

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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# The Chocolate Shop & Patal Vocational School

At the historical Chocolate Shop restaurant, this nearly century-old local institution is re-inventing itself in a new and unique way. The menu cover declares this to be “Winnipeg’s Oldest Operating Restaurant Since 1918” and reminisces that in its early days, the Chocolate Shop was a busy dining room that was open from early morning to late evening for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and anything in between.

In its first six decades, the Chocolate Shop was one of the most popular spots on Winnipeg’s Portage Avenue, and the second-floor bakery was legendary for its fancy pastries in the 1930s and 1940s. Over the years, however, as Portage Avenue’s role as a major shopping and entertainment destination declined in importance, business at the Chocolate Shop also declined as fewer people made the trek downtown.

Change was required, so the restaurant transformed

itself into a training centre for young Aboriginal cooking students as one of Patal Vocational School’s training sites. The Chocolate Shop now provides a venue for the Patal School’s Hospitality program and a Cook Level One training program. Cooks-in-training are responsible for much of the work at the Chocolate Shop and bring unique twists to the menu by incorporating traditional foods such as bison, pickerel and bannock into many popular dishes. This allows students to promote Aboriginal Culture to the general public while building capacity for the Aboriginal staff and students. The once-famous bakeshop, which dates back to 1918, →



➔ has been restored to former glory, and now provides all of the breads, baking, and desserts for restaurant and cafeteria. The bakeshop also hosts Patal's Entry Level Baking Course. This enterprise continues to grow, particularly with the recent expansion into a second location, "The Chocolate Shop on Campus," at the University of Manitoba.

Patal has been a registered privately owned vocational school since 1986, when it was started with youth Federal Funding. In addition to The Chocolate Shop, Patal has a number of training sites in Northern Manitoba. Due to its small size, Patal Vocational can deliver diploma programs to its students in a caring, supportive, culturally appropriate environment. At Patal, Aboriginal students, many from remote reserves, get the training they require for jobs in their home communities or in other towns and cities.

Patal's students do their homework on tables in the former candy-making room and bakeshop, and other rooms are filled with computers which serve as training for computer service technicians. Patal partners with Computers for Schools to refurbish computers and donates the computers to students, low income families and First Nations Communities."

Some of the students are at-risk youth, trying to make the transition from gang involvement, incarceration, and street life. A supportive and multi-faceted approach to employment development is required and is critical to the success of the students, given the multiple barriers that they face in labour

market integration. The success of Patal students is largely credited to the caring and well-trained staff providing support, skills training and transition into places of employment. Job placements are made possible through to a well-developed network of employers who consistently hire Patal graduates. The training centre's statistics are impressive; there is a consistent 90% retention rate, and an 85% success rate for employment placement and/or further training or education.

In recognition of their important and effective work, Patal has received a number of recent awards including the Champion for Aboriginal Employment award from IANE, the Mayor's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Downtown Winnipeg, the Achievement Award for Best Long Term Entrepreneurial Commitment to Downtown Winnipeg Biz, and an award of recognition from Juvenile Diabetes Association. In addition, Chocolate Shop owner Terry Sakiyama was recently recognized for her leadership role, as the recipient of the 2010 Contribution to Community award, presented by the Women's Business Owner Association.

While not a non-profit, co-operative, community-led initiative, or business that would normally be defined as a social enterprise, Patal Vocational School and The Chocolate Shop are privately owned initiatives taking a strong CED and social enterprise approach to employment development resulting in the transition to jobs for many Aboriginal people.

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