

Jean names Winnipeggers to Order of Canada

A longtime volunteer and a former dean of law at the University of Manitoba are the two Winnipeggers among the 77 Canadians named to the Order of Canada by Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean yesterday.

Ron O'Donovan has been named a member of the Order of Canada for voluntary service while Clifford H.C. Edwards has been named a member for education.

"I feel very humbled about it," O'Donovan said.

"You don't do volunteering to get this honour. One of the keys to (volunteering) is you are given the ability and talent to give to the betterment of the community. If you're not there for that you shouldn't be doing it."

O'Donovan, with his wife, began the Grow a Row program for Winnipeg Harvest, and among other events has volunteered for Schmokey Night, the Red River Exhibition and the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba.

Edwards, who became a lawyer in

England in 1949, was called to the Manitoba bar in 1964 and appointed Queen's Counsel in 1980.

Edwards served as the dean of law from 1964 to 1979 and was appointed chairman of the Manitoba Law Reform Commission in 1979.

Meanwhile, others named to the order include fiddler Natalie MacKenzie, retired major-general Lewis MacKenzie, former newspaper columnist Michele Landsberg, and sociologist Reginald Bibby.

Twenty-five were named officers of the order while 52 were named members.

Jean said in a statement that the recipients will receive their insignia at a later date.

The Order of Canada, the country's highest honour, was created in 1967 to recognize outstanding achievement and service in various fields of endeavour.

— Staff

Pocket suites' open in inner city

*few, small,
apartments
suited to city's
working poor*

By Aldo Santin

A made-in-Winnipeg alternative to run-down rooming houses is springing up in the city's inner

city. They've been dubbed pocket suites — newly-built, small, affordable self-contained apartments aimed at the city's working poor.

There's more to inner city housing than developing affordable rental housing — the demographics show that there are a lot of single people who need a safe, affordable place to live as well," said Paul McNeil, a regional vice-president and partner of ND Lea, the employee-owned engineering, planning and project management firm.

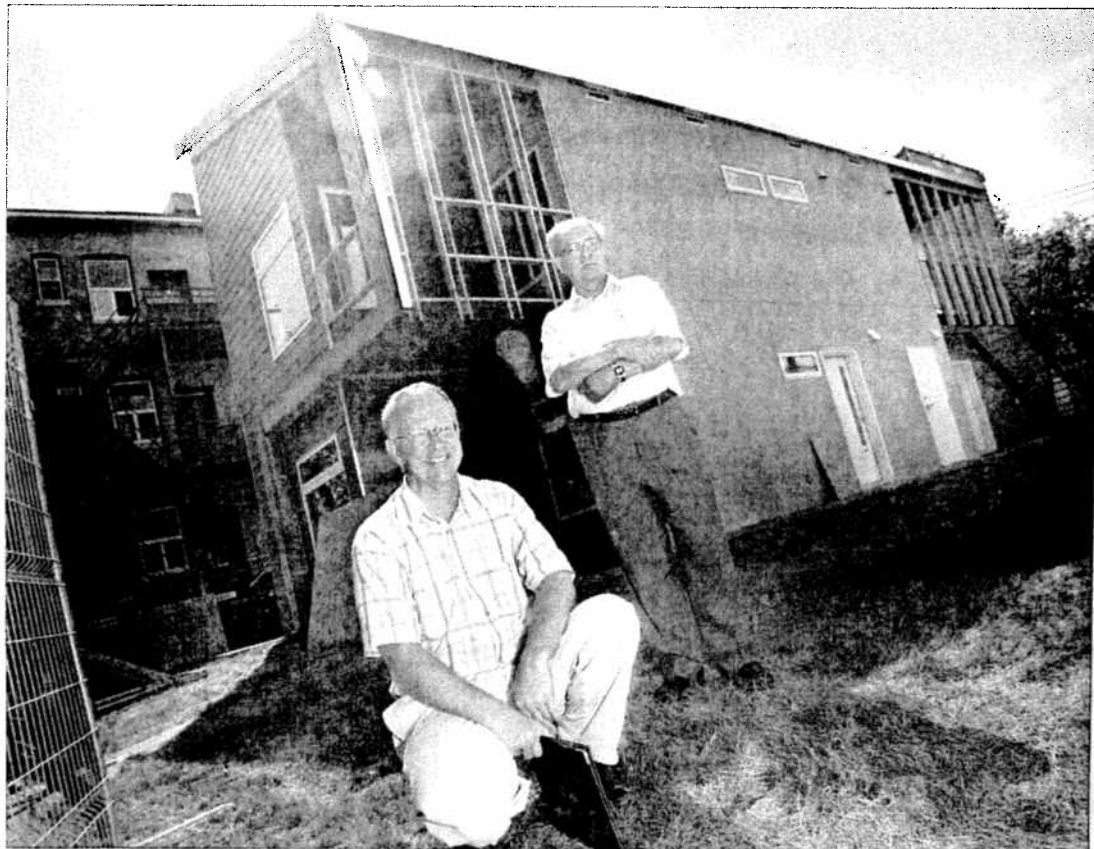
McNeil was on hand yesterday for the official opening of a two-storey, eight-unit building at 156 Kate St., a couple of blocks east of the Health Sciences Centre complex, where a speaker after speaker credited him with what's being called a unique housing alternative.

