

People

Stouffville woman tours India, Bangladesh

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"It really opened my eyes."
That was how Barbara Ribble, manager of Stouffville's Care and Share Shoppe, summed up her feelings as she reflected on her journey to India and Bangladesh earlier this year.

Ribble was one of 12 people who took part in the Self Help Learning Tour, sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

"The idea is to go and meet the producers who make the crafts we sell here, to hear their stories and share them with our volunteers and with our community, so that we can increase awareness of global issues and needs," she explained.

Staying in simple accommodation and paying their own way, the group experienced considerable culture shock when confronted with the reality of lives lived in abject poverty.

"India is nothing like Canada," stressed Ribble.

Her first impression was of "people, noise, vehicles of every kind, erratic driving, beggars, families living on the street with their children and lack of sanitation."

Music blared in the streets and prayers were broadcast over loudspeakers.

"There was a noticeable absence of women in public services such as hotels and restaurants."

In Bangladesh, being Muslim, there was an absence of women on the streets. Poor sanitation and air pollution were rife, Ribble said.

"Lots of people have chronic coughs and chest infections. Life is cheap - we saw many accidents because of their driving and the roads."

Wife beating and dowry problems are

endemic and the caste system continues to be a major source of oppression. Violence was also a concern, with Hindus and Muslims constantly at each other's throats.

"There were some places we couldn't go where we were supposed to go," she noted. "It wasn't that people would fight us, but that our presence might cause a riot."

Crowds would come out en masse to greet the group, and the sheer volume of people could spark violence, as well as presenting a considerable safety hazard.

Despite the overwhelming poverty and despair they encountered, some signs of hope emerged during their trip, said Ribble.

On their first morning in Calcutta, the equivalent of a soup kitchen had been set up outside their hotel.

"This group feeds street people every Sunday. Every time I saw Indians looking after their own people, that was a sign of hope."

And the MCC programs themselves, encompassing everything from trade education to the teaching of job skills, have given people new hope, she added.

"It's also good to realize MCC is not the only organization there - the Salvation Army headquarters were right outside our hotel. The need seems so overwhelming, it's good to see people helping."

A highlight of the tour was the group's meeting with Mother Teresa. "We were with her about half an hour," Ribble recalled. "She welcomed us, shook hands with each of us and thanked us for coming to visit her."

Ribble described the 82 year old Mother Teresa as "soft-spoken, laughing and joking and very excited and knowledgeable about her work. She



Barbara Ribble (far right) met Mother Teresa on her recent visit to India.

wore a simple white sari, full of holes, and had bare feet."

The group visited an orphanage run by Mother Teresa.

"They arrange for adoptions where they can and teach the older girls typing," said Ribble. "Because of the dowry system and girls not being worth much to them, most of the orphans are girls. Mother Teresa also has a home for the destitute and dying, where they bring people off the streets and look after them." Each day, the Missionaries of Charity feed about 1,000 people. "We asked Mother Tere-

sa where she gets all her supplies and she said, 'God sends it every day. They have nothing, but their needs are met.'"

Over the last 12 years, MCC has supplied 150 tonnes of wheat, 28 tonnes of milk powder and 42 tonnes of soap to the Missionaries of Charity.

Ribble's trip brought home forcefully the importance of the Self Help program and the vital role played by stores like the Care and Share Shoppe.

"One thousand dollars of Self Help crafts sales provides sufficient income for one and a half families for a year," she said.

Board Briefs

New trustee appointed to York Board of Education

Holland Landing resident Virginia Hackson won the seat of trustee for East Gwillimbury by the luck of the draw.

York Region Board of Education trustees narrowed an initial list of 20 candidates to five in their search to fill the seat of long-time board member Ken Taylor who recently died.

Trustees couldn't decide between two final candidates, and Hackson's name was drawn from the hat by candidate Anne Weddel. Hackson is a program coordinator with the Newmarket recreation department and a part-time instructor

at Seneca College.

Focus on students

In his first full board address as director of education, Bill Hogarth stressed his "unrelenting focus on students" as his priority.

Since he was hand-picked for the job, Hogarth has visited schools throughout the region and said he found students learning, secretaries presenting a positive image of the system, immaculate foyers, well-organized teachers and administrators who are proud of the programs offered in York Region.

Hogarth underlined that he

will continue to visit schools regularly to ensure decisions made at the board table are actually making a difference for the better in the classroom.

But he noted an uneasiness among the staff because of changes within and outside the board which is facing "complex, critical issues including the continued evaluation of programs and student achievement."

Signs changed?

The York Region Board of Education is seeking to change signs on lots reserved as future schools sites so new home buy-

ers won't be deceived into believing a school will actually be built in their neighborhood.

Two Richmond Hill trustees with high population growth in their areas put forward a suggestion that signs make it clear that the site may or may not be the site of a school. "The signage on reserved or owned sites imply a future school," said trustee Heather Sinclair. "Municipalities don't give a damn. The signs are used by real estate sellers to show school sites where a school will never be built." Trustee Brenda Hogg who seconded the motion

said the current signs give a false impression. "We are right now misrepresenting our ability to provide schools," she said.

The motion asked that a phone number be placed on the sign so future residents can find out if and when a school will be built in that area and if their children will be bused to an existing school.

The board would have to ask developers, who pay for the signs, to change the wording. The motion was deferred until September to allow staff to clarify the board's right to ask for wording changes.

Region's OP policies outlined

(From page 1)

"Present evidence indicates that current standards and controls to permit only dry industries may not effectively control changes in use nor intensity of use," the report states.

The tight regulations are a glimmer of hope for residents, like Pride and Preston Lake ratepayers, who fear the placing of industry could destroy their otherwise serene countryside community without careful planning. But it's just one more roadblock for municipal politicians who say industrial tax dollars are desperately needed to help pay for expensive public services.

And it could mean a giant step backward for developers like the Vandorf West Business Park Group, which has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on studies to prove its plans for industry on unserviced land won't place detrimental effects on the surrounding environment.

But York is standing behind its belief that industry should largely take place in highly populated, urban centres like Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan.

Here's an example of policies York Region wants to incorporate into its OP when it comes to industry on dry services:

- completion of a settlement capability study;
- passing of special bylaws to regulate uses;
- banning any industry on wetlands

By following these rules, York officials say Whitchurch-Stouffville will be provided with moderate growth opportunities without harming the environment.

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