

Media Release

For Immediate Release – November 22, 2023

COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY Held for **NEW INDIGENOUS LEARNING CENTRE** & Revitalization of the Ska-Nah-Doht Museum

Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc, ON – Today

‘Safeguarding our heritage for future generations’ - the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Foundation (LTVCF) in partnership with the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA) hosted a **‘Commencement Ceremony’ for the new Indigenous Learning Centre Project** - located at the Longwoods Road Conservation Area, near Mount Brydges, ON. The ceremony took place from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on the conservation area grounds and site of Ska-Nah-Doht Village and Museum. The \$2.35M project is being funded by government grants and donations to the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Foundation.

Over 65 invited guests attended, including members of local Indigenous communities and organizations, municipal and county government officials, representatives from local boards of education, directors from the boards and committees of the Foundation and Conservation Authority, Learning Centre project engineers, prospective donors and LTVCA staff.

Mr. Kelly Riley began the program at 11:30 a.m. with a warm welcome to guests. Mr. Riley is Director of Treaty, Lands and Environment for the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.

Mr. Don Pearson – Secretary-Treasurer of the Foundation delivered the Land Acknowledgement. He was the emcee for the Commencement Ceremony.

‘Eagle Flight’ singers led by **Mr. Gordon Nicotine-Sands** - a music celebration of drumming and song followed. Mr. Sands is a fourth-generation singer, originally from Bkejwanong territory, and the Poundmaker Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. The ‘Eagle Flight’ singers are a First Nations singing group based out of London, Ontario and have been active for over two decades. The group has travelled extensively in the Great Lakes area (internationally on occasion) participating in festival-like celebrations known as Pow Wow. ‘Eagle Flight’ has also honoured invitations from professional and educational institutions in the form of educational song and dance performances. In addition to creating and sharing traditional music, Gordon Sands also serves as an emcee to many winter celebrations in the Great Lakes known as “Round Dance” which are trending cultural events that originated out west. Mr. Sands is a graduate of Fanshawe’s Fine Art program and father to four.

Ms. Sarah Emons - Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority Board Chair extended a warm welcome.

Mr. Kelly Riley shared why Longwoods Road Conservation Area is special to Indigenous communities.

Mr. Thomas Martel - Community Educator for Longwoods Road Conservation Area, explained why Longwoods is significant to him and the children he teaches. He is a member of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

Mr. Mark Peacock – CAO of the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority and Dan McKillop – Foundation President offered an invitation to view the new space and some background on the project.

Mr. Don Pearson extended an invitation from the Foundation to connect and learn more about the project and explained how to get involved.

Following the formal program and addresses, traditional food and drink were provided by a local Indigenous catering company – Candice’s Catering. An opportunity to explore nearby heritage log cabins to learn about Longwoods educational programs and explore activity stations was offered, as well as a chance to view the project’s progress through slides at the Ska-Nah-Doht Museum’s theatre.

Project Budget:

Total estimated cost of the project is \$2.35M

\$850,000 secured in government grants to date (Federal Government)

\$1.5M to be raised by Foundation for:

New 2000 sq ft Hall, Kitchen, Accessible Washroom \$995k

Revitalize existing building (siding, roofing, furnace) \$223k

Gallery 1, Offices, Artifact Storage Addition \$448k

Gallery 2 (where current offices are located) \$70k

Accessible Elevator \$200k

Furnishings \$60k

Permits and Professional Services \$129k

Fundraising \$150k

Taxes \$40k

\$107,270 has been raised so far! The Lower Thames Valley Conservation FOUNDATION is looking for leaders in the community to help us fundraise. If you, your family or company would like to help us or to donate towards our \$1.5 million project – the Indigenous Learning Centre and Revitalization of Ska-Nah-Doht Museum, please view the project details on our website here: <https://lowerthamesfoundation.ca/capital-campaign/our-capital-campaign/>. We are able to accept online donations through our website or alternatively, through CanadaHelps.org here <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/lower-thames-valley-conservation-foundation/>. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.

Some Ways You Can Connect With and Help Our Foundation Reach Its Goals!

Apply to be a member and join our Campaign by emailing yournature@lowerthamesfoundation.ca

Learn more about us on our website at www.lowerthamesfoundation.ca and follow us and share with friends our www.facebook.com/lvvcf and www.instagram.com/lvvcf/

For more information please contact:

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