

Lakehead open house gives students a sneak peek

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By Rick Garrick

THUNDER BAY – Fort William's Elysia Petrone Reitberger sang a hand drum song during her keynote presentation at Lakehead University's 2nd Annual Aboriginal Programs Open House at the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law.

"I wanted to start with a song because with my experience at Lakehead, and especially in the last three years at the law school here, it was a real on-ramp for access to culture, access to teachings and access to Elders," Petrone Reitberger says during the June 12 open house, noting that Elder in Residence Isabelle Mercier visited the law school once a week. "So we would meet in the Aboriginal Settlement Conference Room and she taught me that song. So that is something that is great about Lakehead."

Petrone Reitberger graduated from the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law in 2016 and now works as a junior counsel lawyer at Falconers LLP in Thunder Bay.

"It was the only law school I applied to," Petrone Reitberger says. "I liked the focus of Lakehead's law school. They wanted to focus on natural resource management, environmental issues and take a focus on Indigenous issues."

Petrone Reitberger delivered three main points to the students who attended the open house, which was held to provide Indigenous students with an opportunity to learn more about the Aboriginal programs offered at Lakehead University.

"The first one is use your supports," Petrone Reitberger says. "Everyone wants you to succeed. There's definitely going to be some challenges — law school was probably one of the most difficult things I have gone through, but it ended up being the most rewarding."

Petrone Reitberger also encouraged students to take advantage of free food supports on campus, noting that the law school usually has different speakers at lunch with food provided to those who attend.

"And there's the food bank, so there are lots of resources," Petrone Reitberger says. "I knew all the watering holes to fill up my water bottle."

Petrone Reitberger's second point was to get involved in the community at university. She was a member of the Indigenous Student Law Association and the Environmental Law Students' Association while studying at the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law.

"Some of the things we did here at the law school was we started an Indigenous student's association," Petrone Reitberger says. "And we showed movies, we organized feasts."

Petrone Reitberger's third point was to have fun and work hard at university.

"For me, it was the best time of my life," Petrone Reitberger says. "It's a time when you can develop your ideas and you kind of become who you are. You can challenge the norms, challenge the establishment and it's a great time in your life."



Falconers LLP lawyer Elysia Petrone Reitberger, a 2016 graduate of Lakehead University's Bora Laskin Faculty of Law, spoke about getting involved with the community at university during her keynote speech at the university's 2nd Annual Aboriginal Programs Open House on June 12 in Thunder Bay.

Petrone Reitberger says her law firm, Falconers LLP, is a civil rights litigation firm that does a “lot of human rights cases.”

“We do some employment issues, constitutional issues,” Petrone Reitberger says. “Something I am working on right now is we work for different First Nations and we are creating membership codes.”

Petrone Reitberger adds that her firm represented Nishnawbe Aski Nation during the Seven Youth Inquest into the deaths of seven NAN high school students in Thunder Bay.

“So we are doing some really interesting work and I have lots of mentors,” Petrone Reitberger says. “It’s a great place to work.”