

Background

How did we get here?

A short history of ACU's move to the North End

Fifteen years ago, as banks were pulling out of Winnipeg's oldest and poorest neighbourhoods, Assiniboine Credit Union members were pulling us into deeper and richer relationships with Winnipeg's diverse North-End community.

As banks' head offices — in Toronto and Montreal — abandoned the North End, Assiniboine Credit Union leaders were talking about what role and responsibility we had as a financial co-operative to serve the increasing number of people without convenient access to affordable financial services.

And as other financial institutions made unilateral decisions to withdraw their services, ACU staff were researching, meeting, talking, asking and listening to the people who live and work in the North-End to determine how, together, we could grow financial services and be part of an inspiring North-End renewal.

Enter 'fringe' outlets

In that time we witnessed the North End lose 10 storefront banks between 1996 and 2009. Other fringe financial services moved

Together with community organizations, we were becoming increasingly concerned that people of low and moderate income had fewer options to manage their money and their debts. Many citizens in the core area were living in a costly cash economy with no place to affordably cash their cheques, save money, set up automatic bill payments or direct deposits, or get reasonably priced loans and mortgages — things that most of us take for granted. And the fees at some of the fringe outlets were very high.

Offering an alternative

By 1997 community-minded organizations created the Alternative Financial Services Coalition (AFSC), of which ACU was a founding partner. Other founding partners were Mennonite Central Committee, Northend Stella (United Church of Canada), SEED Winnipeg (Supporting Employment and Economic Development) and the United

Working with AFSC, the North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC) secured funding for research that led ACU and NECRC to partner in launching the Community Financial Services Centre in November 2006. As a pilot project it was housed in a former bank building now owned by Mount Carmel Clinic on Main Street. It was the first financial service of its kind in Canada, creating a real option for low-income people to open accounts, deposits cheques, get access to their cash quickly and access financial education. By the end of September 2011, over 700 CFSC clients had opened accounts at ACU and had access to a range of affordable financial services.

The CFSC met an important need in the community and as a pilot project, taught us some powerful lessons about what other affordable financial services the North End would need.

Support for a local branch

At the same time a number of community groups, led by Aboriginal Visioning and NECRC were looking for a community-friendly credit union to open in the North End and help revitalize the community. Several of them acted as advisors as we developed the vision, service model and business case for our McGregor Branch.

In early 2010 the ACU Board of Directors gave ACU management the green light to open a branch in the North End that would be sustainable for years to come. However, approval was conditional on raising at least \$6 million in new business dedicated to this branch before we could begin. That was quickly exceeded and by September 2011, we were renovating a former bank branch at 360 McGregor for ACU's newest branch to open in early 2012.



quickly to fill the need — cheque-cashing outlets, payday-loan operations, pawnshops and rent-to-own stores. In fact by 2009, 16 fringe outlets were operating in the North End.

Church — Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario Conference. Together we looked at ways to address the issue of access to affordable financial services for low-income people.

Winnipeg's North End: Then and Now



The North End of the City of Winnipeg was originally home to mostly Eastern European and Jewish working-class families who created a rich and vibrant culture and fueled the city's economic boom in the early 20th century. Known as the 'Foreign Quarter,' the North End was home to large numbers of Ukrainians, Germans, Russians, Poles, Hungarians and others.

Living conditions were hard with inadequate housing, poverty-level wages, lack of public infrastructure (such as water), and little public investment in the quality of community life. Although economically disadvantaged, the North End was home to a remarkable range of social, cultural and educational organizations and a thriving commercial centre on Selkirk Avenue. The result was a real sense of pride in being a 'North Ender.'

Post-World War II, the North End changed dramatically. With growing suburbanization, many who could afford to do so

relocated to the suburbs and other parts of the city leaving behind those least able to move. Economic life in the North End deteriorated, businesses closed, and the rich social and cultural life declined.

Recent years have seen growing efforts on the part of community leaders to collaborate to promote the economic, social and cultural renewal of the North End through job creation, employment development for local residents, youth leadership development, improved and affordable housing, revitalization of the business sector, and efforts to reduce crime and violence. These efforts have seen the growth of nonprofits in the area, with many working to reduce poverty, provide needed social services, stimulate the local economy and revitalize the community.

Today, the North End continues to be the first home for many new immigrants and refugees to Canada and for a growing number of Aboriginal people who locate where housing is least expensive – in the inner city and particularly in the southern portion of the North End. As a result, the North End today is a culturally diverse neighbourhood with Canada's largest urban concentration of Aboriginal peoples and Filipinos, and the largest Ukrainian centre outside Ukraine.

The North End population is also younger than the rest of Winnipeg with nearly 23 % under 15 years of age (18 % of all Winnipeggers are under 15). Nearly 42 % of the people in the North End are under 30 years of age (on average 39 % of Winnipeggers are under 30). One-in-five households is led by a single parent, compared with just over one-in-ten in the rest of Winnipeg. While the average North End household income is \$41,241 (\$68,540 is the Winnipeg average) over 65 % of households earn less than that.

