

# Celebrate a decade of voices

BY IAN PATTISON

AS ITS name implies, the One City Many Voices column is about providing a forum for discussion around certain issues of interest to the residents of Thunder Bay. It was born out of concern that some voices were receiving more attention in the opinion pages of the local newspaper, The Chronicle-Journal, than those of others. In particular, there was a need to hear more voices from the Indigenous community.

One City is what we all share — what we have in common; Many Voices represents our different experiences and perspectives — what makes us individuals. Like the city we have in common, our voices can and should be shared. Like the city we have in common, our voices evolve and change with interactions and experiences over time.

Around 2008, the newspaper redoubled its effort to acquire and publish more community-generated content. The newspaper has always welcomed letters to the editor and done other things, such as our “What To Do” event listings, to make it a local forum that goes beyond news by journalists.

We’ve reached out to encourage community groups, sports organizations and individuals to share — in their own words — what they are doing, and thinking.

Strong community response to this renewed initiative eventually drew comments in some columns and letters that the city’s anti-racism committee viewed as prejudicial to minority communities. Their concern prompted a decision to invite Chronicle-Journal personnel to a joint meeting of the City of Thunder Bay’s Anti-racism and Equity committee and Diversity Thunder Bay to discuss the issue.

The opinions editor attended the City Hall meeting where committee members sought to have publication of material it viewed as harmful stopped. The editor argued for the importance of publishing a variety of opinions to reflect the views of the community as a whole, creating a forum for mutual understanding.

What are seen as ‘extreme’ opinions are essential to the ongoing conversation. We remind ourselves that what are seen as progressive ideas now were seen by previous generations as extreme.

Good newspapers accept — to a point — extreme opinions as part of the conversation. What should



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

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

upset good newspaper people is when their forum lacks balance.

The complaints over anti-Indigenous opinions reminded us to watch the line on what we allow. That was important, and we value feedback to keep us on the right path.

However, the bigger revelation of the complaints was that many people simply didn’t feel comfortable sharing their perspective in the paper. The right move wasn’t to push harder to exclude some voices, it was to find ways to welcome more voices. That’s why the column has been such a win-win-win for the paper, for marginalized communities and for our audience of readers throughout the region.

At the City Hall meeting a suggestion was made that the committees might want to explore writing positive things for the paper — an idea welcomed by the paper.

It was perhaps inevitable that these two forums for community involvement would join forces.

A followup meeting at the newspaper office hosted by then-publisher Colin Bruce produced the idea of a monthly column to be written by members of the two committees. The concept was heartily embraced and soon the details were finalized.

The city’s former director of corporate strategic services, Karen Lewis, came up with a name for the column to reflect its intent. One City, Many Voices was born 10 years ago and it has appeared on the Opinion Page nearly every month since then.

Credit must go to the three main co-ordinators over the decade — Karen Drake, Maureen Nadin and, currently, Roopa Rakshit. Others who have assisted over that time include Amina Abu-Bakare, Yolanda Wanakamik, Jeannine Verdenik, Robyn Pepin, Andy Wolff, Michelle Lander, and Rebecca

Johnson.

Keeping the column going has meant harnessing the willingness, knowledge and enthusiasm of a variety of writers whose passion for the cause of equality and respect has produced an outstanding body of work.

The column has come a long way. This Wednesday from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Lakehead University Faculty Lounge, a commemorative collaborative event titled ‘Community Voices and Dialogues for Social Justice’ is being organized by Lakehead University, Diversity Thunder Bay, the City of Thunder Bay’s Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee, Confederation College, The Chronicle-Journal and several other community organizations. The event will deliberate upon initiatives on social issues affecting Thunder Bay, celebrate the column’s 10th anniversary, and acknowledge the authors and their contributions.

Additionally, two panel discussions will be held. The first one will include a community presentation of the First Voluntary Local Review Report 2022 — a systemic and comprehensive evaluation of Thunder Bay’s progress toward achieving the United Nation’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The second discussion will include representatives from local community organizations who will discuss what is happening in Thunder Bay that gives them hope for positive changes.

Admission is free. All are invited. Information and registration can be found through [Eventbrite.ca](http://Eventbrite.ca) by searching for ‘Lakehead University’ events to find the link to take you here: [www.eventbrite.ca/e/community-voices-and-dialogues-for-social-justice-tickets-435687622407](http://www.eventbrite.ca/e/community-voices-and-dialogues-for-social-justice-tickets-435687622407). You can also email [events.research@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:events.research@lakeheadu.ca) to RSVP for the event or get more information.

*Ian Pattison is retired editor and journalist who writes a weekly column for The Chronicle-Journal that appears each Saturday. He was editorial page editor when the One City, Many Voices column began a decade ago. This column was written with contributions from One City, Many Voices co-ordinator Roopa Rakshit and Chronicle-Journal managing editor Greg Giddens. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*