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**Cultural bridge-building group extends across region**

BY MIKE ADLER  
Staff Writer

The cultural bridge-building that started in Markham is growing.

As they were introduced this week, members of a new advisory group, the Police Intercultural Liaison Committee, had nothing but good things to say about the tolerance for minorities shown in York Region and Canada.

What Regional Councillor Jack Heath of Markham called the "terrible incidents" of the mid-1990s — hurtful comments about the Chinese community stemming from ignorance — seemed far behind, as did a lingering post-9/11 backlash felt by the region's Muslim community.

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch, the group's honorary chairperson, said the past decade has brought big changes — most residents of Richmond Hill and Markham weren't born in Canada — but all have been positive. People migrate to York for its quality of life and that, he said, includes the way the region embraces diversity.



**SUSAN HILTON:** Councillor says Whitchurch-Stouffville must prepare to meet needs of newcomers.

"If you look around the world you realize what can happen when people don't get together as friends. We won't let that happen," Mr. Fisch promised.

The group includes representatives of each York municipality, plus York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, RCMP Chief Supt. Ben Soave, Thornhill MP Susan Kadis and Thornhill MPP

Mario Racco.

East Gwillimbury Councillor Kathy Morton offered her support, though she admitted her town doesn't yet have a lot of cultural diversity. "We are just starting to grow at this point," she said.


Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Susan Hilton said Stouffville, "basically a white community", will soon experience rapid growth that will change its makeup.

"I'm not sure we're prepared for it," she said, but town programs will have to address the needs of newcomers.

Kamil Sadiq, chief co-ordinator of the Canadian Federation of Intercultural Friendship said he founded the group in 2001 to promote harmony between different ethnic groups, an experience that "changed my total view" of what could be done.

Rather than discussing their religious or political ties, he said, talking to people on a cultural basis and attending their cultural functions seems to work, he said.

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**Safety village nearly ready**

The finishing touches are being put on the \$3.5-million Community Safety Village to serve the children of York Region.

Last weekend, 40 volunteers laid 3,500 rolls of sod at the six-acre village at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area on Stouffville Road.

Construction of the miniature village is expected to be completed late this month.

Village co-ordinator Karen Richards said the laying of the sod would not have been possible without volunteers and their families from Vanbot Construction, York Regional Police, Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Services, Kinsmen Club of Stouffville and the vil-

lage's board of directors.

The sod was donated by Brouwer Sod Farms of Keswick.

The village includes a town hall, railway station, school, shops, cars, a police station, fire hall, library and post office.

"Upon the opening of the village, 25,000 students between Grades 1 and 4 will visit to learn life-saving lessons in pedestrian safety, traffic safety, fire safety and hydro safety from the full-time police and fire educators on site," Ms Richards said.

For more information, contact Karen Richards at 905-927-1919 or [5475@police.york.on.ca](mailto:5475@police.york.on.ca)

—Joan Ransberry

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