

# Building a bright future

BY CYNTHIA WESLEY-ESQUIMAUX

AS A newcomer to Thunder Bay, along with my wonderful husband Steve, and living only one year in this lovely city, I am delighted to offer an opinion on building “right relations” between the diversity of people who live here. After a rocky introduction — some damage to a new car by neighbourhood youth — my husband and I have fixed, forgiven and settled in. We have now had the pleasure of meeting some of our neighbours, welcomed a dog and a cat into our home, and learned to like backyard barbecues and urban relaxation. We even learned to navigate the rather extreme winter of 2013-14.

We have both found Thunder Bay to be a city of many contrasts, from the relatively wealthy with magnificent homes and manicured properties, to the clearly struggling and living on the streets inhabitants populating some of the downtown areas.

When we arrived, we felt and observed a social division that looked like it had been in place for some duration. However, in our exploration of the city, we rubbed elbows with the well-educated and professional set enjoying dinner at some of Thunder Bay’s beautiful restaurants, and we had the pleasure of dining at of some of the tastier fast-food outlets that ring the downtown core.

Through our outings we have met people from every walk of life, which enhanced our exploration of the city and benefitted our work. We like it here and we have made a point of getting uptown, downtown and at



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

## *Strengthening ‘right relations’ makes most of our diverse community*

several places in-between on a regular basis.

As an aboriginal couple, we quickly became engaged in the anti-racism and environmental work happening across the city.

I personally had the honour of participating in the wonderful Walk a Mile films directed by Michelle Derosier of ThunderStone Pictures, and was delighted by attendance of almost 1,000 people to the February 2014 launch. Wow! My husband and I immediately felt welcomed and confident we could build friendships and conversations through our work and our presence here.

This event told me people in this city are ready to put their support into raising consciousness, behind building understanding, and towards fostering peaceful relations.

We believe, like so many others, that it is important to address the social inclusion of the many indigenous peoples living and shopping here. After a year, we know the majority of citizens and much of the leadership understands the need for more education on aboriginal history; their place in the trade and commerce of Thunder Bay, their tenure on the lands, and their contributions to the ongoing economic viability of this region.

We have had good experiences in our involvement with the non-aboriginal population, and we thank each of you for that, and look forward to increasing right relations and building on our many conversations.

We see Thunder Bay as a city that embraces change. Many youth and students have told me they are ready to be the change they want to see in how Thunder Bay is perceived by other people.

We view this as a city coming to terms with its diverse population, and readying itself for the future. That future includes everyone, and appreciates the role the aboriginal population will play in development and growth. That’s what “right relations” means, working together towards a better future for all.

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*Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux is the vice-provost of aboriginal initiatives at Lakehead University and is from the Chippewa of Georgina Island First Nation in Lake Simcoe. Her husband Steve is from Six Nations and will be teaching at Confederation College this fall, and they both happily work and live in Thunder Bay.*