This is a brand-new building constructed on a 30-foot wide lot. The average size of the eight units is 250 square feet. They come equipped with a small kitchenette — two-burner stove top, microwave oven, sink, all fridge, bathroom with a toilet and shower, and a bed and sitting area. Each unit is barrier free and all of the main-floor units is fully wheelchair accessible. Monthly rent is \$350. Most importantly, they each have their own private entrance: there are no shared, or common, hallways or any other living space.

The building is owned by S.A.M. Properties Inc., a 32-year-old non-profit group that specializes in managing non-profit housing. The group plans to put up another three more similar-sized buildings, for a total of 11 living units.

Nothing like this exists anywhere else in Canada," said architect Steve Almeyer, whose firm took McNeil's idea and refined it into the finished product. "Hopefully, it will multiply," said Distasio, who has studied and written extensively about Winnipeg's inner city homeless and housing situation while the acting director of the Institute of Urban Studies, said the pocket suites are unique in Canada — innovative housing design that also reflects a sad commentary about socio-economic conditions in Winnipeg.

They beat a night at the Bell Hotel or in some illegal, ramshackle rooming house," Distasio said. "It's a good concept but it's too bad that we've to build them because we have



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Paul McNeil, left, a partner in ND Lea, an employee-owned engineering, planning and project management firm, and Ken Murdoch at 156 Kate St.

too many issues with housing and poverty."

Yesterday's news conference drew some of the province's most important politicians: Mayor Sam Katz, provincial housing minister Christine Melnick, Selkirk-Interlake MP James Bezan, who was representing federal social development minister Diane Finley, a couple of city councillors and backbench NDP MLAs.

McNeil said he came up with the idea for the pocket suites more than four years ago. Rooming houses are inherently dangerous places to live. Residents have little privacy and little dignity. Many of the city's 1,000 rooming houses are illegal — absentee landlords lured here by the cheap housing stock, carving up big old homes into multiple bedroom suites.

McNeil said other cities across Canada have similar conditions but it's only Winnipeg where many properties have been acquired by city hall after they've been abandoned by the absentee landlords.

McNeil approached S.A.M. to sponsor the project, which eventually received funding from the Winnipeg Homelessness and Housing Initiative (WHHI).

The 156 Kate St. project is heavily subsidized. McNeil said the provincial and federal governments provided half the capital construction costs through WHHI. Half of the total 32 individual units will be eligible for additional rent subsidy from Manitoba Housing.

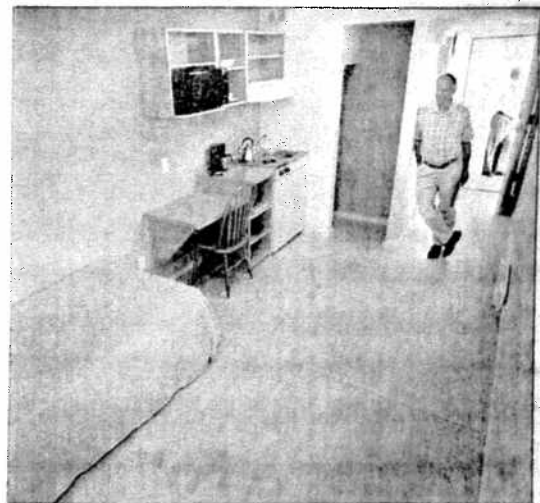
McNeil said the key was that the city gave the four building lots to S.A.M. for a \$1.

"Getting the land for a dollar makes this project affordable," McNeil said. "It was the only way we could do it and that's the reason it can only be done in Winnipeg."

The Kate building will be finished by mid-August. Another 8-unit building is going up nearby on Ross Avenue and two more are going up on Maryland Street in the Spence neighbourhood.

"There is a great need for affordable housing in our neighbourhood," said Flo Chartrand, head of the Centennial Community Improvement Association. "This new project will make a big contribution to improving the quality of life in our neighbourhood."

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Paul McNeil in one of eight suites. The average size is 250 square feet.