Some North End Facts

	NORTH END	WINNIPEG
Population	33,416	721,013
Average Household Income	\$41,241	\$68,540
% Households with Income		
Less than \$40,000	65.2 %	38.3 %
% Single Parent Households	21.5 %	11.8 %
% of Population under 15 Years of Age	22.6 %	17.8 %
% of Population under 30 Years of Age	41.5 %	38.5 %
Self-identified Aboriginal Population	30.5 %	9.9 %
Self-identified Filipino Population	15.5 %	5.9 %
Self-identified Ukrainian, German, Polish	35.0 %	40.5 %

2006 Census Data

Early Investors in Assiniboine's North-End Branch

Canadian Foodgrains Bank
 Garth Duncan
 First Peoples Economic Growth Fund
 David Golub
 Kinew Housing
 Branko Krpan and Frieda Krpan-Brandes
 Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre
 Ma Mawi-Wi-Chi-Itata Centre
 Ndinaweemaaganag Endaawaad
 Neechi Foods Co-Op
 North End Community Renewal Corporation
 Pollock's Hardware
 The MediaBank
 The Winnipeg Foundation
 University of Winnipeg
 Winnipeg Harvest
 Numerous anonymous investors



Some Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What do you consider as the North End of Winnipeg?

A. We have expanded on the definition used by the North End Community Renewal Corporation to describe the North End. Our definition of the North End is bounded on the east by the Red River, with an extension to include North and South Point Douglas. The Logan CPR rail lines represent the southern boundary. McPhillips Street is the west boundary and Carruthers Avenue is the north boundary. Regardless, this branch will serve people in or outside that perimeter. We already have early investors who don't work or live in the North End but believe in its history and future and want to support the branch. And we have ACU members who may use the McGregor Branch while in or travelling through the neighbourhood.

Q. What has been the trend of banks in Winnipeg's North End?

A. With the economic decline of the North End over the years there was a flight of full-service banks out of the area. Our research shows that between 1996 and 2009, 10 bank branches closed, leaving only 2 small credit unions in the neighbourhood. Today there is not a single full-service bank in the North End. They exist only on the perimeter of the North End. However fringe financial outlets (cheque-cashing, payday-loan outlets, pawnshops) have grown to 16 storefronts in that time.

Q. Why do people need a physical branch when you can do so much banking online or at an ATM?

A. Many members still prefer the personalized service they get at our branches. And for others it's a matter of access. If you can't afford a computer,

you can't easily bank online. If you need a small loan or help figuring out how to pay next month's rent, you can't get that help from an ATM. In the absence of a physical branch many people living on low income are left with no option but to use expensive cheque-cashing and payday-loan outlets.

Q. When will the new ACU branch open on McGregor?

A. Renovations are well underway and we plan to open in early 2012.

Q. Who will ACU serve at this new branch?

A. The McGregor Branch will provide community-friendly services to those who live, work and do business in the North End – individuals, businesses, and community organizations. Through community partnerships, the staff at this branch will also reach out to people in the neighbourhood who don't have access to a bank account or other basic services, including Aboriginal, newcomer and youth members in the community.

Q. How will this branch contribute to community economic development (CED) in the North End?

A. Our branch will bring affordable and inclusive financial services to the North End, build on our work with the Community Financial Services Centre to continue outreach to those not well served by mainstream banks, keep money circulating in the North End through business and credit decisions, and join with other community leaders in their efforts to renew and revitalize the North End. The branch will serve as an incubator and testing ground for micro-finance products and services designed to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income consumers and entrepreneurs.

Q. Are there any other credit unions in the North End?

A. Carpathia Credit Union, which specifically serves the Ukrainian community, was established in the 1940s. The Aboriginal-owned Me-Dian Credit Union moved to Selkirk Avenue in 2009 into the former Entegra Credit Union branch which closed in 2008. Assiniboine has an excellent working relationship with our fellow credit unions.

Q. In November 2006, ACU and North End Community Renewal Corporation, along with SEED Winnipeg and other community partners announced the opening of the Community Financial Services Centre (CFSC) on Main Street near Mount Carmel Clinic to deal with some of these same issues. What will happen with that project?

A. The CFSC in many ways was the pre-cursor to ACU opening a branch in the North End. For years the centre offered people with low income an alternative to expensive cheque-cashing and payday-loan outlets. Since CFSC opened, more than 700 people have opened up ACU accounts and taken advantage of money management and budgeting lessons offered by the centre. However it has become clear that the CFSC cannot address the growing need for affordable financial services in the North End. Community partners that helped create the CFSC encouraged ACU to have a greater role in their community and open up a full-service branch. We'll be encouraging our CFSC members to take advantage of many more services at our McGregor Branch as the CFSC transitions to doing other important work in the community over the next year.

To learn more about
Assiniboine Credit Union
assiniboine.mb.ca