



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.

New Indian Friendship Centre to be youth-inclusive

BY ANDY WOLFF

THE Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre is more than just a place where First Nations people gather. The mission statement of the centre is "To develop a sense of Native community in the City of Thunder Bay with opportunities for involvement and control by community members in addressing issues that affect their lives."

Thunder Bay has the third-largest aboriginal population of any city in Ontario — approximately 20,000 and growing. Over the years, a variety of programs have been developed to meet the increasing demands of a growing number of native people migrating to Thunder Bay.

The Friendship Centre delivers a range of community-based programs and services in the areas of health and wellness, justice, family support, children and youth initiatives, education, employment, skills development and training. These programs are built on a foundation of participation from the very people they serve.

The result of this direction empowers participants to be leaders and role models for others to follow in our community.

The Indian Friendship Centre continues to be recognized as a community leader in strengthening Aboriginal individuals and families. Their participant base continues to grow more each year. Children, youth and families are strongly engaged in programs and services.

With the pending closure of the Prosvita Hall on High Street, an opportunity has arisen to expand the Friendship Centre's programs and services. The centre has been approached to take over this facility.

Not only will it provide its present services, but also a much-needed youth centre. By welcoming all youth to this centre, more understanding and unity will be forged among youth of all races and cultures. At the present time, 13 per cent of the participants of the Indian Friendship are non-aboriginal.

The location of this facility is more centralized, providing better access to all youth living in this city. In essence, the Indian Friendship Centre has outgrown its present location.

With the city looking at its long-term infrastructure needs, we as citizens need to look at all projects that will benefit our community as a whole. Whatever the initial costs to relocate this centre on the proposed Prosvita Hall site, in the long run our community will benefit.

With an inclusive, centralized youth centre, two major objectives will be met. We will actively address our growing Aboriginal population, almost half of whom are under 25, and foster greater race relations among our youth.

Recently, the city and the Indian Friendship Centre re-established a partnership to improve the quality of life for everyone in the community. The citizens of Thunder Bay and other levels of government should look at the relocation of this centre as an investment in our youth and a significant improvement in race relations for the future of our city.

Andy Wolff is a citizen representative for Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee.