

Good afternoon and welcome.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the land in the traditional territory of the Algonquin nation.

Thank you all for accepting our invitation to share lunch and to learn about Yukon College - a college that was established as a vocational school on the shores of the Yukon River in 1963 and is today poised to become Canada's first university north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel.

While you are enjoying lunch, you will hear from some of our special guests – shortly from **Yukon's Premier and Grand Chief** and **the President of Mastercard Foundation**, later from academic colleagues and industry representatives.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the many other special guests that are here today - all Individuals who have stood beside us in this journey, who understand and support our vision of a thriving and prosperous north.

### **Sandy Silver**

Our first speaker is a man who has spent his career – until fairly recently – as an educator. Someone who came north to teach and fell in love with Yukon, who has been a strong and unwavering advocate for access to education for ALL Yukoners and remains so today. Please welcome the Honorable Sandy Silver, Premier of Yukon. Please welcome...

## **Peter Johnston**

Our second speaker is someone who also been a strong voice for education in Yukon – both as a Chief in his community and now as Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations. He has always echoed the many Yukon Elders and First Nation leaders, like those here today, who have advocated for the inclusion of traditional knowledge, land-based experience, history and culture in our design for the university. Please welcome.....

## **Reeta Roy**

A thoughtful leader and an advocate for the world's most vulnerable, Reeta has worked tirelessly to build a foundation that is collaborative and known for its lasting impact. During Reeta's tenure, Mastercard Foundation has committed US\$2.1 billion to education, skills training and financial inclusion programs. Those programs have reached 23.7 million people living in poverty, so they can improve their lives and the circumstances of their families and communities. A strong believer in listening, Reeta can often be found in the field, working directly with the people the Foundation's programs serve. Reeta's dedication to the work of the Foundation has its roots in her childhood. Growing up in Malaysia, she won a scholarship to complete her education in the United States, an experience that she said helped her develop the compassion with which she approaches the Foundation's work. I am very, very pleased to introduce our new partner in education to talk about how she has seen education transform people's lives and their communities. Please welcome....

Thank you all.

Now I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you **about the little College that has exceeded all expectations and the University that soon will be.**

Next week, on **February 14<sup>th</sup>** we will celebrate the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary **of the day in 1973** when the Yukon First Nations Chiefs **came to Ottawa** with the document **Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow**. An excerpt from that document –

*“We want our children taught in Yukon – there must be a wider approach to the many areas of economic opportunity that can be open to Indian People At the present time the Yukon Education system is designed to get students ready to go outside to University. Very few of our students feel this is necessary. We feel that there should be a university in the Yukon.”*

That was 45 years ago.

In 1 year and 10 months and a few days (give or take), that dream will finally be achieved. It will be a great day for Yukon, a great day for the north and a great day for Canada.

Think about the North today. There might be a young woman in Old Crow, Sarah- who is watching the crow flats – the area of Yukon that has sustained her people for millennia – drying up.

- In the spring and fall, the caribou – a symbol of food security for Gwitch'in people from Alaska to NWT – are becoming less predictable
- Her children are struggling to remain in school – 27 children, revolving door of teachers from the South

- She watches as they airlift flight after flight of diesel into her community to provide heat and energy
- She works for her government – the only Gwitch’in citizen left in the Lands and Heritage Office
- She does not speak her language and watches fluent speakers pass away every year
- And every summer there are dozens of researchers from southern universities who come to her community – stay for a few months – and leave. She wonders what they are discovering.

Sarah wants to stay in her community and raise her children – but is not optimistic about its future.

This story is replicated across Yukon and across the North.

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The Chiefs knew 45 years ago that a university would change this story.

They understood the solution was for the North itself to be the agent of change – the drivers and decision-makers.

And that education, research, and community development must start in the North - with northern peoples.

Today Yukon College is on the threshold – in fact has crossed it – to achieving that dream of a university.

