



Community Page



Students from Maple Grove Public School perform African drumming during Friday's Stop Racism event at White Oaks Secondary School in Oakville.

Photo by RON KUZYK

Multicultural council vibrant Halton resource

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

In some circles, the Halton Multicultural Council (HMC) may still be perceived as a small, even quaint, cultural agency.

Now marking its 25th anniversary, it has in fact evolved into a vibrant community resource as diverse as the myriad of people it serves.

Sure, the HMC hosts events that feature the food, dance and other unique attributes of various countries but that's only the most easily recognizable tip of the iceberg. Its main focus, however, is on services ranging from the integration of immigrants into their new community and fostering public awareness to English-as-second-language (ESL) classes, employment assistance and more.

So doing, says employment counsellor and settlement worker Al Shanghavi, the HMC provides many newcomers with the tools and resources necessary to start fresh.

"We empower people to believe in themselves," he said, adding that the HMC served

1,533 new clients — 11,283 in total from more than 30 countries — last year.

This is not to imply that everyone the HMC helps is "fleeing something terrible," said managing director Joanna Matthews.

In fact, 90 per cent of HMC clients are independent immigrants, or those whose presence in Canada injects an immediate and beneficial economic boost to their adopted communities by buying houses, cars and other big ticket items.

"That's one of the biggest misconceptions," said Ms Matthews, adding that their professional expertise and business savvy are similarly valuable.

Mr. Shanghavi explained that it's also a fallacy that they come to Canada only to sponge off the social safety net, when really what they want most is to become contributing members of society. As such, they pay taxes, start businesses and more.

"They're not here to take," said LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) co-ordinator Lynn DeLathouwer.

Many come to this country with high expectations, said Ms Matthews, but find it "not so easy

to move forward."

Their main hurdle, added Mr. Shanghavi, is the language barrier, followed by problems having their foreign education recognized, especially for doctors. Gaining "Canadian experience" is third.

Only adding to this frustration, said Ms DeLathouwer, are those willing to actively take advantage of newcomers, like landlords who make tenants pay a year's worth of rent in advance.

Many facets of program

The HMC offers a host of programs and services to help better equip immigrants to avoid some of these pitfalls while bolstering their confidence and improving their chances for employment.

"These are survival skills," said Ms Matthews. They range from settlement and integration, interpretation and translation and LINC to job search workshops and multicultural/anti-racism education. Funding is an ever-present challenge though, so HMC's "youth for youth" and Ethnic Seniors Network have been temporarily cancelled.

"The HMC can't help people with resources they don't have, including helping foreign professionals re-enter their fields," said Mr. Shanghavi.

The goals of all these efforts include, but aren't limited to, facilitating the settlement of immigrants and refugees into the community; developing community education programs to increase awareness of the needs of immigrants and refugees and fostering cross-cultural communication and understanding; encouraging the development of support groups and community organizations for immigrants and refugees; promoting cultural activities and special events designed to represent cultural heritage and develop inter-cultural understanding.

Such is the impact all this has on clients — that many of them waste no time giving back to the organization and the community that offered them assistance.

Take for example the Taiwanese woman in her thirties who attended LINC classes then felt so good about her skills she taught anti-discrimination workshops for grade 2 students.

• see SKILLS on page 9

TVCOGECO

Truly Local Television

www.cogeco.ca

NORTH HALTON STUDIO

Laurier Plaza
500 Laurier Avenue
Milton, ON L9T 4R3
905-878-9306

**Cogeco Cable
Channel 14**

Programming Schedule — Tuesday, March 30 - Monday, April 6, 2004

Tuesday, March 30		Wednesday, March 31		Thursday, April 1		Friday, April 2		Saturday, April 3		Sunday, April 4		Monday, April 5	
5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Early Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition	5pm, 6pm & 7:30pm	Plugged In! Late Week Edition
5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	5:30pm	Osler Health Connection			5:30pm	Be Inspired	5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	5:30pm	With Good Taste
6:30pm	Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	6:30pm	Be Inspired	6:30pm	Money Week			6:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:30pm	PeopleSpeak in Halton	6:30pm	Faces
8:00pm	Halton Hills Awards & Council - Mar. 22	7:00pm	Swap Talk (Live)	7:00pm	The Issue Is...			7:00pm	Money Week	7:00pm	Money Week	7:00pm	-Kelly & Stevens
		8:00pm	Milton Council - Mar 29	8:00pm	Main Street			8:00pm	Faces	8:00pm	Faces	8:00pm	Be Inspired
								8:30pm	- Kelly & Stevens			8:00pm	SportsZone Live (live)

"Swap Talk" - TVCogeco's Live Garage Sale Wednesday, 7pm