March 29, 2021

Hello Selkirk College Saints Supporters.

It has been a challenging year for the Selkirk College community and I would like to thank all students, staff and community members for the positive spirit and determination that has helped ensure learners are getting the best post-secondary education possible under the conditions thrust upon us by COVID-19. As we approach the coming months with optimism for a recovery that includes a return to more normal levels of in-person activity in September 2021, the impact of the pandemic will continue to ripple for many years to come.

With tightened budgets and renewal focus shifted, one of the unfortunate outcomes of the last 12 months is the fate of our Selkirk College men’s hockey team. It is with a heavy heart that we are officially announcing that the team will be discontinued. This was a very difficult decision, but the current landscape in our region and province made the idea of icing a team into the future not possible.

Department head for Athletics, Recreation & Student Life, Kim Verigin, is the engine that has powered the men’s hockey team since the start of this current iteration of men’s hockey at Selkirk College. Kim was instrumental in the formation of the British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League (BCIHL) in 2006 and helped build the program to its climax of four straight provincial championships between 2013 and 2016. The institution is grateful for his tireless work and we thank Kim for putting on full display that the underdog rural community college can succeed at a level few expected.

The college would also like to express our sincere thanks to coach Dave Hnatiuk who has shown tremendous resilience since arriving to the West Kootenay in 2019. This is a disappointing end that had nothing to with his efforts over the last two years. He has been beyond professional and unfortunately the root of this decision is something completely out of his hands. We wish him the best in his future pursuits and know that success will follow him.

It’s important to recognize the important contribution of current Selkirk College student-athletes and the program’s alumni. The majority of these young men arrived from outside of our region and quickly became enthusiastic ambassadors of our college. Those players from our region who were given an opportunity to play for their home team were a proud legacy of the minor hockey programs scattered across our communities. All of the graduating players have provided something meaningful while they were here and we are proud to have played a role in where
they are now. We appreciate the mark every player who has pulled on jersey has left on Selkirk College.

A successful college hockey program does not happen without support staff, passionate fans and community sponsors. The men’s hockey team has benefited tremendously from those who filled the seats at the Castlegar & District Recreation Complex over the years. Students, staff and the community embraced the effort of these student-athletes on the ice and visiting teams were always astounded by the raucous atmosphere in our home rink. For those with a passion for the game of hockey, we understand that this is a disappointing decision. We can take some solace in the shared experience of cheering on the home team over the last 15 seasons. Those memories will live on in college lore.

As we move forward, the Department of Athletics, Recreation & Student Life remains an essential component of Selkirk College. Though we no longer have a team competing at the varsity level, we are all Saints. Since the doors first opened in 1966, athletics and recreation has been a vital part of the overall Selkirk College experience. An increased focus will now shift to enhanced offerings for all students on all our campuses. As part of the overall planning for the 2021-2022 academic year, the college community can expect to see plenty of opportunity for participation and activities. This is critical to the overall wellness of students and staff.

As the institution places current focus on what can be accomplished within overall budgetary constraints, the possibility for a return to varsity athletics will inevitably be explored in the future. When the time is right, those decisions will be considered through a lens of equity that will ensure the college proceeds with both male and female teams.

On a personal level, I have played hockey my whole life and my background in the post-secondary sector has deep roots in recreation/athletics departments. This was not an easy decision to make, but in these current times it was necessary. In the coming months, I am looking forward to working together to bring an exciting and healthy future to our college community.

*John Kincaid, Vice President of Students & Advancement*