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Independent student facility a success in Nelson, BC

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The Downtown Student Facility Trust (DSFT) recently made a conditional offer to purchase Sadlier House from its current owners, Frank and Glenn Molony. DSFT's offer was accepted and they are currently meeting the conditions of the agreement. Student ownership of this magnificent edifice now seems inevitable.

Student-owned and operated space is an idea that has met with resounding success at other universities. At the University of Notre Dame at Nelson, the student-owned building was more successful than the university.

Nelson is a city of ten thousand people in the Kootenay region of British Columbia (about 650 kilometers east of Vancouver). Nelson boasts over 350 heritage buildings, breathtakingly beautiful scenery and a fully intact electric streetcar. It is a progressive community full of artists, hippies and bohemians.

In 1950 the Catholic church founded Notre Dame College in Nelson. In 1963, Notre Dame University at Nelson (NDU) became BC's second degree-granting university. The Notre Dame University Student Union (NDUSU) was organised in the 1960s when there were no student facilities on campus. The Union took a rather bold step; they borrowed fifty thousand dollars from the Bank of Montreal and built their own student union building on campus. That this was the era of 'flower power' might help explain the students' altruistic motives. Not only did the students design the building, but they built it themselves to save on labour costs. The building was used as a student government centre, game/television room, and student pub. Art hung on the walls and various artists performed in its halls. The building became the focal point of student life at NDU.

In 1977 government cutbacks forced NDU to close its doors. The NDUSU was now a student union without students or a university - but it still had a building. In 1979, the government opened the David Thompson University Centre and the NDUSU renamed itself the David Thompson Student Society (DTSS). The DTSS was extremely active during this period. They held parties of all sorts, published a student paper and held readings by some of Canada's foremost authors. In 1984, the government closed the Centre. To reflect its new role, the DTSS renamed itself the David Thompson Cultural Society.

It's been almost twenty years since Nelson has had a university but the David Thompson Cultural Society is more alive than ever. They aim to further the cause of university education in Nelson and promote a wide range of cultural opportunities in arts and culture, including visual art, literature, and theatre. The Society recently bought a stately downtown hotel that will be widely available to other arts and cultural groups in Nelson for dance, music, poetry, workshops, and art exhibits. This space will ensure the longevity of the Society in the Nelson community.