

Muslim community interacts

BY KEITH HOBBS

WHEN making a difference, one has to strive and make the effort where it counts. There are many people who are striving to make change in our Thunder Bay community via picnics, get-togethers, pot lucks, sports, games, etc.

Minority communities try to do as much as they can to remove or at least reduce the misconceptions that sometimes become associated with them over time. It is not easy and at times it can be quite challenging.

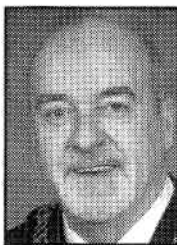
The Muslim community has been active for decades. (The Thunder Bay Muslim Association was formed in 1984 to promote an understanding of Islam.) However, even to this day many Thunder Bay residents have not had a meaningful conversation with Muslims.

It is very important to belong to the community. Thunder Bay is a community where the people become attached to the city and the environment. Thunder Bay is a gem within Ontario.

When a neighbour moves into the community it is members of the community who take it upon themselves to greet and welcome their new neighbour(s).

"When I moved into my apartment, I was immediately greeted by the people who resided within the apartment building," recalls a Muslim woman.

"Many were quick to share stories and share gifts. I still remember when one of the residents invited me over to share some tea, when she re-



ONE CITY
MANY VOICES

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

alized I loved candles she offered one as a gift. Soon we were visiting each other and enjoying tea and biscuits."

Recently, Muslims have engaged in many events with the Thunder Bay public. One of these events was an open-house barbecue that was held at the Thunder Bay Masjid (mosque).

This allowed the Thunder Bay public access to see the city's Masjid up close and actually interact with the Muslim community through playing games, food, and asking questions.

The event was lively as discussions happened inside and outside while sharing a burger over informative displays. I had the privilege of attending.

There were a few events dedicated to the youth of the Muslim community including a youth camp, a first for Muslim youth.

A conference held by the Lakehead University Muslim Students

Association concerned education and how it can be used to liberate. The conference engaged students, faculty, and residents of Thunder Bay in discussions that ranged from Aboriginal affairs to women's contributions to knowledge.

These are among efforts that are helping young Muslims realize that they are valuable to the Thunder Bay community. They help to empower the youth to become leaders in their own community and the Thunder Bay community at large.

Shayan, a Grade 8 student at Ecole Gron Morgan, broke a track record at this year's city meet.

This not only reinforces Shayan's dedication for success but will also help to empower youth to live their dreams by working hard, by training, exercising, playing, and believing.

Imran, a sociology student at Lakehead University who hopes to start his master's degree in sociology, has helped with many projects recently.

"There are people who are willing to help bridge the gaps, but they cannot work alone, rather they need support — support that is all-encompassing," says Imran.

Thunder Bay is home to many and it has a special place within the hearts of Muslims who have come to call it home.

We need to come together to make Thunder Bay an even better gem. It starts with trust and friendship.

Respect begins with you and me.

Keith Hobbs has been Thunder Bay's mayor since 2010. 30.09.13