

Local action fosters inclusivity

BY MANEET AHLAWAT

2020 and 2021 have, without a doubt, been years where issues of diversity and inclusion have been brought to the forefront of people's minds. It is in such unprecedented times that the inequities inherent in our society become even more apparent.

Thus, it could not have been timed better that Diversity Thunder Bay arranged for Jesse Wenté — a former columnist for CBC's Metro Morning and member of Serpent River First Nation — to be the keynote speaker at the 15th annual Celebration of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 24, 2021.

Through his work, Wenté is a strong advocate for aboriginal arts and calls into question the depiction of Indigenous peoples by the media, putting a major focus on putting the power to tell their own stories and create their own portrayals into the hands of marginalized groups themselves.

Wenté's talk focused greatly on the power dynamics deep rooted within the language we use when discussing diversity. He mentioned how the very ideas of "inclusion" and "equity" themselves indicate the existence of a group in power who are making the active decision to be inclusive of marginalized groups. Thus, the ultimate goal communities should be working towards would be to move beyond the power dynamics inherent in the system and create a world where power is shared equally.



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.

Wenté's points resonates deeply and directly ties in with the 2021 action plan laid out by Diversity Thunder Bay, which outlines the overall goals of the group and details the strategies needed to achieve the group's objectives. The action plan focuses on how education, youth engagement, communication, partnerships and initiatives can be used to spread ideas of acceptance and equity within our community.

Diversity Thunder Bay strives to promote an organization that is welcoming of all, regardless of "race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, class, creed, sex, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability or income disparity." The organization also seeks to create connections and partnerships with other groups within the city and support the City of Thunder Bay itself in undertakings and initiatives which promote positivity and inclusivity.

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Through educational speakers at monthly meetings, Diversity Thunder Bay encourages open conversation, personal learning and growth. They also strive to have a membership that is representative of the diverse and growing population of Thunder Bay.

Within Wenté's presentation, he mentioned the need to go beyond just "talking" and into the realm of actually "doing" or "acting upon." The very principles of Diversity Thunder Bay are very much in line with this as the organization's action plan outlines clearly the specific and measurable ways the group can actively create change, whether through organized events, community involvement, education, inter-organization connections or the use of social media.

Jesse Wenté's talk provided much food for thought for those who attended. One can hope that through openly and actively seeking equity and acceptance in our communities today, there may be no need for groups focusing on diversity in the future when, as Wenté stated, power can be inherently and fairly shared without question.

Maneet Ahlawat is the operations manager for Safety Net Security. He has been a member of Diversity Thunder Bay since 2015 and is currently serving on both the executive and celebration committees. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.

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