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M E D I A R E L E A S E

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Opening Doors: UWinnipeg launches Opportunity Fund, Makes University More Accessible to Inner-City Students

WINNIPEG—Internationally-acclaimed singer and songwriter Chantal Kreviazuk (Collegiate Class of '90) and her husband, Raine Maida, will launch The University of Winnipeg's new Opportunity Fund at a benefit concert this Monday, Feb. 19, 2007. Kreviazuk and Maida, lead singer of Our Lady Peace, have generously offered to donate all net proceeds from the concert to establish an innovative fund – with a targeted endowment of \$10 million – that will help inner-city children and youth attend UWinnipeg. **Tickets are still on sale for \$42.50 plus applicable taxes at www.ticketmaster.ca and by calling 204.780.3333.**

The Opportunity Fund, with its flexible bursary and tuition credit account programs, is the next step in UWinnipeg's bold approach to target students at a young age who until now could only dream of a post-secondary education – youth from inner-city neighbourhoods, Aboriginal students, young people from war-affected nations and refugee populations.

“By addressing the financial obstacles to attending university and encouraging youth to complete their high school education, The University of Winnipeg is opening a door of possibilities to Aboriginal and other inner-city youth to get them thinking at an early age about a future that includes university,” said University of Winnipeg President and Vice-Chancellor Lloyd Axworthy. “According to several recent reports, almost half of our city's Aboriginal youth do not graduate from high school. The Opportunity Fund – combined with innovative programs such as *Eco-Kids* and *Enviro Techs* – demonstrates The University of Winnipeg's commitment to closing that 'graduation gap' and enabling inner-city and under-represented students to achieve their full academic potential.”

Axworthy thanked members of UWinnipeg's Access Task Force – including faculty, staff and students – who are currently developing the parameters of the fund, and who will soon begin consultations with the Winnipeg School Division and neighbourhood schools before finalizing the program.

The Opportunity Fund includes a Tuition Credit Account option – an innovative program that would provide students, as early as in the fourth grade, with an incentive to stay in school and earn a “tuition credit” towards post-secondary education at The University of Winnipeg. This program targets Winnipeg's Aboriginal youth, in particular, whose high school graduation rate lags far behind the general population.

These accounts are letters of credit, or deferred scholarships, offering students in grades 9 through 12 \$500 to \$750 credit for each year of school completed—with built-in bonuses for achieving averages of 80 per cent or higher and participation in extra-curricular activities. An incentive program for younger students in grades 4 to 8, valued at up to \$200 per year, is tied to participation in programming such as UWinnipeg's *Eco-Kids: Adventures in Environmental Science*, successful completion of the school year and academic achievement. In total, a student could potentially “earn” \$4,000 toward future UWinnipeg tuition if they join the program in Grade 4; or a \$3,000 potential for high school participants.

The unprecedented Opportunity Bursaries—available to both part-time and full-time students—will be awarded to applicants who show academic promise and financial need and come from a group currently under-represented at The University of Winnipeg. They will augment traditional bursaries and scholarships by covering other critical needs such as emergency childcare, food, and shelter that can mean the difference between leaving University and graduating with a degree. Both bursary programs can be combined with any other University of Winnipeg scholarship or bursary awards and may be carried over consecutively from one year to the next. Opportunity Bursary recipients may also benefit from an expanded Transition Year program – already available to Aboriginal students – to help adjust to university studies and life. Opportunity Bursaries may be renewed.

The Opportunity Fund is an integral part of the community outreach and programming now underway at UWinnipeg. This is in addition to the Aboriginal Students Services Centre (ASSC), the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre, and the new Innovative Learning Centre which is providing opportunities for inner-city and Aboriginal students to get excited about science, relating indigenous values to traditional scientific and environmental issues. In cooperation with the Winnipeg School Division, *Eco-Kids* explores the relationship between culture, science and the environment, and links the Aboriginal community's traditional teachings with science curriculum. Children, ages 10 to 14, in the *Eco-Kids* program participate in a wide range of field trips such as to Oak Hammock Marsh and Fort Whyte Alive! as well as hands-on environmental science experiments. Each activity gives participants an opportunity to experience success within their school environment.

Enviro Techs, aimed at high school youth, incorporates traditional Aboriginal teachings with environmental science. It taps into academic potential by training teen-agers in Creative Problem Solving and other techniques to promote academic and personal success. The high school students undergo leadership training as well to enable them to work with *Eco-Kids* and contribute in other positive ways to their community.

“We have welcomed elementary, junior high and high school students to UWinnipeg through our *Eco-Kids* and *Enviro Techs* programs and given them a sense of belonging at UWinnipeg,” said Kevin Chief (BA '98), coordinator of UWinnipeg's Innovative Learning Centre and a former Wesmen basketball star. “We're trying to tap kids on the shoulder, so that they may one day see themselves at The University of Winnipeg as an athlete, an environmental studies student, a science student. We want them to know that they can realize their dreams and achieve academic success.”

The University of Winnipeg aims to establish an endowment of \$10 million to support the Opportunity Fund as part of The University of Winnipeg campaign. With Monday's concert as a launch, a fundraising campaign for the Opportunity Fund will begin in the lead up to UWinnipeg's 40th Anniversary Homecoming weekend September 13-16, 2007.

To donate to The University of Winnipeg's Opportunity Fund, please visit
<http://www.uwinnipegfoundation.ca/donate/>

Located in the heart of downtown, The University of Winnipeg is a compact, diverse, multicultural academic community committed to access and excellence. Home to more than 9,200 full- and part-time students, UWinnipeg has been ranked by our graduates in the Top Ten of all Canadian universities when asked about their "Entire Educational Experience" (Maclean's Graduate Survey, June 2006). The Globe & Mail 2006 Report Card gives The University of Winnipeg an overall 'A' grade in the areas of quality of education, teaching quality, class sizes, faculty-student interaction, and the availability of faculty outside classroom hours. Find out why. Visit www.uwinnipeg.ca

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