

## Bancroft praised as a place of opportunity

By Tony Pearson

CanIndia is a print and on-line news journal covering subjects of interest to the South Asian community in Ontario; it describes itself as "Canada's favourite South Asian newspaper". On Easter weekend, at the suggestion of MPP Todd Smith, editor Pradip Rodrigues paid a visit to Bancroft. And he liked what he saw: a prospective place to settle for immigrants looking for a quality of life different from that of the big cities to which immigrants normally gravitate. He also viewed it as a place of potential economic opportunity for investors and entrepreneurs.

Rodrigues, who immigrated to Canada in 2000 after working as an assistant editor at the Times of India, is not a stranger to rural eastern Ontario. For many years, he has been visiting area provincial parks and campsites. But this was his first visit to the town of Bancroft itself. As most visitors do, he extolled the natural beauty of the town and region. However, he went on to outline its advantages to people who might like to set up a business here.

Rodrigues noted that many members from visible minority groups are slightly wary of facing discrimination in small towns, worrying that 'foreign' looking Canadians may be viewed upon with suspicion and even fear. But after talking to a number of area residents of South Asian heritage, he reported that this seems to be a myth. "When the South Asian families living in Bancroft meet friends and families from elsewhere, they invariably get asked if they experienced racism and quite frankly, none of them can point to any incident that has had racial overtones. In fact they have encountered nothing but kindness and generosity from their friends and neighbors."

Rodrigues also found a different social dynamic between urban and rural ethnic minority groups. "In Toronto," he writes, "when one says 'my community', you can pretty much take it for granted that they are referring to people from their own cultural or ethnic background. The South Asians living in Bancroft use the word 'community' when they are referring to everyone around in the neighborhood." Accordingly, he concluded: "Talking to these South Asian families living in Bancroft, I've come to realize that they have integrated much faster into the mainstream than many immigrants who've spent the same amount of time in large cities. Their friend circle includes a large number of Caucasians. I spoke with one South Asian woman who I assumed had grown up in Canada, given her diction and Canadian accent; I was blown away to learn she had arrived in Canada just ten years ago."

The CanIndia editor was just as positive on the economic front. He took note of businesses currently run by South Asians, such as Subway, and Sword Best Western motel, as well as professionals like the veterinarian at Faraday Animal Hospital. In addition, he observed that doctors would certainly be welcome. As for financial attractions, he compared the cost of buying a home in Bancroft, versus the far greater cost of the same-sized house in Toronto. He suggested that brand-new immigrants still need to spend some time in a large urban area, with its access to language training and other services as well as its public transportation system; "not being able to drive in a rural community would be akin to not having legs," he noted. But for those who have "acclimatized", he suggested that they could well find the pace and way of life in a small town a refreshing change from large congested city life. If buying a house is on the agenda for immigrants then they may want to look into fha loan limits 2021 or similar within the immediate area, to see how much financial assistance they could get to help them buy a home where they are looking to reside.

Changing perspective, Rodrigues also identified the potential of New Canadians to revitalize smaller communities, both culturally and economically. In addition, he pointed out, New Canadian migration to the countryside can reverse population loss, and bring a younger demographic to communities whose average age is above the provincial norm.