

# GRADUATE STUDENT SOCIETY UBC VANCOUVER

**JOHN EDE**

**May 14, 2018**

On this occasion honoring Leon Joseph Koerner, I'm delighted to be here on behalf of the Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver. I can say that neither I nor the Society would be here without the immense generosity of the Koerner Foundation and Leon and Thea Koerner in particular. Leon set a high premium on education, as a vehicle to develop the best in the individual. He recognised that graduate students were an important community on campus, and that their success as contributors to learning and research would be enhanced by a dedicated space. In 1959, he gave \$400,000 towards the building of a graduate student center, with a penthouse where he would reside. The building was dedicated to the memory of his dear wife Thea Koerner.

When Leon Koerner announced in late 1959 that he would donate this building as a place for graduate students, there was no society of Graduate Students at UBC Vancouver. The Graduate Students Association was established a few months later in 1960 and when the building was completed two years later the GSA made it's home here. Although the name of the Association has since changed to the Graduate Student Society, Thea Koerner House has remained its home ever since.

56 years later Thea Koerner House is still a hub for all types of graduate student events on campus. There are opportunities to socialise; on Friday I was here with more than 120 other graduate students celebrating the end of the academic year. There is advocacy; our student advocates assist their peers in dealing with issues from financial hardship to academic problems. There are events to help graduate students with physical and mental wellness and there are conferences that give graduate students the opportunities to share and discuss their research. I believe that Leon and Thea would be pleased to see that the building is still very important to the lives of graduate students today, and that their unique contribution is preserved in the artwork and furnishings of Thea Koerner House.

In his letter to the UBC President Norman Mackenzie, announcing the bequest Leon wrote "I hope it will fill a particular need that would not otherwise be filled in the ordinary course." That was more than 55 years ago so it is no exaggeration to say that generations of graduate students have benefitted from that generosity. That visionary donation

certainly filled a particular need in 1959 and I will, I believe, continue to serve the 'particular needs of graduate students for many years to come".

As an elected representative of the more than 10,000 graduate students presently on campus, and on behalf of past and future graduate students of UBC Vancouver, I offer our profuse gratitude in memory of Leon Joseph Koerner, and to the Koerner family.

Thank you.