

Good Neighbours Committee & Community Accord

The Good Neighbours Committee (GNC) was organized in 1999 to address racism at a local level. The original committee partners included College of New Caledonia, District of Vanderhoof, School District No. 91, and Saik'uz First Nation; it has expanded to include Vanderhoof Chamber of Commerce, the Vanderhoof Rotary Club and the Regional District Bulkley Nechako, Area "F". The GNC is supported by many community agencies and organizations including Nechako Valley Community Services, Omineca Safe Home Society, and Vanderhoof Alcohol and Drug Services. The College of New Caledonia-Nechako has ensured that the GNC continues to have a voice in our community by supporting and leading a group of dedicated citizens and appointed members of the GNC to uphold and work toward our **Mission Statement**, *'to have a society where racist behaviour is unacceptable and mutual respect between individuals is honoured'*.

The Community Accord is the culmination of ten years work led by the GNC. The proclamation of the 'Accord' took place as part of the opening ceremonies at the Canada Day Celebrations in Vanderhoof on July 1. The Community Accord declares Vanderhoof as a Welcoming and Inclusive Community. This requires us to:

- Reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women.
- Believe that promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities contributes to the political and social stability of our community.

- Understand the need for all community members to recognize and respect the importance of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom with regard to the rights of persons belonging to different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities within Vanderhoof.

We must promote realization of the principles contained in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, or mental or physical disability. The Community of Vanderhoof, in order to be a welcoming and inclusive community, desires to support the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the fullest degree.

The Accord was publicly signed on Canada Day 2009 by Saik'uz First Nations Chief Jackie Thomas. Chief Thomas said, "Saik'uz supports all work to fight the racism battle. I was asked to sign the accord to re-affirm our new Council's support – however wanted to sign it in a public forum. In our potlatch system we do business in front of all the people – to be open for public scrutiny and witnessed by the community".

Signatories to the Accord also include the District of Vanderhoof, College of New Caledonia, School District No. 91, Vanderhoof Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club of Vanderhoof and the Regional District Bulkley Nechako, Area "F".

Those attending Canada Day Celebrations had the opportunity to be the first individual citizens to sign the Accord. Maureen Mallais, Regional

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Director, College of New Caledonia-Nechako sees the signing by individual citizens as increasing the circle to ensure everyone is truly part of community. She asks us to consider the gift that each person represents and refers to *“Building Communities From the Inside Out”*, Kretzmann and McKnight,

“Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to those around them. And the community around them will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.”

Mayor Gerry Thiessen says, “The privilege we have to live in a community that supports an accord of this scope and depth is worth noting and the District of Vanderhoof is committed to the principles set forth within the accord. We will work closely with the Good Neighbours Committee to ensure that we hear and respect all the voices of community”.

Calvin Desmarais, District Principal for Aboriginal Education and member of the Good

Neighbours Committee, on behalf of School District No. 91 (Nechako Lakes), says, “At school, children learn to be students and students learn to be citizens. Understanding is the key to learning, and to developing strong positive relationships and communities. The school district supports the ideals of the Community Accord and is pleased to be a signatory on this community-wide initiative”.

Ken Simon, President of the Vanderhoof Rotary Club explained their involvement with the GNC and the Community Accord as exemplifying the guiding principles of Rotary and the four way test. The test, which has been translated into more than 100 languages, asks the following questions:

Of the things we think, say or do--

1. Is it the Truth?
2. Is it Fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build Goodwill and Better Friendships?
4. Will it be Beneficial to all concerned?

We must consider and invite the possibilities, to be the change, so that we may truly live in a community that is vibrant, diverse and progressive in which all people live, work, play and prosper together.

Check out the Good Neighbours Committee Blog:

<http://goodneighbours.wordpress.com/>

For more information on the Community Accord or the Good Neighbours Committee

call Charlyne Smilinski,

College of New Caledonia-Nechako

(250) 567-3200 or email smilinski@cnc.bc.ca.

To personally sign a registered copy of the Accord, please go to the District of Vanderhoof Office or to Saik’uz First Nation Band office.



**Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors
Signing of the Community Accord**