

Advocacy vital to ensure a better community for all

BY JASON VELTRI

ISTART 2024 in a reflective state, on my role in our community, the work done to date, and the work left to complete. Changes are upon us; new opportunities present but the one constant is that the work is plentiful and new voices are necessary to rise to the occasion.

Firstly, my role as chair of Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee for the City of Thunder Bay has been rewarding but challenging. I have been chair since the end of 2018, and I have worked hard to change the perception of the committee, the work we do and to broaden its reach beyond anti-racism issues to include equity as a foundation of the work the committee is doing.

Without equity, we fight an uphill battle to ensure everyone gets a fair chance to succeed. Serving as chair has been a great honour and bore great responsibility, but it is time to pass the torch onto new voices, new leadership, and it is with this in mind that I have advised the committee that my time as chair will end at our January meeting. I look forward to ushering in new leadership to build on the work we have accomplished since 2018.

I express my deepest gratitude to past and present committee members for their belief and support in me to lead the committee over the past five years, and to bring my outspoken and activist spirit to the leadership of the committee. I look forward to continuing to serve on the committee for the remainder of my term and continue to contribute to building a community where everyone is valued for their diversity.

Secondly, it was announced on Jan. 8 that I have been appointed by the Thunder Bay Police Services Board to serve in their capacity on the City of Thunder Bay's Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee. The work of this committee is vitally important to addressing community safety issues and creating a community focused on building and maintaining the well-being of its residents.

I don't take this work lightly; it is important and meaning-



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

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

ful work and one that I have been passionate about for many years now. As a member of an equity-deserving community (2SLGBTQIA+) with direct lived experiences of discrimination and threats of violence, I am well positioned to advocate for and bring a lived-experience voice to the table to ensure those of equity-deserving, Indigenous and racialized backgrounds are centered and focused on the work we do at the Community Safety and Well-Being table.

It is a great honour to be entrusted by the Police Services Board members to carry their voices to the committee and ensure that the work to reshape, rebuild and reaffirm community policing in Thunder Bay goes beyond its board members, but drives to the heart of the community and the people who raise their hands to help.

Thirdly, and most importantly, is my role as president and co-founder of Rainbow Collective. In 2021, we formed Rainbow Collective to fill a void in our community, providing education and community awareness, and political advocacy; education, because this is the key to solving many of our problems.

The protest of this past summer and fall drive to the lack of education around what is truly being taught in schools, what pronouns really mean, and how transgender and non-binary youth are accessing gender-affirming care. The misinformation campaigns by the hate mob are damaging and demeaning those who are at most risk, and putting the lives of the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in

peril.

Experiencing death threats is not to be tolerated and we must continue to stand up, show up for, and call out hate as it happens. Allyship is needed now more than ever.

As we enter 2024 planning for Pride, I call on the community to get involved, buy tickets, donate money, show up and celebrate and share factual information when countering hateful or disinformation.

We are all here to leave our own footprint on this world. I am guided by giving back and using my privilege afforded to me in a good way — fighting for what is right, not for what is cool or hip in the moment.

My life has always been focused on helping others, more than helping myself to some degree. I thank my grandfather, George Bruley Sr., for instilling in me his devotion to public service as a dedicated firefighter to our community, who imparted the value of helping others, and selfless dedication to building a community that was fed, supported and safe. I will continue to give back my time to building a better community — not only for myself, but for my nieces, nephews and the future generations to have a community to live, work and build a meaningful life.

Love will always win. Hate is never tolerated, and nobody is born being discriminatory — that is learned at home. Kindness, compassion, and education are the keys to countering misinformation, hate and continuing degradation of our world.

I call on others to do more by getting involved, joining a committee, donating their time to a cause that deeply affects them; and I urge you all to use your voices and privilege to help those who still can't use their voice or whose rights are being withheld or trampled on by people in positions of power who feed on the fears and insecurities of others.

Stop the hate, protect trans kids, and every child does matter.

Jason Veltri is a community builder and human rights activist. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.