

Program helps immigrant navigate Canadian schools

By LIZ MONTEIRO
RECORD STAFF

KITCHENER

As a newcomer to Canada, Dina Mahmutova didn't know she could get involved in the schooling of her children.

In her native Kyrgyzstan, teachers act as second parents and whatever they say goes. Parents rarely play a role in their children's academic progress.

And volunteering in the classroom is unheard of.

So coming to Kitchener and actively participating in the education of her nine-year-old and four-year-old daughters appeared daunting to Mahmutova until she joined a leadership program for immigrant parents.

"The program makes you feel that people care," she said. "They welcomed us into the school and into the country."

"As a newcomer that is so important to me."

Mahmutova, who has stayed at home to look after her children, was among 32 immigrant parents who participated in a two-year pilot project.

The Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrant Concerns was spearheaded by the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre.

The purpose of the project, paid for by Canadian Heritage, was to engage parents in their children's education.

More than half the training was spent on educating immigrant parents about the school system in Ontario. Parents also learned how to advocate for their children, how to handle parent-teacher interviews and how to facilitate meetings.

At the end of the program, all parents were involved in their schools in some way, said Gebre Berihun of the



Dina Mahmutova became involved in her children's education at Westmount Public School in Kitchener after taking part in a pilot project for new Canadians.

Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre.

Some are now on the school council, others help students with math, and some help with a breakfast program, he said.

Mahmutova is vice-chair of the school council at Westmount Public School.

Edgar Najera, a father of five, said he feels enlightened.

"I discovered a whole new world," said the Kitchener man, who had little to do with the education of his three older children, who attended Monsignor Haller Catholic School.

Najera came to Kitchener from Guatemala 12 years ago.

"I went to work and home and that was it. Then I joined this fabulous group. They made us feel comfortable

and useful."

Whether the program for immigrant parents continues will depend on funding.

But Najera said he will encourage his community through the Guatemalan association and a Spanish-language newspaper to get involved in the education of their children.

"This is a new opportunity to give back to this beautiful country," he said.

Jim Berry, principal of Sunnyside Public School, said new Canadian parents were not the only learners during the pilot project.

"The things I have learned from parents," he said.

"They took the risk to talk to us and the more parents get involved the more we all get better."

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Women urged to take on 'heroes' that shape men

By KAREN KAWAWADA
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KITCHENER

Judy Rebeck still remembers the shouting.

It was about 25 years ago, and the longtime feminist activist and journalist was living in an apartment in Toronto. A couple in another unit were fighting, and it soon became apparent the man was beating the woman.

Rebeck went into the hall. She was the only one there. She banged on the door where the woman was being beaten. Luckily, the man stopped, and Rebeck called police.

Almost the same thing happened 10 years later. But there was a difference. By the time Rebeck got to the door, several people were already there.

In a decade, violence against women had gone from a taboo subject best left behind closed doors to something widely seen as wrong.

Rebeck related the story at the Walper Terrace Hotel last night, at a talk hosted by the Kitchener-Waterloo Sexual Assault Support Centre, the centre's major event for sexual assault awareness month.

That grassroots feminist activists have broken the silence about violence against women is "a huge triumph against patriarchy," she said.

"But it's only halfway. . . The violence hasn't stopped. And I think now we have to take on men."

By taking on men, Rebeck means the way boys learn to be men — by watching movie "heroes" such as Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible and Arnold Schwarzenegger in his various tough-guy roles.

"We have this celebration of male violence in popular culture and nowhere do we talk to young men and women about what's a healthy relationship."

Movies and pop songs tend to celebrate obsessive love characterized by jealousy and possessiveness rather than relationships between equals.

And while the ideas of what women can be and do have expanded, boys are still taught they're not successful as males if they're not the Schwarzenegger type, Rebeck said.

Telling a boy he's "girlie" is still one of the worst insults he can receive. It's time that changed, she argued.

"We've got women to do most of what men can do. Now we have to get men to do what women can do."



Social activist Judy Rebeck says feminism has developed some powerful tools for combatting violence against women.

Because patriarchy underpins violence against women, combatting it must be done from a feminist perspective, as opposed to a "social-worky" one, Rebeck said.

Over the years, feminism has developed powerful tools, which are as essential and groundbreaking as ever in some parts of the world. Rebeck recently visited Jordan, where a group of well-educated, middle-class Iraqi women invited her to give a training session.

The women found it easy to talk about issues such as sexual assaults by strangers but tremendously difficult to talk about issues affecting their own lives.

The 1970s ideas of consciousness-raising groups and the personal being political were revelations to them.

When the Iraqi women finally began to talk about the barriers facing them in their own lives, they came to the conclusion a patriarchal tradition was behind the biggest obstacles.

