

Homeless-to-Harvard activist to speak at celebration breakfast

BY LISA BECKWICK

TONI Morgan, an award-winning advocate, educator, and one of the Toronto Star's top stories of 2015, will be the keynote speaker for Diversity Thunder Bay's 12th annual Celebration Breakfast. Once homeless and now a Harvard graduate, Toni will share her insights on how we can tackle racism in our community.

Diversity Thunder Bay is a community-based organization whose mission is to work towards an equitable community free of racism and discrimination of any kind. Every year, Diversity Thunder Bay honours the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination held on March 21 by hosting a breakfast celebration.

We mark this day to remember the 1960 Sharpeville massacre where 69 unarmed and peaceful demonstrators were killed by South African police as they protested the country's unjust apartheid laws. Since proclaiming the day in 1966, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Racist laws and practices have been abolished in many countries but despite much progress, racism continues to exist and to affect the



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

lives of individuals and ethnic and religious groups worldwide. Racism violates our human rights and our communities suffer from the injustice.

Toni's passion for social justice began as a homeless high school dropout working in Toronto's most underserved communities. At the age of 17, she was kicked out of her third school and told she would never get a university degree. Toni left school vowing to never return and instead immersed herself in activist work, spending most of her days discussing youth issues at Toronto City Hall.

She soon became a recognized advocate on issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and marginalization. At



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Toni Morgan has been a vocal advocate for social progress, rallying women to speak out against injustice and encouraging young mothers to pursue post-secondary education. She'll be the keynote speaker in Thunder Bay for the annual Celebration Breakfast to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21.

age 22, she was accepted to Ryerson University as a mature student and completed a bachelor of arts in equity and diversity.

Wanting to further her education, she applied to Harvard's prestigious master's in education program in 2015. Once accepted, she was presented with the daunting challenge of financing the one-year program and managed to successfully crowd-fund \$50,000 in tuition fees and a further \$21,000 for housing.

In 2005, Toni was chosen as a Canadian guardian of the Women's Global Charter, rallying more than 20,000 women to speak out against injustice in Canada. Toni was then hired to launch and manage Women Moving Forward, a \$1-million initiative designed to inspire young mothers to pursue post-secondary education and break the cycle of poverty.

She went on to found Medina, a media literacy collective for young women interested in bringing femi-

nist voices to pop culture. Currently, Toni is the head of strategy and programs at The Beat Academy, an arts and technology academy serving youth in Canada and the United States.

From issues of white privilege to generational poverty, Toni will take us on a journey that points to the various ways individuals and institutions can tackle the seemingly rigid structures of systemic and individual racism in Canada, and what the means for allies, organizers, and decision makers in Thunder Bay.

Join us for this special opportunity to hear Toni Morgan speak about how we move forward as a community to address and combat racism.

Diversity Thunder Bay's 12th annual International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Celebration Breakfast will be held on Wednesday, March 21 from 7:30 to 9 a.m. at the Victoria Inn. Tickets are only \$25 and can be purchased online at www.diversitythunderbay.ca.

Lisa Beckwick is the director of organizational and people development for St. Joseph's Care Group, is co-chair for the Celebration Breakfast, and has been a member of Diversity Thunder Bay since 2005. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.