



Press Release

For immediate release

**THE VERNA J. KIRKNESS EDUCATION FOUNDATION RECEIVES
A DONATION OF \$500,000 FROM THE SISTERS OF ST. ANN.**

Friday, December 1, 2017 - The Verna J Kirkness Education Foundation, an organization with the goal of increasing indigenous student graduating in science and engineering, has received an endowment gift of \$500,000 from the Sisters of Saint Ann, Pacific Northwest.

The gift represents the initial donation to an endowment fund the Foundation is establishing to allow Program continuity and expansion. It will supplement funding from universities, government agencies, corporate and individual donors. The Sisters of Saint Ann understand and support the efforts of the Foundation to ensure successful educational outcomes for First Nations students. They expressed in a letter to the Foundation the hope that their donation “might encourage other potential donors to also contribute”. “In establishing an endowment, the initial gift is the most difficult to achieve”, said Ron Woznow and Susan O'Brien, co-founders of the Foundation. Tony Williams, Chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors, and Verna Kirkness met with the Sisters of Saint Ann on November 23rd and thanked Sister Marie Zarowny for the generous gift and for the Sisters’ interest in helping the Foundation Program to expand.

About the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation

The Foundation was established in 2008 with the primary goals to increase the number of First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students graduating in science and engineering and to develop young role models who will influence other students to complete Grade 12 and pursue post-secondary studies. It achieves these goals by bringing Grade 11 FNMI students to a University campus for one week where they live in residence, meet with Elders at Aboriginal student centres, and do independent research with faculty mentors and their research groups. The program is called the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program.

The Foundation's namesake, Dr. Verna J. Kirkness, has been a leader in the field of Indigenous education since the 1950s. Her active involvement in the Program has been a major factor in its growth and success. To date, 288 Indigenous students have completed the Verna J. Kirkness Science and Engineering Education Program and are proud to be recognized as Kirkness scholars. In Georgina Balfour's words, a 2012 Kirkness scholar from Norway House MB, "the Program allowed me to gain a great amount of knowledge and experience which is going to help me push forward in furthering my education into a science field."

The Program started at the University of Manitoba in 2008 and expanded to include the University of Saskatchewan in 2014 and UBC in 2015. In 2018, new Programs will be added at the First Nations University of Canada, the University of Calgary, and the University of Ottawa. A total of 100 students will be accepted into the Program in 2018. In 2019, the Foundation plans to offer additional programs at the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia, UBC Kelowna campus, McGill University and Mount Saint Vincent University.

For further information about the Kirkness Foundation please visit:

<http://www.vernajkirkness.org/>

About the Sisters of Saint Ann, Pacific Northwest

The Sisters of Saint Ann is a congregation of women religious founded in Vaudreuil, Quebec in 1850 by Marie Esther Blondin, now Blessed Marie Anne Blondin. The purpose of the congregation was to educate children in rural Quebec and a commitment to education in rural areas remains to this day. At the invitation of Bishop M. Demers, four Sisters and a laywoman arrived in Victoria on June 5, 1858, to educate both indigenous and settler children of this distant land. Their first 12 students included a Metis orphan, who began to live with the Sisters. Immediately, the Sisters began to learn Chinook, which was spoken by the First Nations and Metis.

The Sisters' arrival coincided with the Fraser River Gold Rush, necessitating a response to ever-changing needs, including care of the sick and dying. Throughout the years, the education and health care provided by the Sisters of Saint Ann throughout British Columbia established them as a vital and important part of the civic community.

Since their arrival in 1858, the Sisters have supported the aspirations of Indigenous Peoples through education of children, spiritual accompaniment, provision of health care, and collaboration on rights to land claims and self-determination and on environmental issues. Participation in the Truth and Reconciliation process and support for healing and education initiatives were and continue to be a priority. The Sisters have also engaged in the education of the wider public regarding historic and continuing injustices toward Indigenous Peoples.

The Sisters view this contribution to the Verna J. Kirkness Education Foundation as a continuation of their commitment to the education of indigenous people.

Media Contacts:

Tony C. L. Williams, Chair, Board of Directors

Phone: 604 928 0338

Email: t_williams@telus.net

Dr. Ron Woznow, Executive Director

Phone: 604 414 5844

Email: ron.woznow@vernajkirkness.org