local

Beating brings town together

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As a teenager lay in critical condition in Prince George hospital, his community rallied back home in Vanderhoof to end the violence that put him there.

The family of the perpetrators and the family of the victim stood side by side offering each other support.

Brandon Lee Thomas-Flurer, 17, was described to The Citizen as a friendly, athletic, positive youth influence for the Saik'uz First Nation based on the Stoney Creek Reserve.

That was where Thomas-Flurer was on Friday night as he walked home, excited about the new job at Extra Foods he was starting the next morning.

He was only a couple of months away from graduation at Nechako Valley secondary school, and he was impatient for the spring thaw to open up the pitches for the games of rugby and soccer he loves so much.

His mother said all of that will have to be curtailed due to the effects of head trauma.

The beating was so savage – the suspects' identities are known and police are looking for them – the tread of the attackers' shoes could be seen on the victim's face.

His brain was bleeding.

She credited native remedies for part of his encouraging recovery, but she trusts the analysis of his conventional doctors about the dire consequences of his head injuries.

"The drugs and alcohol has taken over the young people in the communities, and they targeted my son," said Thomas-Flurer.

"They were passing in a truck and jumped out and pounded him, just random.

"He was three blocks from home and they just left him there. It could have been anyone – anyone's child."

Others saw their own family members embodied in the nearly fatal attack, and since it was not the first – just the worst – violence in the Saik'uz-Vanderhoof area in recent times, it sparked a burst of action.

All ages rallied at the Saik'uz hall to support a fallen youth and curb community violence.
Photo by David Luggi

By Sunday at 11 a.m. scores of people were motivated to attend a talking circle at the Saik'uz community centre.

Among the attendees were Carrier Sekani Tribal Council Chief David Luggi, Saik'uz First Nations Chief Jackie Thomas, most of the Saik'uz elected council, and representatives of the RCMP.

Thomas-Flurer said she and the community all knew that drugs and alcohol have been the bane of Northern B.C. communities for decades, and it was the main fuel in this violence.

"There are so many things needed to make a community, and there is no money for that," she said.

"We have to start talking about solutions and talking about traditional ways. What I want is for the people who did this to face an elders' circle and let them decide what retribution and payment has to come of it."

She cautioned the word retribution was meant in its most literal sense.

"Forgiveness is what it is all about," she said. "I got word right away that the mother of one of the boys who attacked my son was crying at the gathering. I want her to know that I forgive those who did this. I want them to face their community, but the last thing our family wants is for any feelings of revenge or feelings of hate to be in our hearts. We have love in our hearts. My son is in the hospital and other people's children have been in the hospital from violence and what are you going to do to stop that from happening anymore? What am I going to do alongside you? This is a really good example of how communities have to come together."

Brandon Lee Thomas-Flurer was transferred to hospital in Vanderhoof on Sunday night.

Earlier in the day, before the results of tests and scans came back, preparations were being made for his transfer to Vancouver instead. His improvement was good enough to warrant care closer to his loved ones.

Racism is never anything but ugly

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"We weren't happy when he was freed without a proper trial. Killing is killing, it is always wrong," Powar said, stressing that evil was done on all sides of that bitter conflict.

Yet flowers grow out of concrete. In Sierra Leone, Powar would travel outside the UN protection protocols because he had very dark skin and could move about the traumatized population more easily than white UN officials. He always hired the same youth to be his guide and translator.

"He was from a family that was completely slaughtered," he said. "When the rebels came to his house, he managed to hide but he could see them. He watched as they made his older brother rape his sister, while his parents were forced to watch it all, then they murdered them all and moved on to the next house."

You could never help everyone, he said, it was an overwhelming level of social destruction and permanent mental scarring, to say nothing of the tens of thousands there who had limbs and facial features hacked off by machetes. Yet they had a will to live and thrive, despite the marks of horror. So you picked a few and helped then as much as you could, he said.

And in Kosovo his heart found an even deeper level of empathy. He is now married to a woman he met there. She is back in her home country now caring for an ailing family member, and Powar will join her in a few weeks.

