

Niigaan, left, and Dené Sinclair speak at the renaming of the junior high to Ecole Murray Sinclair Middle School.

Murray Sinclair Memorial Fund established at SDCF

The legacy of the Hon. Murray Sinclair will live on in Selkirk through Ecole Murray Sinclair Middle School and through the endowment fund created in his memory by his family.

During the official renaming ceremony of Ecole Selkirk Junior High on Oct. 7, Sinclair's daughter Dené Sinclair announced the establishment of the Murray Sinclair Memorial Fund at the Selkirk & District Community Foundation. This fund will provide grants to the school, to support students' participation in music and sports.

"I'm so pleased to share news of the new student award through an endowment that the Murray Sinclair Memorial Fund has made to the Selkirk & District Community Foundation," Dené said to a gym filled with family, friends, students and staff from the school.

“These awards are going to support students here at Ecole Murray Sinclair Middle School, so this is a message for you guys at the back – the awards that we’re establishing here at this school will support students’ education and wellbeing through participation in music and sports…Our dad loved sports, but especially he loved supporting young athletes and supporting young people to achieve their dreams.”

Sinclair was Manitoba’s first and Canada’s second Indigenous judge, he served as the co-commissioner of the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal Peoples of Manitoba, was Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and served as a Canadian Senator.

Dené said her dad quietly donated to many teams and individual athletes over the years, but he also was passionate about the power of music.

“He loved music and always had music in the car and in the house,” she said.

“He had the most diverse collection of music of anyone I’ve ever known. To the students, no matter what kind of music you love, no matter what kind of instrument you play, as long as you’re following your dream, this is something that we want to help you do…Our dad’s goal was always to be the best Anishanaabe person he could be, and for him, I know that meant to be kind, to be a good relative and to be a good neighbour. It also meant for him that he needed to know who he was. Our hope for this fund and these awards is that they’ll help some young people to make new goals, to explore themselves and to find out who they are.”

School Principal Daryl Loeppky said Murray and the Sinclair family have deep roots in Selkirk and the lawyer, judge and senator excelled in his studies and as an athlete at the school, which when he attended was known as Selkirk Collegiate. In 1968, Murray was named Male Athlete of the Year and voted valedictorian by his classmates.

“Murray himself walked these halls, learned math, physics, and English in these classrooms and played basketball in this very gym,” Loeppky said.

“As we know, Murray used his many talents to make a positive difference in the world by shining a light on some of the darkest moments in Canadian history and giving us a roadmap to move forward. It is our intention to carry on Murray's legacy in the location where he got some of his formative education.”

Sinclair’s son Niigaan spoke about his dad’s love for Selkirk.

“Dad cared immensely of this place. He loved this place,” Niigaan said.

“He went around the entire country from coast to coast to coast, every classroom, every boardroom, courtrooms, and he'd talk about this place. He would talk about this community. And I want you to know how immensely proud he was to come from here.”

Niigaan said Selkirk was imprinted on his father and he never forgot the people he met in this community.

“One of the amazing things about dad was he loved visiting. He loved telling stories and he most of all loved learning about people. He loved hearing their stories. He especially loved the stories of young people. He really believed that if we just visited enough, if we just laughed enough, if we just cried enough together, we could do anything. And he learned that from this community.”

Deborah Vitt, Chair of the Foundation, said it’s an honour to host a fund that bears the name of the esteemed former student of Selkirk, and changemaker in the province, the country, and the world.

“At the Foundation, we are honoured the Sinclair family chose SDCF as a place to keep the Hon. Murray Sinclair’s legacy,” Vitt said.

“Clearly, he was a man who valued education and following your dreams. With the establishment of the Murray Sinclair Memorial Fund, he has ensured that generations of young people will have opportunities to achieve their dreams, and perhaps go on to make a difference in the world, just as the Hon. Murray Sinclair did.”

In the spirit of the Hon. Murray Sinclair, we encourage everyone to donate to the Selkirk & District Community Foundation during Endow Manitoba Giving Challenge, Nov. 9-15. Donations will be stretched during the challenge, thanks to the Province of Manitoba and Endow Manitoba.