

Low self-esteem hobbles racists, says speaker at local conference

By KAREN SMITH
The Champion

A typical racist has low self-esteem and is looking for someone to blame for society's problems, an anti-racism conference heard Wednesday.

"Perpetrators (of racism) feel themselves to be the victim," said Dr. Karen Mock, the keynote speaker at the Milton event. "Are we the perpetrators in ways we don't know?"

From outright hatred due a person's race or culture to subtle stereotyping, racism comes in many forms, she said.

"As soon as you start to generalize to any group, you make a mistake stereotyping," she told the conference, hosted by the North Halton Cultural Awareness Council (NHCAC) and Halton Regional Police at Holy Rosary Church's Parish Hall.

While there isn't a racist "hiding behind every bush," Halton has its share of hate mongers, said Elizabeth Carmichael, conference co-chair and chair of the NHCAC.

Detective Don Cousens, the event's other co-chair and a Halton police officer, pointed out that 15 racially-motivated crimes have occurred in the region this year. The most recently publicized incident was the unprovoked attack on a black shopkeeper in Georgetown.

Craig Harrison, 30, of Halton Hills was sentenced last week to prison for two years less a day in the beating. He was also placed on probation for three years.

Mr. Harrison spewed out a number of racial slurs before the attack, court heard, and after being sentenced, he signed his probation order with a swastika beside his name. The same man reportedly once burned a cross on his lawn to protest the presence of racial minorities in Canada.

Racism is a problem that everyone must help solve, said Dr. Mock, national director of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada.



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.....
DR. KAREN MOCK

"What kind of injustices do we turn a blind eye to?" she told citizens to ask themselves.

She said victims of racism are abused in more ways than one because they're often left with feelings of guilt after being targeted, much like abused children blame themselves for vicious beatings. "It has nothing to do with what they've done. It's merely to do with what they are," she said. "Can we understand the role of the victim if we haven't been there?"

Halton Police Chief Peter Campbell said his force is dedicated to tracking down offenders of racially-motivated crimes. "We have to create a society that sees no colour," he said.

The day-long conference was attended by police officers, students, teachers, social workers, health care professionals and representatives of human rights agencies including Holocaust survivor Sigmund Reiser.

"For me it's something that's on my mind every day," said Mr. Reiser referring to the Nazi-driven massacre of Jews. "Those things will always be in me."

People from a variety of cultures and age groups were represented at the conference called Countering Hate and Bias in Halton. Participants broke off into groups to examine racism-related issues with the objective of coming up with solutions.

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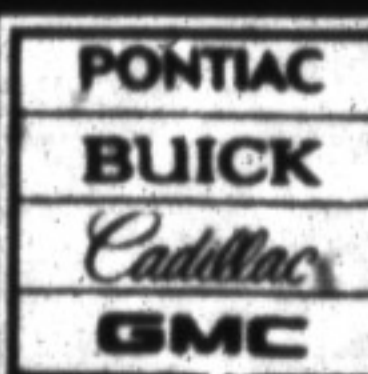
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