We know it is a bold vision

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But let me tell you about where we are today:

1. We are diverse - Yukon-born residents, international students, immigrants and their families, and migrants from other parts of Canada. 52% are already in university level programming – now mostly having to transfer south.
2. We deliver quality- was assessed by Campus Alberta Quality Council, against the same processes and standards that all Albertan universities must achieve before offering degrees. CAQC confirmed that we meet the organizational criteria and standards to deliver degree programs.
3. New degree - This fall, we will be offering our first MADE-IN-THE-YUKON degree! Developed by collaborating closely with the 14 Yukon First Nations, the degree is focused on producing graduates who will have a full understanding of Indigenous governance and public policy.
4. Six partner degrees – six partner universities – 3 baccalaureate 3 masters – some for 25 years – all in Yukon
5. Reconciliation – 100% focused and committed to using the lens of reconciliation to drive our growth - We have won Awards for our work in Reconciliation and tackling the very big questions like: what does the Indigenization of university governance look like? Or how to blend traditional knowledge across all disciplines for all students?
6. Hybrid – commitment to learning pathways – from upgrading, skills and career diplomas and certificates to graduate programs – and merging research and applied learning through our Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining, Northern Institute of Social Justice, and Cold Climate Innovation
7. Research

- a. two NSERC industrial research chairs - renewable energy solutions– across north; mining – contaminant remediation;
- b. SSHRC - collaborating with Champagne and Aishihik First Nation to co-lead climate change adaptation research; working with Yukon School of Visual Arts in Dawson to find ways of using artistic forms to translate complex scientific data

8. Dissemination – Northern Review – since 1988 – we published a peer reviewed journal in humanities exclusive to northern issues

9. Infrastructure – Ayamdigut campus in Whitehorse with new trades facility research lab, campus housing – embedded in the community;

- a. 11 campuses throughout Yukon
- b. Ability to deliver distance
- c. New land plan – 97 hectares to grow into

10. Partnerships – Pan-territorial NABE, UArctic, Mastercard Foundation and Rideau Hall Foundation

Finally and most importantly:

11. Community engagement – board, foundation board, CCCs, advisory boards, PACFNI – our community is our co-designer in the university

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Now – I ask you to look ahead to 2044 - 25 years from when Yukon College becomes Yukon University in 2019

- Imagine in Old Crow – Sarah’s children have completed degrees in environmental science, biology and climate change at Yukon University (YukonU) and are leading research on the Crow Flats
- Imagine Teslin – thriving community – because of the ability to ground their governance in a traditional clan system
- Imagine flourishing small business in every community started by YukonU graduates
- Imagine infrastructure and energy solutions that have been discovered and applied in communities across the north – solutions found by northerners studying in the North
- Imagine Indigenous peoples from around the globe coming regularly to the institute to learn from the successful implementation of Yukon modern treaties
- Imagine Canada joining the other Arctic States using a vibrant centre – located IN the North - attracting great thinkers to debate the critical issues of climate, policy, health, culture and language that affect the north.

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How do we get there?

- by listening. Listening to northerners and using that wisdom
- by attracting bright young minds to study in the North – and to stay
- by working together with the rest of Canada – and particularly the rest of Canada’s north.

When the new Yukon College main campus opened in 1988, it replaced the old building on the Yukon River.

Tagish Elder Angela Sidney was asked to give the new Yukon College campus a name.

She remembered a story - a killer whale house on the banks of a river – moving. Mrs. Sidney named the new campus Ayamdigut. - Tlingit for “She got up and went.”

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*On that day, Mrs. Sidney said: “The reason I sang this song .....is because that Yukon College is going to be like a Sun for those students. Instead of going to Vancouver or Victoria, they’re going to be able to stay here and go to school here. We’re not going to lose our kids anymore. It’s going to be just like the Sun for them”*

Yukon College is that now. That sun will shine even more brightly as Yukon University. I encourage you to learn more about our journey and our vision.

THANK YOU