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Federal grant and donor support contribute to creation of permanent home for Iikaisskini Gathering Place

With the support from the Government of Canada’s Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP), and an investment from TD Bank Financial Group, the University of Lethbridge will move the Iikaisskini Gathering Place to a central location on campus.

In September 2011, University of Lethbridge President Dr. Mike Mahon asked professor Leroy Little Bear (BASC (BA) '72, DASC '04), Roy Weasel Fat (Red Crow Community College President) and Dr. Jane O’Dea to develop an overarching strategy that would create support for Indigenous students, faculty, staff and community members at the U of L. The resulting report identified the need for a gathering place on campus. Out of those recommendations, the Iikaisskini Gathering Place was created and opened in 2014 at its temporary location in the Paterson Centre.



“It was important to open the centre at that time, knowing that it was just the first phase of establishing a permanent home for Iikaisskini,” says Mahon. “We knew from the onset that Iikaisskini needed to be in a central location on campus so that it was accessible to our students. Another key element was that we wanted it to be highly visible to all, acknowledging, respecting and honouring the values, history, customs and culture of the Blackfoot speaking nations on whose territorial lands the University resides.”

The proposed University Hall location satisfies those needs by creating a gathering space in the heart of campus that will afford enhanced access for students, faculty and staff

and create much needed additional space for U of L Indigenous Student Affairs administration to provide continued and additional supports for Indigenous students.

The ICIP grant will contribute \$184,000 toward the relocation of Iikaiskini, which will also serve as the central location for the University's new partnership with the MasterCard Foundation — EleV.

The Iikaiskini Gathering Place will provide students a place to meet with Elders and share stories, teaching and wisdom. It will be a vibrant and powerful cultural community where Blackfoot and other Indigenous languages are spoken, and where students can explore new knowledge together.

"Iikaiskini will also serve as a key hub for the University's Indigenous outreach activities," says Mahon. "A focus of the EleV program is creating pathways and enhancing access to post-secondary education for prospective Indigenous students. This space will house activities designed to reach out to Blackfoot and other Indigenous elementary, middle school and high school students, showing them the possibilities and benefits of a post-secondary education and enabling them to see themselves in a University environment."

Construction on the space is tentatively scheduled to begin in the summer of 2021.

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