Sara Casselman, community relations coordinator for the Kitchener-Waterloo Sexual Assault Support Centre, reminded the audience of about 100 that violence against women happens every day in our midst.

In Waterloo Region, 441 sexual assaults were reported to police in 2004, she said.

Given that fewer than 10 per cent of sexual assaults are ever reported to police, and more than 85 per cent of victims are women, it could be assumed that more than 3,700 women were sexually assaulted that year, she said.

"Sexual violence against women is universal but not inevitable," she said.

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GETTING HELP

The Kitchener-Waterloo Sexual Assault Support Centre has a free, 24-hour crisis and support line at 741-8633.

Public warms to Canbar plans

Delegates pleased about growth in core, but reaction to building design is mixed

By PHILIP JALSEVAC
RECORD STAFF

WATERLOO

There seems to be broad public acceptance of the proposed redevelopment of the former Canbar industrial lands, says a planner for developer Auburn Developments Inc.

"There is a growing recognition that we need to intensify," Glenn Scheels said about the The BarrelYards, a \$140-million development that entails development of 750 "luxury" units in seven buildings in the city core.

Chris Pidgeon, a partner with Scheels in the planning firm GSP Group of Kitchener, said some concerns have been raised, mostly about traffic issues, but public response to the plan so far has been "very positive." Pidgeon noted that only two delegates spoke last night at an informal public meeting of council and both were "reasonably positive." Nobody raised any strong objections at the meeting, one of the first steps in a long planning approval process that will extend into 2007.

John Shortreed of Euclid Avenue raised one sour note about the preliminary, conceptual design of the proposed buildings, which he described as "some '50s, '60s apartment styles." "I wish

there was another word, but it is ugly," he told council. "It really is not very attractive." That being said, Shortreed said the "the uptown is just getting better and better. . . the Auburn development is in a great location. I think that it is a wonderful development."

The second delegate, Carmeta Abbot, chair of the Waterloo Park committee, said: "We welcome new residents in uptown Waterloo." However, she told council: "Investment will need to be made to enhance and conserve our very special park. Councillors and staff should be talking about and planning for this substantial increase in the use of Waterloo park for the neighbours who will be moving into the Auburn development."

Residents of The BarrelYards, at Erb Street and Father David Bauer Drive, will view the park as an "attractive amenity" and a "quiet oasis," she said.

Construction on the five-hectare (12.7-acre) vacant site would be phased in over five to seven years.

The proposal includes five apartment buildings ranging from seven to 15 storeys in height and two condominium buildings of 17-storeys each.

Those two tallest structures would be at the north end of the property overlooking Waterloo Park.

As well, there would be about a

dozen two- to three-storey townhouses at the northern end of Avondale Avenue on its east side.

Auburn, based in London, Ont., says the new "neighbourhood" would be home to about 2,000 residents.

Jamie Crich, president of Auburn, said in an interview that he doesn't agree with Shortreed's characterization of the buildings as ugly.

For one thing, he said: "We didn't want something too modern, to fit in with the heritage feel." And, in any case, the architect's renderings are still in a conceptual design stage that will be fine-tuned.

Auburn's plan also entails development of a seven-storey hotel and six-storey office building, with both fronting on to Erb Street.

There would be 1,600 parking spots on three levels, with 890 underground, 520 surface spots and 190 on the second level of two-tier deck structures.

The proposal also includes a park and tree-lined streetscapes.

The developer is seeking an official plan and zoning bylaw amendment.

One of the key issues is a bid to have council change the height restrictions, which are currently capped at four to seven storeys. A formal public hearing, at which council will make its decision on the zoning application, will likely not be held until early 2007.

If the project goes ahead, Auburn is planning to begin construction by early fall of next year.

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Tax: Costs go up

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Coun. John Gazzola was absent but sent an e-mail saying he supported using some of the 2005 surplus to reduce the 2006 property taxes.

As a member of the economic development advisory committee, Coun. John Smola said he has heard from several local businesses about the increased cost of natural gas and water.

"The ones in my ward anyway explained that taxes were a burden on their business and costs are rising, both in utilities and other areas, and if we could keep the taxes down that would help out those businesses."

Kitchener Mayor Carl Zehr wanted to make it clear this was a one-time adjustment to bring the 2006 tax rate to zero.

"I think it's good to get it to the taxpayers as quickly as we can," Zehr said.

In a brief interview after the meeting, Galloway said he was pleased with city council's unanimous support, and he denied this was a move to gather support in an election year.

"Two years in a row at \$3.5 million, it just seems that some of the projections are not as correct as they could have been and, therefore, in my mind, it creates a bit of overtaxation," Galloway said.

