

Aboriginal poverty 'a black mark'

FONTAINE LAUDED

Wins rights award, decries plight of aboriginals

HUBERT BAUCH
THE GAZETTE

Rampant aboriginal poverty will be the country's shame in the eyes of the world until it is resolved, says Phil Fontaine, Canada's foremost aboriginal leader of his generation.

"I've been consistent on this one point, which is that I believe the single most important social justice issue in the country is First Nations poverty," said the past National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

"It is a burden on the entire country, not just the people living it, a black mark on Canada because we are one of the richest countries in the world yet have Third World living conditions right in our back yard."

Fontaine was honoured in Montreal as the first recipient of the Equitas Award for Human Rights Education, bestowed by the locally based international non-governmental organization.

The group was founded in 1967 to promote democracy, human development, peace and social justice through educational programs. For the past 30 years it has run a human rights training program that attracts participants from 60 countries every year.

Founders include such eminent figures as Harry Batshaw, Canada's first Jewish Supreme Court justice, women's rights pioneer Thérèse Casgrain, and John Humphries, lead author of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



Phil Fontaine (left) is presented an award for human rights education by Deon Ramgoolam, of the Montreal-based organization Equitas, during a ceremony last night.

Its new award is intended to recognize activists defending rights on the front lines who contribute to a culture of human rights, Equitas executive director Ian Hamilton said.

Fontaine was recognized for his achievements in advancing not just the cause of aboriginal rights in Canada, but general awareness of the importance of human rights to the lives of all Canadians, Hamilton said.

"In terms of what we were trying to do with this award, particularly this first year, we felt Phil Fontaine was the most worthy of a list of worthy candidates," he said.

Fontaine, 65, served an unprecedented three terms as national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, from 1997 to 2000, and from 2003 to 2009. He is a member of the Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba, where he was first

elected chief at age 28.

The achievements for which he was recognized include securing a formal apology from the federal government for abuses under the Indian residential schools system and negotiating a \$5-billion compensation settlement for its victims, along with a truth and reconciliation commission, and the negotiation of the Kelowna Accord in 2005, designed to improve living conditions and educational standards for aboriginals.

Since leaving his Assembly of First Nations post, Fontaine has served as a special adviser for the Royal Bank of Canada. He recently worked on organizing the Olympic torch run and advises on the administration of the bank's environmental fund.

He deplored the Conservative government's renunciation of the Kelowna Accord

negotiated with the previous Liberal administration.

"It was a real opportunity for us to turn the corner," Fontaine said. "It was a well thought out, well designed plan with real targets. It was focused on education, housing, health and economic development, all of which are crying needs for our community."

He added, however, the truth and reconciliation commission under way is a splendid opportunity to fix some of what is wrong in the relationship between Canadians and the aboriginal population.

He said he was both honoured and humbled by the Equitas award.

"It's nice to receive awards, but I see them as acknowledgment of First Nations' place in Canada."

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Bringing country to the city: A sweet treat for families



MIKE BOONE
on Urban Sugar Shack

"In addition to maple taffy, the event will serve pea soup."

The party will rock, unless it's crashed by a rottweiler with a sweet tooth.

The first Urban Sugar Shack will take place, weather permitting, in Percy Walters Park tomorrow. The downtown green space has been a bone of contention between parents, who think parks are for children, and dog-owners, whose pets had the leash-free run of the joint until two years ago.

In response to complaints by area residents concerned about the potentially uneasy relationship between dogs and small children, the city fenced off a dog run on the north side of Percy Walters Park, which is on Dr. Penfield Ave., between Redpath St. and McGregor Ave.

Dogs will be sniffing at the fence tomorrow. In addition to maple taffy, the Urban Sugar Shack will serve pea soup.

It's all free. And with music and play activities for children, the Urban Sugar Shack is refreshingly family fun-oriented by the standards of downtown green spaces.

