

Shades of freedom



By Nate Smelle

The events I found myself covering for Bancroft This Week were just this type of eye opener. EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE events come along that remind me how privileged I am to live here in this town and country. Sure it is easy to complain about the injustices and inequalities that still exist within our society here in Canada, but when we look at some of the conditions people living in other parts of the world must endure we notice quickly how lucky we truly are to be living here and now.

Sitting in at the official opening of the Dhammanjali Meditation Centre (DMC) in Hartsmere over the weekend I was taken aback by the generosity and gratitude being expressed by the Venerable Bhante Dehongshi and his guests that day. With some of the 30 or so people in attendance travelling great distances just to be a part of the ceremonious occasion it was obvious how special this day was for all those involved. Many even showed up days in advance to help prepare for the event.

After a morning of meditation and listening to a team of teachers from around the globe we all moved outdoors into the sunshine to enjoy a massive spread of vegetarian deliciousness provided by the volunteers at the DMC. Walking and talking during the lunch break with Dr. Amit Chakma, one of the guest speakers that morning, we discussed our interpretations of the teachings we had heard earlier that day.

In this conversation he explained how much easier it is to practice Buddhism in Canada than it was in Bangladesh where he had once lived. He said that while living there the corruption was so entrenched in the society that it made it impossible on many occasions to uphold the principles of honesty and compassion at the core of his spiritual practice. "In Canada there is really no reason to lie," he said. "There were occasions there [Bangladesh] when you have no choice but to lie. I had to lie, not because I wanted to lie, but to save my life."

Looking around at the scenery surrounding us while we spoke of politics and spirituality, I thought of how beautiful a country this is on so many levels.

Going over my notes the following day while finishing my articles for the week I started thinking of Dr. Chakma's comments on how fantastic a place Canada is to live, and how in spite of this more needs to be done to dissolve the inequalities that exist with First Nations in this country. My mind jumped back to the notes I had taken after speaking with Scott Tinney from the Baptiste Algonquin Nation at the Maynooth Public School's (MPS's) end-of-year drum circle.

Recognizing that MPS has one of the largest percentages of First Nations students in the district at 28 per cent, Tinney said that in reality the numbers of students coming from a First Nations heritage were likely even higher than that.

?It's probably a little higher than that, but it got lost with our history,? said Tinney.

?When I was young you didn't say you were native. It wasn't something you talked about. It is good to see that this is changing.?