



## The **Leo Panitch Scholarship** at **Merchants Corner**

**Leo Panitch** was an enthusiastic and generous supporter of Merchants Corner, an innovative and unique academic initiative in Winnipeg's North End. It was here that Leo grew up, deeply influenced by a working class subculture rich in history and embedded in socialist ideals.

Merchants Corner is an educational complex at which the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies runs university-level courses during the day, and CEDA-Pathways to Education runs an after-school, high school support program.



### **The Reinvention**

The building was previously the Merchants Hotel in Winnipeg's North End, once a thriving business in a robust city, but which later became infamous as a magnet for various forms of violence and drug dealing. In 2012, a broadly based community coalition was successful - with strong financial support from the previous provincial government and a wide range of contributors, and with the strong backing of the local community, now predominantly Indigenous - in acquiring the Merchants Hotel and six adjoining city lots. The architecture of the reconstructed space is particularly sensitive to both progressive pedagogy and the cultural roots of the neighbourhood's current residents. Merchants Corner opened in 2017. As Kevin Chief, then the Member of the Legislature for the area, described it at the official opening ceremony, the previously notorious space went "from beer bottles to books."

### **The Program**

The University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies had moved from the main campus to the North End in 2010, operating on the premise that its physical location in the neighbourhood would make it possible to create an environment in which low-income, North End students who would not otherwise have attended university, could thrive.

The initiative is working, High school graduation rates in the North End have been rising and university courses are fully enrolled, with many courses wait-listed. Students who have grown up in poverty are attending university and growing numbers are graduating.



In May, 2019, during the Winnipeg General Strike Centenary Conference, Leo and a group of other Conference participants asked for a tour of Merchants Corner. Excited by what they saw, they immediately organized a fund-raising initiative, with Leo playing the key role. In the course of the tour, Leo pointed out that when he was very young, his family had lived right across the street from what was then the Merchants Hotel. Leo had benefitted enormously from the educational opportunities made available to him in the North End, including the afterschool I.L. Peretz Folk School, where instruction was in both Yiddish and English. Today, the curriculum at Merchants Corner has a strong but by no means exclusively Indigenous character.

### **The Scholarship**

The new Leo Panitch Scholarship will support students in the Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies at Merchants Corner who have academic ability, financial need and who have experiential knowledge of the North End. The Scholarship will also enable senior students to gain work experience as community outreach workers. They will be paid to go to North End high schools and junior high schools to make students aware of the opportunity to attend university right in their neighbourhood.

The multiple benefits of this scholarship include more young people in the North End attending university and benefitting from the unique curriculum and atmosphere created at Merchants Corner. As well, senior Urban and Inner-City Studies students will gain invaluable work experience—under the supervision of Department faculty—in organizing and delivering the program of presentations to high school and junior high school teachers and students. The part-time income for students employed in this way will help finance the continuation of their studies toward a degree.

Leo would be thrilled to know that the Leo Panitch Scholarship is being created in his name. In a sense, the educational work at Merchants Corner represents a coming full circle for Leo. We are extremely pleased to have the opportunity to invite your support for this remarkable project in the memory of this great and creative socialist thinker and activist, who never forgot his origins in Winnipeg's North End.



Please forward charitable donations by cheque to  
The Winnipeg Foundation  
For the Leo Panitch Scholarship at Merchants Corner  
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Or by credit card at: <https://www.wpgfdn.org/LeoPanitch>

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