



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG



RED RIVER  
COLLEGE  
OF APPLIED ARTS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **LearningCITI Partnership Addresses Digital Divide, Provides Innovative Wireless Technology in Downtown Winnipeg**

WINNIPEG— University of Winnipeg President Lloyd Axworthy, Red River College President Jeff Zabudsky, Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) President Wayne Helgason and Smart Partners of Manitoba Chair Simone Smith together launched their unique LearningCITI project today.

LearningCITI (Computer and Information Technology Infrastructure) is a technically-innovative wireless service in downtown Winnipeg. It bridges the digital divide by providing free Internet access—as well as beneficial learning resources and tools—at points across the downtown and the inner city. The LearningCITI portal ([www.learningciti.ca](http://www.learningciti.ca)) promotes community learning, knowledge transfer, and social and economic development opportunities. The open learning environment provides employment and self-employment resources, recreation and community information, library and on-line course material and EduGaming, an interactive and fun learning tool to engage youth.

“The University of Winnipeg is proud to lead this partnership with Red River College, the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development and Smart Partners. We are committed to connecting with our downtown community in educational pursuits and addressing the imbalance of computer literacy within society,” said Dr. Axworthy. “LearningCITI opens doors by providing free wireless Internet access and exceptional learning resources to the Aboriginal and inner-city communities as well as to newcomers to Canada.”

The LearningCITI project began in December 2004 with an objective to build open access hot spots using leading-edge WiMAX technology bringing UWinnipeg, Red River College and CAHRD together to develop and share academic resources for students from the three campuses. Smart Partners joined the partnership shortly thereafter, bringing a unique community connection to the project.

“As a leading institute of applied learning, Red River College strives to stay on the cutting edge of technology and innovation,” said Zabudsky. “We are excited to take part in this innovative project, and about the potential use of emerging wireless communication technology to support our learners in an anywhere, anytime environment.”

Funding from the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement along with funds and in-kind investments from UWinnipeg, RRC and CAHRD supported the installation and implementation in January 2006 of the initial WiMAX base station at The University of Winnipeg, and the WiMAX receivers and WiFi equipment at RRC Princess Street campus, CAHRD and UWinnipeg’s Division of Continuing Education. Since then, two additional WiMAX receivers and WiMesh technologies were acquired

which provide free, wireless Internet access to specific blocks in North Point Douglas and at the International Centre on Edmonton Street.

“Canada’s new Government understands the importance of supporting and promoting the expansion of technology,” said the Honourable Carol Skelton, Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Western Economic Diversification. “Through Western Economic Diversification Canada, we are helping to provide the people of Winnipeg with the resources, tools and opportunities they need to be inspired, grow and succeed.

“We are pleased to have provided, through the tri-level Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, funding support that allowed these key players to move ahead with their innovative plans to create cutting-edge wireless Internet service in Winnipeg’s downtown and enhance educational opportunities for students. Their project boosts the sharing of knowledge and enhances social and economic development opportunities,” said Advanced Education and Literacy Minister Diane McGifford.

“We congratulate the partners of LearningCITI for their visionary initiative,” said Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz. “This is the first step in creating a wireless Downtown Winnipeg that will benefit all Winnipeggers and move our city forward.”

As the project progressed, the aim shifted to provide wireless Internet access and learning resources and tools to members of the community, particularly those in the downtown core. By extending the reach of the project, members of the Aboriginal community (through the North Point Douglas Women’s Centre) and immigrant/refugee populations (through the International Centre) are now included as subscribers to LearningCITI.

“The partnership between CAHRD, The University of Winnipeg and Red River College is the continuum of relationships that provide opportunity and promise to the Aboriginal community of Winnipeg. Although each institution is distinct, this partnership leverages and helps unify future educational opportunities between these three downtown educational hubs,” said Helgason, adding LearningCITI also encourages the development of innovative approaches for student retention, enhances access to career information and provides mentoring and support for Aboriginal learners.

For Smart Partners, LearningCITI was a natural fit with its Computer Lending Library program — which provides computer training and refurbished computers to those with limited or no access to computers and communication technology. To date, Smart Partners has lent 600 computers to downtown families demonstrating a good will on both sides to close the digital divide and create technological inclusiveness.

“Smart Partners of Manitoba has supported the LearningCITI project because wireless technologies enable community and economic development in a Smart city,” says Smith. “Having a partnership with LearningCITI offers momentum for the partners to find ways to share resources for greater community development. An increase in connectivity for a community is always followed by an increase in citizen participation in the global economy.”

LearningCITI has already met technological milestones in the deployment of WiMAX and WiFi systems and constructed a framework from which to build further wireless neighbourhoods. Future public and private partnerships will ensure that LearningCITI continues to evolve on both the content and technological fronts.

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