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Thomas Russell displays the inaugural Respect award that he received during the Diversity Thunder Bay breakfast Thursday morning.

Respect initiative growing

BY KAREN MCKINLEY
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The winner of the first Diversity Thunder Bay Respect award says it's a humbling experience to have his efforts recognized.

Thomas Russell was the recipient of the Respect Champion award for his work founding the Respect initiative seven years ago.

The award was presented during the seventh annual Diversity Thunder Bay Celebration Breakfast in Thunder Bay on Thursday.

"I'm overwhelmed," he said in an interview.

"We were the first school to start Respect. Now there's many more across Canada."

Russell, administrator for Wellness and Diversity — Student Union of Confederation College, Inc., said that in 2006 a growing number of instances of people at the college using derogatory, racist and sexist language was noted.

Russell said Respect was started to give students a voice against the rising tide of discrimination and teach others a more respectful way to communicate with each other.

"It was a way for others to say no more. This kind of behaviour will not be tolerated," he said.

Since then, the Respect initiative has spread to other colleges in Canada, and it has taken hold in Thunder Bay.

"I think of the college as a microcosm for the city," Russell said. "I'm glad the city has embraced this. It shows the community wants to be more inclusive."

The Respect initiative continues to grow, he said, with gradual progress toward a more tolerant community.

The Respect award is given to an individual, business or organization who promotes the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that recognize the importance of human dignity and provides leadership to foster respectful behaviour. The award recognizes demonstrated leadership in enhancing diversity and respect for others.