

Curbing racism takes effort, co-operation

BY PAUL PUGH

THE 2013 City of Thunder Bay Citizen Satisfaction Survey, carried out by Ipsos Reid, a reputable firm using accepted statistical techniques, indicates that 82 per cent of citizens feel that racism and discrimination is a serious issue in Thunder Bay. On the one hand, it is positive that residents identify racism as an important issue; on the other, it is troublesome that racism still exists in our city.

I am a soccer fan. My wife, Evelina Pan, and I attend every Thunder Bay Chill game we can. The Chill is composed of players from Thunder Bay, Sweden, Nigeria, Brazil, Spain and the United States. As one can imagine, these players come from different cultures, ethnic groupings, and skin colours. The Chill play as one, passing the ball to each other in order to score goals, and defending to prevent their opponents from scoring. When the Chill scores, the crowd cheers enthusiastically, regardless of which player scored.

I enjoy attending the Thunder Bay Multicultural Festival, with its ever-growing display of ethnic and cultural diversity. A few weeks ago, I

was at the Italian Cultural Centre for a book launch of poetry from Southern Italy, with readings by the author. The Raag-Rung classical Indian music concerts are not to be missed, and draw large crowds of appreciative non-Indians. On June 21, National Aboriginal Day, Evelina and I went to the pow wow at Prince Arthur's Landing for a great afternoon. My friends know I enjoy Hoito pancakes. What can I say? Thunder Bay is becoming more diverse, and is becoming all the better for it.

However, despite positive developments, the Ipsos Reid report is correct: racism is a serious issue in Thunder Bay. Unlike my male-pattern baldness, racism is not genetic: racism has to be learned. Racism is not "human nature," it is a relatively new behaviour.

When the Romans invaded Britain, they sent captives back as slaves, just as they did when they invaded North Africa. There was no distinction. For most of human history, China has been on the leading edge of culture and technology. It is only for the past 150 years that China and its people have been considered as anything less. Today, as China regains its leadership position in field



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

after field, it would be a very foolish person who suggested that the Chinese people are "inferior" to anyone in any regard.

Racism has no scientific basis, it is just nonsense. However, it is very harmful nonsense: it hurts its victims and can prevent them from developing their potential. Because racism has no genetic basis, but rather is a learned behaviour, we can eradicate it, but this will require effort. It is time for us to put forth that effort.

So how can we tackle this harmful

learned behaviour? I would suggest we learn from experience in challenging other forms of harmful learned behaviour, e.g., bullying or smoking.

I am old enough to remember when I couldn't go into a restaurant or pub without encountering a wall of smoke, and having stale smoke stink up my clothes, to say nothing of the harmful effects of the smoke. Today, we can enjoy an evening out without second-hand smoke, and even more important, smoking rates are dropping, as more and more people chose not to engage in this harmful learned behaviour.

The anti-smoking campaign has required lots of effort and co-operation, but it is showing success. The campaign against racism will also require effort and co-operation, and 82 per cent of our citizens want to see this harmful learned behaviour curbed. The City's anti-racism advisory committee and other organizations are working toward this goal. We all need to work toward this goal. Get involved. It's time.

Paul Pugh is a Thunder Bay city councillor and member of the anti-racism advisory committee.