

VIU feast recognizes good relationships

First nations theme highlights luncheon

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Vancouver Island University (VIU) celebrated partnerships and relationships at a first nations feast at the Powell River campus recently.

"We are bringing together a bunch of different traditions," said Sharon Hobenshield, VIU's director of aboriginal education. "The theme is celebrating partnerships and community development. At the core of that is relationship building. My grandfather always used to say, to do good is to be good. Simple words, but if we go into things with good hearts, good things will come."

Hobenshield said a good friend of hers recently said that relationship building is not romantic. "It's not just staring into each other's eyes and singing Kum Ba Ya," she said. "It's tough, especially between different groups. As first nations people and non-first nations people, sometimes building relationships is tough work. We have to have tough discussions but we persevere and learn from our elders who always come from a good place."

Ralph Nilson, VIU president and vice-chancellor, said one of the really important partnerships that VIU is developing, and knows it has a huge responsibility for, is with the first nations communities that it is involved in. "The fact that the Sliammon [Tla'Amin First Nation] people have welcomed us into their territory and have provided us with the level of support that they have...I think there are some very important opportunities for us as we look at that fastest-growing percentage of the population in all of our communities," Nilson said. He added that considering new discussions and developing opportunities, "places like Powell River are going to be involved in creating some of the models and some of the opportunities, and already are. Leadership is being provided for the rest of the province. With all of us working together, we can achieve some very positive things."

Jeanette Scott, vice-chair of School District 47 Board of Education, said the event provided the opportunity to celebrate successful partnership with VIU, but moreover, it recognized commitment to broaden the work with first nations. "School District 47 and VIU have a rich history of working together," she said.

Scott said she wanted to recognize the Tla'Amin and Klahoose first nations for partnering with the educational institutions to make education and training a top priority. "Without their trust, commitment and willingness to work with us, we couldn't have achieved the level of success that we have," she said.