

GORDON OAKES REDBEAR STUDENT CENTRE



"The truth about stories is, that's all we are."
Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories*

Buildings tell stories. They tell the stories of the people who desire them, the people who pay for them, the people who design them, the people who make them, and ultimately the people who inhabit them. Buildings tell the stories of *who we are* and *who we desire to be*. The Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre is stories of Indigenous knowledge, told in a building, told in stone.



Beginning in 2007, the UofS hired the architectural team of Douglas Cardinal Architect and RBM Architecture to design a stand-alone building to house the Aboriginal Student Centre. Then President Peter MacKinnon personally shepherded the project forward, with the concept of bringing Indigenous knowledge to the center of campus life.

The building was named after Gordon Oakes an Elder and graduate of the UofS dedicated to education and welcoming to all. He often spoke of culture and education as a team of horses, needing both to succeed

The basic form of the building is a sculptural expression of organic architecture. Buff limestone from Tindall, Manitoba is used to express the form, balancing the contemporary and dramatic architecture with a timeless quality. The building is designed as a spiritual lodge with limestone wrapping to protect the north, opening to the south. The opening to the south is protected by a massive cantilevered canopy of suspended limestone above it. The buff colour of the limestone also tells the story of the building as a buckskin blanket. A mother protects the building from the cold north wind and opening to the warm south sun. This story is reinforced with the stone "beads" decorating the building.



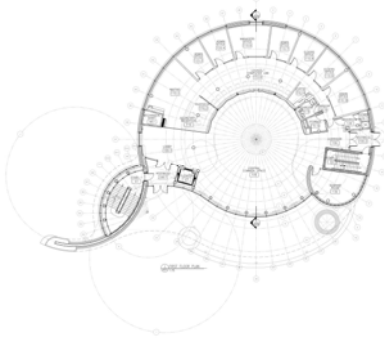
Natural coloured granite is used in each of the four directions, reflecting the colours of the Gordon Oakes family. Purple-grey granite fills in the rest of the design, with the colour chosen to match the colour of Wampum, a shell product used for 1000 years as a gift and for belts of treaty and prophecy. Yet another story told by the stone is the contrast of the buff limestone with the blue glass and blue anodized aluminum frames. In story and symbol these elements evoke grandfather stone and grandmother water, the elements of the sweat ceremony.



The plan of the main space of the building is based on teachings that the circle is the symbolic base for healing, knowledge and equality: the foundation for all Indigenous ceremonies. The Gathering Space is both the symbolic a base for the building's plan, with its center on the ground with a view to the sky above. At the direction of the Elders, the original earth beneath the center of the Gathering Space is retained to ensure that ceremonies in the space happen directly on the ground.

The building integrates sculptural qualities with sustainable solutions for the building envelope, mechanical systems, passive solar gain, material selections, and energy and water management strategies.

The 1946 m2 Student Centre houses the Indigenous Students Council and the Aboriginal Students Centre, with space for studies and ceremonies. It connects via underground tunnels to the Arts Building and Murray Library, and to the newly renovated Health Sciences.



These are some of the stories of this building. They are stories in stone that demonstrate how buildings can embody the truth about the world, through poetic expression and timeless presence. The building demonstrates demonstrates how an entire community of many partners come together to tell profound and important stories in new and amazing ways.

To quote Tomas King again from his book *The Truth About Stories*:

"Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now."

