

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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Ellice Café and Theatre

The Ellice Cafe & Theatre is a business operated by a non-profit in Winnipeg's West End, established by New Life Ministries (NLM) in 2005 in order to contribute certain community services, and to generate financial support for their community initiatives.

The revived Theatre operates on a break-even basis. The Ellice Café is a friendly place locals can go for quality affordable food and entertainment—a place that draws people from all parts of the city to Winnipeg's West End. Everyone is welcome there and everyone is treated with respect. Community members are working hard to revitalize this inner city neighbourhood, and Ellice Café plays an important role.

The Café and Theatre have created local jobs and offer skill development to community members through volunteering, job training and employment. Typically, 20–22 employees work part-time as servers and cooks for both the café and its catering service (the café manager is full-time, and the head cook works 30–35 hours/week). In the past year,

the café also had about six volunteers working each week: these individuals often hear about the project through the church or, more recently, through the Winnipeg School Division. To strengthen the business, the café pays for employees to attend the city's food handling course. Once they are certified, these individuals are responsible for training new staff and volunteers. The Theatre also employs one part-time staff member and is run mostly by the effort of volunteers. The majority of staff live in the West End area; while employees are not required to live locally, café management aims to hire neighbourhood residents. This →



➔ practice encourages community building and is appreciated by their local ‘regulars.’ Local relationships and opinions are important to café management. Before launching the project, NLM asked local residents for input; one result is that the café does not serve alcohol, since community members recovering from addictions wanted a ‘dry’ place to relax and enjoy a meal.

Through the Café, NLM runs a subsidized food service for low-income people, primarily for residents of their transitional housing projects (see below), although they are currently expanding this program to include local low-income community residents. They also support local artists, who can rent the theatre at very low rates to present plays, concerts and films; these groups keep the revenue from ticket sales. Recently, the café has introduced live music nights, featuring local volunteer artists who appreciate the exposure and love the atmosphere.

Now that the nearby West End Cultural Centre has reopened, management hopes to partner with them to organize a West End Film Festival. The event would promote local filmmakers and films featuring issues relevant to the neighbourhood. All of these activities make Ellice Café and Theatre a popular place and a successful venture for New Life Ministries.

While many people have become familiar with Ellice Café, few people really know about New Life Ministries. NLM is a community Baptist church rooted in the heart of the West End that opened in 1983. About 80% of the people who attend Church services live in the immediate neighbourhood, and approximately 65% of those who attend live below

the poverty line. The members and attendees are a group interested in community development: they are involved in more than 50 different groups and agencies serving Winnipeg and other areas. The Church performs community organizing around issues such as zoning in the neighbourhood and integration (in local schools for example).

The Theatre and Café are not the only community economic development initiatives undertaken by New Life Ministries. NLM’s major development projects include local housing renovations and a property management enterprise. In these initiatives, NLM works both with those interested in or-

ganized religion, and those who are not. Through their non-profit Lazarus Housing project, NLM purchased, renovated and sold 26 previously derelict, vacant houses in the area. To complete the renovations, they worked with volunteers, professionals and local construction training initiatives. Then, they sold the homes to low-

income people from the community who agreed to live in the house (and stay in the neighbourhood) for a minimum of 5 years. In addition to creating quality housing, this program helps raise neighbourhood property values. Through the Nehemiah Housing project, which began in 1998, NLM renovates and rents quality apartments, currently owning 90 units in 5 buildings in the West End.

NLM is renewing the local community infrastructure, creating jobs and training opportunities, facilitating home ownership, working toward neighbourhood stability, and creating a high quality social enterprise restaurant where local people can enjoy great food and good company.

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