

# You, your neighbourhood part of evolving city

BY REBECCA JOHNSON

*Who are the people in your neighbourhood?*

*In your neighbourhood, in your neighbourhood.*

*Yes, who are the people in your neighbourhood?*

*They're the people that you meet*

*When you're walking down the street,*

*They're the people that you meet each day.*

REMEMBER this familiar song from Sesame Street? I've just changed the wording a bit but the meaning is just the same. Many people and characters sang the song over the years. I would be pleased to do that for you but it's not possible in print. The point here is what it means.

So who are the people in our neighbourhood? All you have to do is attend the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association's Folklore Festival in early May. Thunder Bay is white, Arab, Muslim, Polish, Slovak, Greek, Caribbean African, Dutch, Filipino, Ukrainian, Finnish, German, Indian, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, aboriginal and more. People from different backgrounds bring delicious food and entertainment through dancing and cultural activities. More than that, they are the people in our neighbourhoods.

We are in the midst of reshaping



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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.**

our community. How we do it is a high priority. It is a new decade of diversity.

My family has this discussion around the table on many occasions. My comment: "We have a new community filled with a number of new people. It is not going to change; we are the people in our neighbourhoods and we have to learn to live together."

About 20 years ago, as president of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, I had a phone call from Rocky Serkowny at Heritage Canada. It led to my involvement in diversity work, first on behalf of the chamber, and then as an individual citizen who recognized the changing landscape of our diverse community.

As representatives from different organizations we set about working

on celebrating March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. When I look back over these past 20 years we have come a long way. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go — but we are moving forward.

Diversity Thunder Bay evolved out of those initial years of celebration. In 2000 Diversity officially formed and it is stronger than ever in 2013. From the first flag-raising at City Hall we now hold an annual March 21 breakfast that 400 people attend — people who recognize and value the diversity in our neighbourhoods.

THUNDER Bay is recognized at the national level for its initiatives. Diversity Thunder Bay worked hard to get city council to agree to have the city join the Federation of Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination. We became one of the 13 original municipal signatories on the national declaration.

Diversity Thunder Bay also conducts research. After a two-year study, we presented the Thunder Bay Committee Against Racism and Discrimination's Report on the Thunder Bay Plan for Action to council in May of 2009. A resolution was passed by council that acknowledged racism and discrimination is present within the community and that an integrated community effort was

needed to address it.

Diversity Thunder Bay then helped to establish the city's Advisory Committee on Anti-Racism. The committee together with the Crime Prevention Council adopted Confederation College's RESPECT campaign, now recognized throughout the community by people wearing green RESPECT buttons and with people treating each other with respect.

The advisory committee produces this monthly column in The Chronicle-Journal and we have reviewed anti-racism guidelines to support further dialogue with the media. We have worked through discussions with community partners to advocate for communication materials that reflect the diversity of Thunder Bay.

In September we will host the delivery of Ontario Human Rights Commission training in Thunder Bay.

We are continuing the work that began 20 years ago and moving our community forward. You are part of this new community!

Who are the people in your neighbourhood? They are walking down your street. Remember to say, "Hello neighbour."

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*Rebecca Johnson is a councillor at large, co-chair of Diversity Thunder Bay and a member of the city's anti-racism committee.*