

We have to be in the welcome business

BY CATHY WOODBECK
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INCREASINGLY, a diversity of newcomers are learning what many of us already know. Life can be better in the smaller centres of Canada.

It takes 10 minutes to drive to work. You can walk it in 30, or bike it in 15. After work, the waterfront, restaurants, shopping, golf and many other amenities are close at hand. Lake Superior, which we can see from our offices here at the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, is easily accessible, has walking trails and just induces relaxation.

Newcomers have discovered that they can enjoy a summer evening of music, play with their children at the splash pad, launch a kayak, or do Tai Chi in the park. The open spaces, size of residential lots, cost of housing and the smaller population are all very appealing to newcomers to our city.

University? College? Vibrant arts scene? Thriving and diverse restaurants and shops? Check, check, check, and check. We have many of the attractions of a larger city combined with all the benefits of life in a smaller centre.



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

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

The multicultural association is in the midst of it all in at our offices in the old fire hall on Court Street. We work with newcomers to Canada who have chosen to make Thunder Bay their new home.

There is a lot of diversity in Thunder Bay and much to learn and celebrate. We have more than 57 language groups living in our city. Newcomers arrive from all over the globe, and they stay. They love the clean air, fresh water, green space and access to nature.

We see the positives, celebrate them, promote them and hope to attract newcomers to our region.

Recently, a number of community organizations interested in creating an immigration strategy for the city met to create a Local Immigration Partnership. They see the demographic trends — baby boomer retirements, low birth rate and youth out-migration — and want to keep our city viable, vibrant and growing. They are the champions of welcoming newcomers and proud ambassadors of Thunder Bay.

We need to create a buzz in the community, generate media coverage, create partnerships and get people excited about the possibilities.

We must start having community conversations on growth plans, maximizing the potential of our existing workforce, encouraging immigration and education, all within an environment of respect and co-operation.

Our community can't move forward and prosper if we ignore the problems we have with racism, welcoming and acceptance. We need migration within the country and immigration from outside of Canada to grow, but we also need acceptance and welcoming to retain those who choose to move here.

We have to be in the business of creating a welcoming community to grow our future, enhance our econo-

my and capitalize on the features that make Thunder Bay a great place to live.

Communication is an ongoing challenge. We have to ensure the community knows what we are doing, why we're doing it and constantly reinforce the message.

Many will forget and some will resist. While it's necessary to acknowledge that challenges exist, it's crucial that we don't waste too much time with those people who have solely negative viewpoints but rather work with the "green lights." They are much more fun to be around and they're the ones that get things accomplished.

Moving our community forward in prosperity, growth, welcoming, anti-racism and acceptance combined is a much more hopeful endeavour than focusing on only one aspect.

We're all in this together. Let's focus less on the "us and them" and more on the wonderfully diverse community that we are becoming, that we can promote to the world.

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