

MHR *Connections*

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Peace By Piece Banner Unveiled in Winnipeg and Brandon



Samantha, a grade 4 New Era student, attended the presentation of the Peace by Piece Banner in Brandon on December 10, 2008 at a celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. The event was hosted by the Brandon Race Relations Network.

Manitoba Human Rights Commission staff Pat Daniels and Pam Roberts participated along with other special guests and dignitaries including His Worship Mayor Dave Burgess and Manitoba Human Rights Commissioner Karen Banuga. Many guests commented that the Peace by Piece banner's message by students from across the province had a profound impact on them.

WINNIPEG - On December 9th, 2008 at 1:30 p.m. over 200 students and teachers from across the province unveiled their "Peace by Piece Banner" on the Grand Staircase of the Legislative Building. The celebration took place following the Human Rights Commission's Youth Conference earlier in the day.

In the spring of 2008, students and teachers from across Manitoba attended the Manitoba Human Rights Commission's *My World Your World Our World* youth conferences in Winnipeg, Brandon and The Pas. Each school was provided with materials to make a "Peace Piece," so that their human rights message could be added to those from across the province in celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December. Over 40 Manitoba schools contributed "Peace Pieces," which makes this banner a very impressive size!

This Peace by Piece Banner symbolizes the commitment of youth in Manitoba to human rights today and tomorrow. The banner was constructed with the help of COR Enterprises Inc. and Ventures, organizations which work with adults with disabilities, and the Headingley Tailor Shop. All these groups played a vital role in the assembly of the banner.

During the unveiling ceremony two schools were recognized for their work in human rights. Margaret Barbour Collegiate Institute in The Pas received the Challenge Award and Elmwood High School in Winnipeg received an Honourable Mention.

The banner travelled to Brandon where it was displayed on December 10. Next it will be going north, and be featured at the Manitoba Human Rights youth conference next April.

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The Rights Connection by Elliot Leven - Commissioner In appreciation of staff

It has become fashionable in some circles to criticize human rights commissions. Employers, landlords and service-providers sometimes say that human rights complaints against them are frivolous. They also contend that it is a waste of time and money defending themselves, while commissions conduct slow, lengthy investigations. Some journalists and editorialists have echoed these complaints.

Of course, some human rights complaints, like some lawsuits, really do lack merit. I can certainly sympathize with the respondents in such complaints.

I have less sympathy for respondents and journalists who criticize the staff of human rights commissions. By law, commission staff must accept complaints and investigate them, even if they suspect that, at the end of the day, the complaints will be dismissed for lack of merit.

By law, staff can't summarily dismiss complaints just because it looks like the complaints will ultimately fail. If people want the law changed they can lobby the politicians, but it is unfair and irrational to blame commission staff for the way the law is written.

I am often amazed at how quickly our staff manages to complete difficult investigations. They deal with very demanding parties and invariably do so with patience and tolerance. They face many hurdles. Parties to complaints can be slow to return calls and to provide documents. Sometimes they don't return calls at all. Ironically, the parties that cause the most delays are, at times, the ones who complain the loudest about how slow human rights commissions are.

Parties can miss the obvious. I have seen business owners who think they can ignore human rights laws whenever doing so is good for business. I have seen condominium corporations who think they can ignore human rights laws by simply getting a majority vote of unit holders. I have seen employers who think they can fire employees, in violation of human rights laws, as long as they give them two weeks pay (or otherwise comply with employment standards laws).

So here's to commission staff! Their jobs are not easy and they have to put up with unfair abuse. Somehow they manage to get the job done quickly and professionally. They deserve our thanks.

Human Rights Awards Winners Announced

WINNIPEG – On Wednesday, December 10, 2008, International Human Rights Day, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties jointly presented the Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba and the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award at a dinner celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This dinner followed the day-long “Into the Future” Human Rights Conference.



Yude Henteleff, C.M., Q.C., L.L.D. (Hon), (pictured here with former Regional Director of the Canadian Human Rights Commission Nicole Ritchot) received the Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba for his more than forty years of human rights advocacy on behalf of special needs children. He has travelled throughout Canada, and the world making presentations about the legal and human rights of special needs children. He has also written widely on the equality rights of these children and has received numerous honours and awards for his work and is one of the founders of both the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba (LDAM) and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC).



Irene McKay received the Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba for her dedicated work to the rights of First Nations children and youth. Mrs. McKay is a Cree woman from the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. She is a Child Development Specialist for the Children with Lifelong, Complex, Medical Needs, a pilot program of the

Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba. Mrs. McKay has been an advocate for the rights of these children, working tirelessly to establish and maintain appropriate resources within the First Nations community to ensure that children with complex medical needs can return to a loving and nurturing home environment.



Accepting the 2008 Sybil Shack Memorial Manitoba Human Rights Youth Award on behalf of **Joe A. Ross School of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation** were students Raven Richards and Brenna Constant. MARL Board Member Angie Conrad presented the award. The school took Article 26 of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to an education, very seriously. The school raised money to help orphaned children in Rwanda realize their dream of an education. Staff had money deducted from their pay cheques, while students engaged in fundraising. The schools they supported increased their enrollment from 50 to over 300 students.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission celebrates International Day of Persons with Disabilities with two successful settlements

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission announced on December 3, 2008, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, two settlements, which will improve the lives of many people with disabilities in Manitoba.

The first, announced by Minister of Family Services and Housing Gord Mackintosh, is an agreement facilitated by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. This agreement addresses the discrepancy in financial support adults with disabilities face when they reside with their families.

The second is an agreement with the City of Winnipeg, which benefits people with disabilities when they are attempting to cross streets at controlled intersections. This settlement will result in all intersections with pedestrian traffic signals eventually having audible cues.

These settlements resulted from human rights complaints.

In the first settlement, in April 2009 the Province will increase the room and board allowance for persons with disabilities receiving social assistance who live with a family member. Room and board rates will increase from \$441 per month to \$566 per month for single adults, a 28% increase. This will bring the rate in line with what is available to someone who is living in a private home with a non-relative. Providing more financial support to families caring for their adult children with disabilities will promote more independence for adults with disabilities and more stability for their families' support and care.

With regards to the settlement with the City of Winnipeg, the City has agreed to install audible signals at all controlled intersections over a set time period. It will also remove push buttons from most of the downtown area and at many locations in the rest of Winnipeg, and will test alternate methods of activating signals that are accessible. Once found, a feasible alternative to push buttons will be implemented. In carrying out the settlement, the City will consult a team of representatives from the community, Commission and City and report publicly each year on the progress made to date.

Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission says that these successful settlements resulted from individual complaints filed against the City of Winnipeg and the Government of Manitoba, adding that the Commission recognizes the contributions of individuals who come forward with complaints. “Individuals who file complaints put in a lot of time and effort and selflessly place the interest of others ahead of their own. The hard work of a few individuals often improves the lives of many other people,” she says.

The annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities promotes an understanding of disability issues and mobilizes support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It seeks to increase awareness of gains made from the integration of persons with disabilities into every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.