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NIC Breaks Ground for First Nations Gathering Place

Representatives from North Island College, the First Nations communities, NIC Aboriginal students and many honoured guests gathered today at NIC's Campbell River campus to share in a traditional ground-breaking ceremony and site blessing for the new First Nations Gathering Place.

"The concept initialization and development process for this building has been an enlightening one," said Vivian Hermansen, NIC's Director, Aboriginal Education. "The initial visioning sessions were an opportunity for employees of the college and non-Aboriginal participants to listen and learn the metaphors that would aid in creating a sense of belonging and identification for aboriginal people."

A significant part of the vision identified for the structure was that the Gathering Place would have a story from its very beginning in planning stages and the importance for its hosts to know the story and remember to tell it often. It is vital that the Gathering Place be a place of welcome to all indigenous peoples regardless of home territory or home country but also to acknowledge and honour the people within the traditional territory in which the building will sit.

The Gathering Place at the Campbell River campus has received generous financial support through the Ministry of Advanced Education's Gathering Places Capital Fund, whose goal is to support Aboriginal students in starting, staying and succeeding in post-secondary education by providing appropriate spaces for ceremony and celebration.

"The leadership provided by Master Carver Bill Henderson, Elder Alberta Billy and Rod Visser in their efforts to secure donations of wood has been instrumental," continued Hermansen. "And WACOR Industries, who are donating land clearing services, have been invaluable as well."



Master Carver Bill Henderson speaks after performing a traditional blessing of the land.

Hermansen worked closely with Architect Tom Dishlevoy and an integral Steering Committee who offered their time and assistance generously. Members include First Nations representatives from Campbell River, Cape Mudge, Homalco, Mowachaht/Muchalaht, K'ómoks, the Cape Mudge Elders Council, the Kwakiutl District Council and Laichwiltach Family Life. The North Island Métis Association, School Districts 71 and 70, the Mayor and Council of the City of Campbell River, the North Island Student Association, North Island College students of Aboriginal descent and the NIC Foundation Board of Directors also participated on the Steering Committee.

For further information regarding North Island College's Campbell River campus Gathering Place, please contact Vivian Hermansen at 250-923-9749.

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