

Champions of respect honoured

BY JASON VELTRI

DIVERSITY Thunder Bay, the Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and the Crime Prevention Council embrace and promote respect. Aligning with the philosophy of treating one and all with respect, and recognizing the importance of human dignity, they contribute to the initiative, developed by Confederation College students and staff in 2006, and adopted by the City in 2012.

In recognizing on-the-ground efforts by community members and organizations, they continue to encourage community members to champion efforts that will create a culture of respect, nurture a community that speaks and acts with compassion and kindness, and oppose all forms of discrimination.

In commemoration, the City introduced an annual Respect Award in 2013 to recognize one individual as a respect champion. A second annual award recognizing an organization was introduced in 2020. Walid Chahal, co-chair of Diversity Thunder Bay, emphasizes that the awards tie in with advancing diversity and addressing any form of discrimination.

Traditionally, the recipients were celebrated during the Diversity Thunder Bay's annual breakfast event, marking the United Na-



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

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

tions Annual Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year, the event was called off due to COVID-19.

Announcing the 2020 Respect Awards recipients, Respect Working Group chair Tina Maronese said: "We are proud to present this year's Respect Awards to two very deserving recipients who empower others by leading with compassion and dedication, and always with respect."

The recipients, community leader Roopa Rakshit and the Therapeutic Recreation Department at Pioneer Ridge Long Term Care and Senior Services, were recognized for promoting attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that demonstrate respect.

"The recipients are working to ensure an inclusive community and facilitating a safe environment for everyone. Their efforts exemplify respect in the community," said Crime Prevention Council chair Jeff Upton.

Jason Veltri, chair of the Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee, said: "We need leaders who are doing incredible things and we have that with our two recipients this year."

On receiving the individual award, Roopa Rakshit conveyed that she is humbled, and added that this award is an encouragement at so many levels. It is a recognition, an acknowledgement and an appreciation for her as an Asian woman, as a person from the racialized community, a person of colour, and an immigrant. She thanks people and organizations who have contributed to her community engagement activities.

Lisa Tyance, supervisor of Therapeutic Recreation and Volunteer Services at Pioneer Ridge, said: "It is important to understand that older adults in our home are at their most vulnerable and their dignity needs to be fully respected."

The Therapeutic Recreation Department advocates for the cultural, social and spiritual needs of their residents. They actively engage with the community in planning tailor-made activities.

Currently there are more than 80 local organizations that have committed to Respect. No single individual or organization is capable of addressing the complex issues of racism, discrimination, oppression and inequity. This requires a community commitment. Other organizations in the community are invited to sign up and be a part of this initiative.

To see the award video and for more information on the Respect Initiative, go to thunderbay.ca/respect.

Jason Veltri chairs the Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Respect Award winners in the front row are individual honouree Roopa Rakshit, left, and Lisa Tyance, representing Therapeutic Recreation and Volunteer Services at Pioneer Ridge. Also pictured are award supporters, back row from left, Walid Chahal, Jason Veltri and Jeff Upton.

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