American Studies to adopting an Indigenous Protocol Handbook and the recent opening of the Ikaisskini Gathering Place, the University has grown in step with the local Blackfoot community.



“We are honoured that Charlie has accepted the role of chancellor, something that is, frankly, long overdue,” says Dr. Mike Mahon, president and vice-chancellor. “Our University has always worked to foster a meaningful relationship with the Blackfoot community and our Indigenous students and more can be done in terms of making our campuses accessible and desirable to the Indigenous community. It is important we continue to lead the way in promoting truth and healing and eliminating barriers, both on campus and throughout our community, to achieving reconciliation.”

Weaselhead is the former chief of the Blood Tribe and Treaty 7 grand chief. As a survivor of residential schooling, he has devoted his life to promoting health, education and economic development issues for Indigenous people. Recently retired, he admits his new role with the University is a little out of his comfort zone and he welcomes the chance to learn.

“I’m a little bit nervous about the position itself and the unknowns associated with it,” he says. “For me, it’s a deep honour, and it’s a deep honour for my tribe, the Blackfoot

Confederacy. I come into this position with an open mind. I have a lot of experience walking both sides of our cultures and that's how I was taught by my grandfather. You need to understand both cultures and you need to find a way to work with both."

Weaselhead has worked on numerous boards and committees including the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Community Violence Prevention on the Blood Reserve, the First Nations Governance Centre, the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs' Committee on Health and the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre's Chiefs' Senate. He was a signatory to the Alberta Protocol Agreement on Government-to-Government Relations and the Memorandum of Understanding on First Nations Education.

He is noted as a determined leader who fosters relationship building in resolving social issues facing Indigenous people and he has worked with every level of government in championing his vision for a truly reconciled community.

"Over the years, I've worked with our people to begin to understand that there is life outside of the reserve, and that life is a good life; there are opportunities there," he says. "You also have to align yourself and show that you can fit into that society and the way to fit is through education, being out there and connecting yourself with people and with industry.

"In my view it's a day-to-day process, a work in progress, you and I, sitting here together understanding our backgrounds; and that there is some commonality between us."

Weaselhead holds a Certificate of Hospital and Health Care Administration from the University of Saskatchewan and has served on the Board of Directors for Athabasca University. He will officially be installed as the University's 14th chancellor at 2019 Spring Convocation. He succeeds Janice Varzari (BN '90, MEd '20), who served as chancellor since 2015.

"I am very excited about this opportunity. I think there will be a learning curve for me but it's a great environment for me to use a little bit of my experience and my background to help the University of Lethbridge," says Weaselhead. "It's all about knowing your identity and where you fit into the University. There's a tremendous opportunity for southern Alberta to grow with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. If one falters, the other falters and if we grow together economically and educationally, I think the sky is the limit."

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/university-lethbridge-introduces-charles-weaselhead-14th-chancellor-and-first-indigenous>

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