

## Grand Opening of the New TNFC Building

The Timmins and Native Friendship Centre celebrated the opening of its new Kirby Street location on Friday, June 21st. On hand for the grand opening were Friendship Centre board chairman Gary Martin, MP Charlie Angus (NDP — Timmins-James Bay) and Timmins Mayor Tom Laughren, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, Friendship Centre executive director Veronica Nicholson and MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP — Timmins-James Bay). Daily Press Photos and Article [Opening the Doors of the Kirby Street Location](#)



Premier helps open new Friendship Centre

By Kyle Gennings, The Daily Press (Timmins)

Friday, June 21, 2013 4:41:04 EDT PM

The newly opened Timmins Native Friendship Centre was unveiled on Friday afternoon with help from Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne as the facility celebrated National Aboriginal Day. The Centre has been contributing to the city's cultural mosaic for more than 40 years. Dignitaries on hand for the grand opening include: Back row, from left, Friendship Centre board chairman Gary Martin, MP Charlie Angus (NDP — Timmins-James Bay) and Timmins Mayor Tom Laughren; and front row, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, Friendship Centre executive director Veronica Nicholson and MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP — Timmins-James Bay).

## [Daily Press Article:](#)

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TIMMINS - As National Aboriginal Day was being celebrated in Hollinger Park, a different moment of pride was taking place at the new Timmins Native Friendship Centre on Friday afternoon.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne was on hand to cut the ribbon at the new Kirby Street facility, ushering in another era in the Centre's longstanding history.

"It is a pleasure for me to be here on the sacred grounds of the Treaty Nine peoples," said Wynne. "This is an impressive feat. This new Centre is beautiful and I know that this place has been a crucially important part of this community for the past 40 years."

Wynne has a soft spot for the Centre given that it once employed her daughter, who met her future partner through the facility.

"My daughter Jessie worked here and did a great many things," said Wynne. "But most importantly, she met her partner here and now I have many grand babies because of that and to me, it is honestly the best thing."

Having a first hand look at how much the facility has grown over the past four decades, the Premier is proud that funding made available from her government played a role in the building of the new facility.

"You've done so much together to make this a great community place, for the people and the First Nations of Timmins," she said. "I am really proud that our government could help to support this important project and I know that government can't do everything, government can't be on the ground all of the time, but government can support community and that is the best of what government does."

The significance of the facility and its programs could not be understated.

"This is a place through which people can turn in their time of need," said Wynne. "And of course they can find their community, to meet new people, to make new friends and develop new relationships."

It was a fitting location for the Premier to celebrate National Aboriginal Day.

"It has been my experience with friendship centres around the province, they are gathering places and hubs for community and growth," she said. "So I cannot think of a better of a better place to be on National Aboriginal Day."

Over its 40-year lifespan, the facility and its employees may have changed, but for board chairman Gary Martin, the growth will only continue to benefit his peoples and his community.

“I recall this Friendship Centre when it first started, it was probably half the size of the gym that we are now in,” he said. “I think we only had four program workers at that time. So I think it is safe to say that we’ve come a long way since that time. And looking around the room now, I still think that this Friendship Centre is too small.”

The people and initiatives that have been put in place to help the facility and its work grow, will continue to create a strong presence in Timmins.

“The commitment to growth that we have from our board of directors and our community partners will see this facility grow even further,” said Martin. “As with all agencies, we go through growing pains and we move forward stronger, there is a good reason that we’ve won the Model Friendship Centre Award three years in a row and it is because of our staff, our people and our community and positive change.”

For MPP Gilles Bisson (NDP — Timmins-James Bay), the presence of the Premier in Timmins on National Aboriginal Day speaks volumes about the continued work being done to ensure treaty equality and understanding.

“I think that what we’ve learned over the years because of places like the Timmins Native Friendship Centre,” he said. “It has been because of the many people who have reached across and made an effort to understand, we have moved forward, but not far enough.”

Bisson made reference to the treaties signed shortly after the formation of Canada.

“Our forefathers sat down to sign the treaties, it was about a really simple concept called sharing,” said Bisson. “All of this great land that we have in Northern Ontario and all of these great resources that we have were to be shared. And what I have learned over the years is that, when we signed treaty, it was all about saying this land is for all of us, we should all benefit.”

Staying true to the original intent is the way forward as far as Bisson sees it.

“Unfortunately for many years, my people, the non-Aboriginals, forgot about that,” he said. “We were really good about signing the treaties, but we weren’t very good about keeping our word, but because of places like the Native Friendship Centre and the people who made it possible, people like Charlie (MP Angus), Kathleen and I have learned over the years that we need to live up to what these treaties are all about.”

Building upon the steps taken by the Friendship Centre, the city and the province, Bisson holds the future of cultural togetherness in high hopes.

“If we truly are as one, as a city, a province and a country want to move ahead economically, socially and culturally,” said Bisson. “We have to do it together and that spirit of Treaty 9 which was signed over 100 years ago in the Province of Ontario by Canada and by our First Nations is about that concept and we need to revisit that in order to move forward.”