

Hartsmere home to new meditation centre



By Nate Smelle

A year ago the idea of a not-for-profit mediation centre in the heart of cottage country was merely a dream of the Venerable Bhante Debongshi. On Saturday, June 28 the dream of this humble Buddhist monk from Bangladesh became a reality with the official grand opening of the Dhammanjali Meditation Centre (DMC) in Hartsmere.

"We can only appreciate the present moment," he said, "not the moments that have passed, or the ones that have not come yet. This is the time for us to be happy."

Situated in the forested hills near McArthurs Mills, Debongshi believes the tranquil and natural setting of the centre is perfect for finding peace and understanding happiness. The realization of this dream would not have been possible, he said, without the help from a large community of supporters.

"As a result of our collective effort today we have the opportunity to assemble here happily today in this peaceful natural environment," said Debongshi.

"This is really a special day for us. We could not have done this alone without getting assistance from my generous wholehearted people. We so appreciate the loving kindness coming from the people of the community. We still have a long way to go and there is much work that needs to be done. We can do it if we believe we can."

Gathered at the DMC for the inaugural celebration was an audience of more than 30 honoured guests from across Canada and around the world. Before the ceremonial unveiling of a statue of the Lord Buddha that had recently been donated to the centre, some of these guests took a moment to show their appreciation and to share a few insights.

Dr. Alan McAllister is a practising psychologist in the Bancroft area and a board member at the Dhammanjali Meditation Centre. He has played an instrumental role in bringing Debongshi's dream to fruition.

"This is remarkable that here we are in rural Ontario and we are going to have a meditation centre with a monastic person leading it," said McAllister.

"Bhante's vision is very inclusive. He saw a need for this kind of centre in this kind of environment. In a small community there isn't any point in having a narrow perspective."

Traveling from London, Ontario to the DMC that mornDr. Amit Chakma is also excited about Bhante's vision. Originally from Bangladesh, Chakma is now the president and vice-chancellor of Western University in president and vice-chancellor of Western University. He is also a Buddhist and a member of the board at the DMC. Living in Canada he said it is easier to practice the teachings of the Buddha than it was in Bangladesh.

?There were occasions there when you have no choice but to lie,? said Chakma.

?I had to lie, not because I wanted to lie, but to save my life. Here I find myself in a wonderful country where I don't need to lie. If you are looking for a just society around the world you will not find too many societies that come close to Canada. In trying to equalize opportunities; and trying to make sure those who are less privileged are supported and looked after I think this country has done more than any other in trying to bridge the gap. Of course there is a lot more to be done. All we need to do is look to our First Nations and we see the disparities.?

A student of life, Chakma said he does his best to learn from the all religions. Thrilled to think of the how this meditation centre will help people improve the quality of life of people in the community and beyond.

?What Buddhism helps me to do is to take the best practices from all of the religions and make them part of my life as a Buddhist,? Chakma said.

?Whatever we do we should always be thinking of compassion and how we can use that knowledge and wisdom for the betterment of the world. That's what it's all about. You first start with individuals because individuals make up the community. If you are peaceful and I am peaceful the community becomes peaceful.?

Helping to lower the cloth and reveal the statue of the Buddha during the ceremony was the Venerable Bimal Tissa Mahathera, a veteran human rights and peace activist from India, who is also the president of the Shishu Karuna Sangha, and the chairman of the Bodhicariya senior secondary school; and the Venerable Prajnananda Mahathera from Bangladesh, the principal of Adavasi College and the Abbot of Shakyamuni Buddha Vihar.

After the morning session had finished everyone headed out into the sunshine to enjoy a traditional vegetarian meal, before the afternoon's meeting of the DMC's board of directors. Located at 205 Hartsmere Road in Hartsmere, the DMC is currently available to the public by appointment. For more information on the centre contact dhammanjaliinfo@gmail.com , or 613-332-0188.