In contrast to stereotypical downtown dwellers - single, transient and more inclined, if companionship is needed, toward four-legged friends - many residents of the mountain slope are parents with young children. Demography untypical of an urban core has spurred creation of a Percy Walters Park Family Association, which is organizing the sugaring-off event in cooperation with Tandem Ville Marie and Éco-quartier Peter McGill.

Julie Street, a project manager with Éco-quartier Peter McGill, said the idea for an Urban Sugar Shack began with a grant from the city.

"They basically said do whatever you want with it, but make sure it's a family affair," she explained.

She said 8,000 Montrealers live in census tracts bounded by Sherbrooke St., Pine Ave., University St. and Côte des

Neiges Rd. She sees creation of the Percy Walters Family Association as evidence of a "surprising number" of downtowners with children.

"They're not like people who live here, have a kid and move out to the suburbs," Streets added. "They want to stay downtown."

"Urban kids might not get the chance to go to a sugar shack in the country. We'll be bringing it to them."

The Urban Sugar Shack will run from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. tomorrow in Percy Walters Park, Dr. Penfield Ave. between McGregor and Redpath Sts. It is free and open to the public. Rain-check day is Sunday.

Dr. Norman Cornett is back at McGill, albeit in two dimensions.

Monday evening at 7, National Film Board director Alanis Obomsawin will screen her most recent documentary in Room 132 of the university's Leacock Building. The film is called Professor Norman Cornett, and tells the story of the professor's dismissal by McGill.

Cornett had taught at the university for 15 years when he was fired in 2007. He still doesn't know why, and no one

Cornett had taught at McGill for 15 years when he was fired in 2007.

from McGill explained the sacking to Obomsawin.

A native of east Texas who studied at University of California, Berkeley, Cornett fetched up in Montreal in 1974. He is a passionate francophile who came here to complete his doctoral thesis on cleric/historian Lionel Groulx.

Cornett was an eccentric teacher whose unorthodox methods were not universally admired. But the students who liked him loved him, and several offer glowing endorsements in the documentary. How Cornett rubbed McGill administrators the wrong way remains a mystery.

Maybe principal Heather Monroe-Blum can pop over for a Q&A at the screening.

Professor Norman Cornett will be shown Monday at 7 p.m. in Room 132 of McGill University's Leacock Building.

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Speeder's lawyer vows to appeal court ruling

Judge upholds increase in fines and demerit points enacted in 2008

JAN RAVENSBERGEN
THE GAZETTE

A Sherbrooke resident has lost a bid in Quebec Court to overturn tougher and costlier penalties for excessive speeding that took effect in the province almost two years ago.

But the 13-page ruling by Quebec Court Judge Claude Provost will be appealed next week to Quebec Superior Court, said Claude Villeneuve, the lawyer for plaintiff

Charles Duguay.

Provost ruled Duguay must pay the maximum penalty imposed under new traffic rules that took effect April 1, 2008, a fine combined with penalties amounting to a total of \$718, along with 10 demerit points on his driving permit.

Duguay had been caught in June 2008 doing 122 kilometres an hour on a Champlain Bridge exit, where the speed limit is 70 kilometres an hour.

Had he won in Quebec

Court level, his fine would have been chopped to \$265 - and he would have lost only five points.

"From our point of view, we have a different interpretation of the point-demerit mechanism, and that's what we'll be taking to Superior Court," Villeneuve said.

Legal fees and other costs in the test case are being covered by a group of "several dozen" speedy drivers in similar situations, he added.

The results on appeal, if Duguay were to prevail, could have much more far-reaching consequences.

Thousands of motorists - more than 20,000 pinched by

the Sûreté du Québec alone since the law took effect - have been fined at the higher level for excessive speeding, and had double points taken away.

A class-action lawsuit could be carried forward to reverse half their point losses.

In the event of a win by Duguay, provincial Transport Minister Julie Boulet indicated prior to the Quebec Court judgment, Quebec would amend the law to eliminate the old fine structure. It had been left in the law to cover violations at lower speeds.

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