

# Luso-Canadian culture thrives

BY JULIO HELENO GOMES

ON JULY 15, 1978, a half-dozen people gathered for a momentous occasion at a Cumberland Street motel. These were the first officers of the Portuguese Association of Thunder Bay, the newly-created non-profit organization. The first order of business: organize a picnic at Boulevard Lake. That event would see sardines, hot dogs and juice available to attendees, as well as a full day of games and other activities. This would be the first formal coming together of Portuguese-speaking immigrants residing in the Lakehead.

In the 45 years since the letters patent was granted, those who hailed from mainland Portugal or the Atlantic islands of the Azores have since become woven into the fabric of the city. (The term "Luso" is the descriptor for all things Portuguese, much like "Franco" refers to the French and "Anglo" for English.)

That charter, dated June 13, 1978, outlined the goals of the association. Simply, it's to:

- promote and foster in the Portuguese a knowledge and appreciation of their culture;
- to foster the civic, educational and social welfare of their community;
- to promote and perpetuate a "spirit of generous consideration" amongst the peoples of the region of the traditions and history of the Portuguese.

Those directors — who became the first dues-paying members by offering the token amount of \$1 — launched programs both small and significant. Having reached the minimum of 50 members, the association could begin making a mark in the community. For ex-



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## *Portuguese Association of Thunder Bay celebrates 45th anniversary*

ample, flowers would be sent to members in hospital or for a death in the family.

More broadly, the Portuguese bonds were strengthened through language classes, dances, picnics and the formation of a soccer club. In its first year, they participated in the annual Folklore Festival by organizing a parade, operating a food booth, and having colourful dancers perform on the Fort William Gardens stage.

Just as prominent has been the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, commemorating the day in 1917 on which the Virgin Mary appeared to three children in rural Portugal. The celebrations, which will take place from May 11-13 at St. Anthony's Church on Hilldale Road, will feature mass and confessions, culminating with a candlelight procession

through neighbouring streets.

One of the earliest dreams of the directors was to acquire a home. Dinners bringing the close-knit Portuguese together were held at different locations across the city, but after fits and starts, in 1992 a small building was purchased at 5480 Mapleward Road. Two decades later, following extensive renovations, the building has a full-service kitchen and can accommodate 200 guests for events such as weddings and retirement parties.

More information on the association and hall rentals is available at the website: portugueset-bay.ca.

With about 1,000 people in Thunder Bay claiming Luso heritage, the association has about 150 dues-paying members. As with any group, the burden of keeping things going rests on a core of committed individuals, who often face challenges both internally and externally. Indeed, even in the early days grumblings about dissolving the association bubbled to the surface. Such sentiments did not sit well with the first president. "That was negative thinking," admonished Jose Martin Frade. "The association will prosper always, even if slowly."

A new generation has taken up the torch from that first executive. As we approach the half-century milestone, the Luso-Canadian community in Thunder Bay continues to thrive in a way that would surely make the founders proud.

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