Even before yesterday's move, Kitchener city council had the lowest tax-rate increase in Waterloo Region.

The 2006 tax hikes ranged from a high of four per cent in the City of Waterloo to two per cent in North Dumfries. Waterloo Region came in at 2.6 per cent and the City of Cambridge at 2.2 per cent.

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Photos: 'I have bad dreams'

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She'd come to the 32-year-old man's home in Kitchener for a sleepover with his two young daughters, who were visiting.

The man will have to serve only 12 more months in jail because of credit he received for time spent in pre-trial custody. He isn't being named to protect the identity of the victims.

"It's not long enough if you ask me," the mother of the older girl said outside court.

The man pleaded guilty last year to sexual interference and making and publishing child pornography.

He told police he took his digital camera and photographed his roommate's daughter and his neighbour's daughter because he was bored. He also said he just wanted to see if he could get away with it.

But Crown prosecutor Andre Rajna said those weren't the real reasons. The man did it simply because he is attracted to young girls, Rajna said.

He pointed to a psychological report in which a doctor concluded the man is a heterosexual pedophile.

His activities came to light last September when the older girl came to his home for the sleepover. His two daughters were visiting him.

The girl woke to feel a tugging at the bottom of her sleeping bag and on her shorts. She saw flashes of light.

Peeking out of her sleeping bag, she saw the man with a camera. He'd opened the bottom of her bag to take pictures.

She pretended to be sleeping and he eventually left.

A year earlier, the man had sent

love letters to this girl, then 10, declaring his feelings for her. Police were not contacted.

After the sleepover incident, the girl ran home and told her mother, who called police. They checked his computer and found the pornographic pictures of the seven-year-old girl.

The man's hand and penis were included in some of the photos beside a sleeping child. The girl's mother identified her daughter from her underwear and bedsheets in the photographs.

It was obvious the man had taken the photos over a period of time, although court didn't hear under what circumstances. Once arrested, the man confessed to his crimes.

"Both of our lives have been turned upside down," the mother of the eight-year-old girl who wakes up screaming said in a victim-impact statement received by the court earlier.

"As a mother, I feel I have failed with protecting my daughter. What makes it hard for me to understand is why. It's going to take a long time to heal and move on with our lives."

The mother of the older girl expressed her feelings of betrayal.

"Even once the police had arrived, I still did not want to believe it that a person I considered a friend could deceive and hurt people in such a manner — especially when children are supposed to be cared for and respected by adults," she said.

"From this day on, I shall protect her even more from predators in society like you. I shall never again bestow my trust upon anyone so liberally

where my children are concerned."

Her sleep has also been disturbed. She said she wakes up often at night "just to ensure myself that my children are safe."

She has recurring nightmares of the man coming to take her daughter. The girl is too afraid to sleep in her own bed, and bunks down with her mother.

"I have bad dreams about him," the girl said in her victim-impact statement.

Justice Margaret Woolcott put the man on three year's probation. During that time, he must attend programs for sexual offenders and for alcohol and substance abuse. He cannot use a computer except for work or as allowed by his probation officer. He can't use a computer to contact anyone 14 or under.

He can't possess "any item capable of producing photographic images." He can't have contact with anyone 14 or under unless he is with an approved adult.

Should he want to resume contact with his own children, Family and Children's Services would have to be involved.

The judge also imposed a lifetime ban against going to parks, swimming pools, day-care centres and other places where children might be present.

His name will be on the national sex offender registry for 20 years.

"I can't heal what went wrong," Woolcott said. "But I hope the sentence gives some comfort to the victims and they can now move on."

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Swim: Help from master

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Solo Swims of Ontario, the provincial swimming body governing those participating in long-distance solo swims, assigns a swim master to direct Whiteside's training program and be present during the attempt.

At Waterloo Oxford District Second School in New Hamburg, where she is in Grade 11, students are trying to collect \$1,000 in pennies for the cause.

The swimmer still needs two 30-foot boats and two inflatable Zodiaks for the team accompanying her, Pam said. The registration fee is being covered by the Foresters.

The fraternal organization has launched a national fundraiser with the Arthritis Society called Foresters Big Swim for Arthritis.

About 1,000 children in Canada have juvenile arthritis. Symptoms include joint swelling, pain and stiffness.

Water exercise has been shown to help children with the disease, said Shirley Mitchell, regional community development manager at the Arthritis Society's Kitchener branch.

Although the Big Swim event is over for this year, the Foresters were impressed with Whiteside's determination. So is Mitchell.

"I'm blown away," she said. "She is really a living example of our research."

To make an online pledge to Whiteside's fundraising campaign, go to <https://secure.e2rm.com/registrant/StartUp.aspx?SID=834158>

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