

'Warrior' for indigenous people to speak at 11th Diversity Thunder Bay breakfast

BY LISA BECKWICK

MARIE Wilson, characterized as a warrior by the survivors of Indian residential schools in Canada, will be the keynote speaker at Diversity Thunder Bay's upcoming breakfast to celebrate the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Wilson's entire professional life has been devoted to diversity and inclusion, building bridges of understanding across many cultures within Canada and abroad as a teacher, translator, award-winning journalist, executive manager and university professor, as well as a truth and reconciliation commissioner.

For six-and-a-half years, Marie Wilson fought tirelessly as the one non-indigenous commissioner of the historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Wilson insisted that the ongoing work of reconciliation belongs to all Canadians, and not just to the indigenous people who lived through



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

130 years of forced residential schooling imposed on them by Canada. Even though she heard horrific accounts of cruelty and abuse from among the 7,000 courageous survivors, she found faith and hope for our future.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed on March 21 of each year. 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 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 lives of individuals, and ethnic and religious groups worldwide. Racism violates our human rights and our communities suffer from the injustice.

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 March 21 by hosting a breakfast celebration on or around that date. This year marks our 11th annual event, and we are proud to have Dr. Wilson join us.

Wilson will speak on "Canada at 150: Diversity and the Gift of Reconciliation."

Her presentation will encourage us to explore our past so that we can move forward together on a path to national healing.

Join us for this special opportunity to hear Marie Wilson speak about how we move forward in a way that is respectful, fair, and enriching for all of us.

Diversity Thunder Bay's 11th Annual International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Celebration Breakfast will be held on Wednesday, March 22 from 7:30-9 a.m. at the Valhalla Inn. Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased online at www.diversitythunderbay.ca.

Lisa Beckwick is the interim vice-president, People, Mission and Values for St. Joseph's Care Group, is co-chair for the breakfast celebration, and has been a member of Diversity Thunder Bay since 2005.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.

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