

# Reflect today on the meaning of diversity, respect

BY MICHELLE MCKENZIE LANDER

A WELCOMING and inclusive community is informed self-aware and connected.

My vision of a welcoming and inclusive community is one where Thunder Bay and the region promote the full participation of all residents in the social, cultural and economic life of the region without discrimination. Our welcoming community is helpful to newcomers, respectful of aboriginal culture, land and treaty territory, open to the new idea and customs of newcomers, and appreciative of their contribution as members to their community.

We are not fostering a welcoming community when we are making racist and derogatory remarks to an aboriginal person walking down the



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

street. We are not a welcoming community when we gauge our opinion on a whole race of people by the few we see.

We are not fostering a welcoming community when we are making

racist and derogatory remarks to the East Indian Mac's store franchise owner when he refuse to sell you cigarettes without proper identification. He is following the law.

Why is it that when there is some strife between people, the derogatory words are hurled? That means that it was always there, pushed below the surface until you get angry and then the derogatory word surfaces. Why do we so quickly use hurtful phrases that aren't about the issue but the person? When you see my blackness instead of seeing me as a person, I become the scum under your feet instead of the neighbour with whom you just had a great neighbourly conversation last weekend.

There are many factors that start an argument, such as a reaction to a particular action, but my ethnic

background is not always the reason we have a difference of opinion. It is my basic human right to object to a statement, have a different opinion or way of doing things or in some cases adhere to the law of right and wrong. Whatever the case, empathy goes a long way in making a small issue solvable and keeps it from becoming an issue to divide a community.

Our community started with aboriginal peoples. English and French came to Canada and then European immigrants (German, Ukrainian, Italian, Finnish, Polish and many more) followed by the Asian groups and the Black ex-slaves. From the time of early immigration to now with the first, second, and third generations, Canada has placed much emphasis on equality and inclusiveness for all peoples.

In the spirit of being a more welcoming community and in celebrating Canadian Multiculturalism Day today, take this opportunity to reflect on the meaning of diversity and respect. Remember that as a community we can promote, teach, and practice equality and mutual respect for all.

We have a diverse and multicultural community that has so much potential and can grow to be a strong and welcoming home for all. Let's make a welcoming community together.

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