

NEWS RELEASE

PenFinancial Credit Union is awarded \$25,000 grant to support the Grow @ Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre program



October 4, 2024 – WELLAND ON – As part of Concentra and EQ Bank’s Empowering Your Community grant program, PenFinancial is pleased to announce that they’ve been awarded \$25,000 to support the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre’s ‘Grow’ program, which provides holistic, sustainable, and land-based Indigenous learning to the Centre’s participants and the wider community partners.

The Empowering Your Community grant program exists to facilitate community initiatives that help improve mental health, support housing initiatives, honour indigenous resurgence and strengthen food security for the vulnerable. The program has awarded over \$2 million in grants to credit unions since 2011 and has made an incredible impact in communities across Canada. EQ Bank and Concentra’s joint cultures are strongly aligned with the cooperative spirit of the credit union ecosystem and with directly supporting communities in need to enrich Canadians’ lives. Concentra is proud to support credit unions across the country and their more than six million members with wholesale banking and trust solutions.

In the fall of 2023, the Grow @ FENFC program was one of four recipients of PenFinancial’s first ever Truly Local Grant program. They received \$8,000 to purchase 3 greenhouses to kick the program off in the spring of 2024. The Grow program, spearheaded by the staff at FENFC and the Greater Fort Erie Secondary School, is highly focused on skill development and empowerment for youth. The entire vision from conception to harvest allows participants to learn and develop knowledge and skills. What the participants learn can easily be transferred into their daily lives and transmitted within and throughout the wider Niagara community. Working and learning about greenhouse and intensive local farming also means exploring modern agriculture, resource management, and small-scale farming techniques which can have a positive impact on the holistic well-being of all involved.

“PenFinancial is dedicated to improving lives and strengthening communities, and we are confident that this program and the team at the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre do just that,” said Shari Sekel, CEO at PenFinancial. “We are thrilled to receive this funding from EQ Bank to support the Grow @ FENFC program. By investing in this program, we are ensuring that the Indigenous-led learning and cultural connections to growing, harvesting and sustainable practices continue.”

The \$25,000 will enable the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre to expand the scope of the Grow program, reaching more participants and enhancing the resources available to them. This funding will provide garden beds, accessible pathways and beds, a seed library, Indigenous guest speakers and workshops, and a student part-time job to learn about gardening, sustainability, and Indigenous Resurgence and Resilience.

"We are super excited and truly blessed for this opportunity to support our community with the Grow @ FENFC program," said Dianna Sowden, FENFC Educational Liaison Officer. "We are so thankful for all of the encouragement, help, and support as we prepared this application and would like to thank PenFinancial Credit Union, Concentra and EQ Bank. This is a wonderful opportunity for our students and for the FENFC community at large. Thank you so much!" PenFinancial Credit Union is proud to facilitate this impactful collaboration and is committed to supporting initiatives that drive community well-being and growth. Make sure you follow along on this exciting journey by connecting with us on social media.

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About the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre:

The Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre has a rich history of revitalizing Indigenous traditions and culture that were suppressed for decades. Established in the late 1970s as the Fort Erie Native Social Club, it provided a safe space for Indigenous people facing discrimination. By 1983, the Centre incorporated as a non-profit and became the first fully funded satellite Friendship Centre in Canada. Located at 303 Niagara Boulevard, it offered crucial programs in literacy, employment, and youth services. In 1988, the Centre moved to 796 Buffalo Road, where it expanded its facilities to include a gym, daycare, preschool, and literacy programs. Our mission remains "To Enhance all Aspects of Native Life While Extending Friendship to the Community," and through our values of Tradition, Friendship, Respect, and Compassion, we continue to support and uplift our community.

About EQ Bank

Equitable Bank has a clear mission to drive change in Canadian banking to enrich people's lives. As Canada's Challenger Bank™ and seventh largest bank by assets, it leverages technology to deliver exceptional personal and commercial banking experiences and services to over 670,000 customers and more than six million credit union members through its businesses. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of EQB Inc. (TSX: EQB and EQB.PR.C), a leading digital financial services company with \$125 billion in combined assets under management and administration (as at July 31, 2024). Through its digital EQ Bank platform (eqbank.ca), its customers have named it one of the top banks in Canada on the Forbes World's Best Banks list since 2021.

To learn more, please visit eqb.investorroom.com or connect with us on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/equitablebank).

About PenFinancial Credit Union

PenFinancial Credit Union is a truly local values-based credit union committed to improving the lives its nearly 20,000 members and businesses. PenFinancial delivers a full range of financial services digitally and through a network of six branches across Niagara and Haldimand. Through their Truly Local Commitment, the credit union is a proud Certified B Corporation and Living Wage employer who invests a portion of their pre-tax profits into the communities it serves. PenFinancial is also proud to choose 100% renewable energy with Bullfrog Power as part of their commitment to environmental sustainability. For more information visit penfinancial.com.

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