He can't wait to see the changes there now since he left Kosovo in 2006, and his greatest wish is to return to Sierra Leone for the same purpose. "When I got back to Canada I couldn't help think that we must have all done something wonderful in a past life to deserve living here," he said. "We are very blessed. And we complain about the stupidest things."

Yet even here there is ethnic tension bubbling away. He reminded everyone that Yugoslavia was a model European society, and Sierra Leone was a five-star resort destination in the very recent past. Discrimination, if left unchecked, could rush like an infection through a social system.

He experienced a few incidents of racism against himself or observed among his Sikh friends in the 1970s and '80s in Prince George, but is impressed with how accepted Western culture is by the Sikhs here, and vice versa, albeit still imperfect.

Powar sat on Sunday morning at the Guru Gobind Singh Temple having tea with Daniel Gallant, the organizer of today's rally (4:30 p.m. at the Prince George Courthouse) having tea and traditional food of India. Gallant was once an activist in the B.C. and Alberta skinhead white supremacy movement. Both remembered living in the Lower Mainland at about the same time when a Sikh man was killed in a skinhead attack.

Daniel Gallant, and Lucky Powar, right, will be among the speakers at the Racism-Stop it! rally at the Prince George Courthouse today at 4:30 p.m.
Citizen photo by David Mah

"That was a big part of why I wanted to have the Sikh community involved in this event, and somehow it was meant to be because Lucky was the perfect person to do that," Gallant said.

Powar was working at one of the prisons involved in the sentencing of the attackers and he remembered "we all went out of our way to be professional, at the time, but to make sure they were handled by absolutely as many people of colour as we could."

Since then, he said, some of the attackers turned remorseful for their actions, and one even converted to Sikhism. That, said Powar and Gallant together, took a lot of work and a lot of love from all sides. That is what will diminish discrimination.

City continues to support Japanese relief efforts

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Prince George's Japanese community is rallying to support friends and loved ones living in Japan.

On March 6 a massive earthquake — measured as high as nine on the Richter Scale — convulsed the island nation, causing a massive tsunami which devastated Japan's northeast coast.

Last week students and professors at UNBC launched a fundraising campaign for the Canadian Red Cross' Japan Earthquake and Pacific Fund. Volunteers asked residents to come out and fold paper cranes and make a donation to the fund

Japanese tradition holds that anyone who folds 1,000 origami cranes will be blessed. Senbazuru, strings of colourful paper cranes, are often given as wedding presents and hung in the home for good luck.

In an e-mail, UNBC professor Ami Hagiwara said as of Thursday students had raised over $1,000 dollars and close to 1,000 cranes.

"After people found out [about] this fundraising, more people outside of the university also show[ed] great support," Hagiwara said. "... a Japanese-Canadian couple phoned me and offered more than 700 origami papers. That was very helpful because we were almost running out of paper.

Others have shown their support by bringing food and support for the volunteers.

A pair of city residents will be belly dancing to support the fundraising efforts this week and Tokiko Wilkening will be playing the koto – Japanese harp.

"The local people showed their support for us and this event would be one of the unforgettable memories for Japanese students in their Canadian student life," Hagiwara said.

Donations to the Canadian Red Cross can be made at UNBC, College of New Caledonia, AiM-Hi, Days Inn Hotel, University Hospital of Northern B.C., Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society and the Sendo sushi restaurant.

The Days Inn Hotel will be hosting a pub night fundraiser for Japan on March 25. The Pine Centre Mall and Two Rivers Gallery will also have events next weekend.

For more information about local fundraising events, go online to *www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=205871826090782*.

HELPING OUT — Terry Kleinsteuber and Miki Tomita, UNBC ESL student, admire Terry's origami handiwork after he folded a crane from paper at the booth for Japanese earthquake victims at the Pine Centre Mall on Saturday.
Citizen photo by David Mah

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LOTTO BC, LOTTO 6/49 LOTTO MAX

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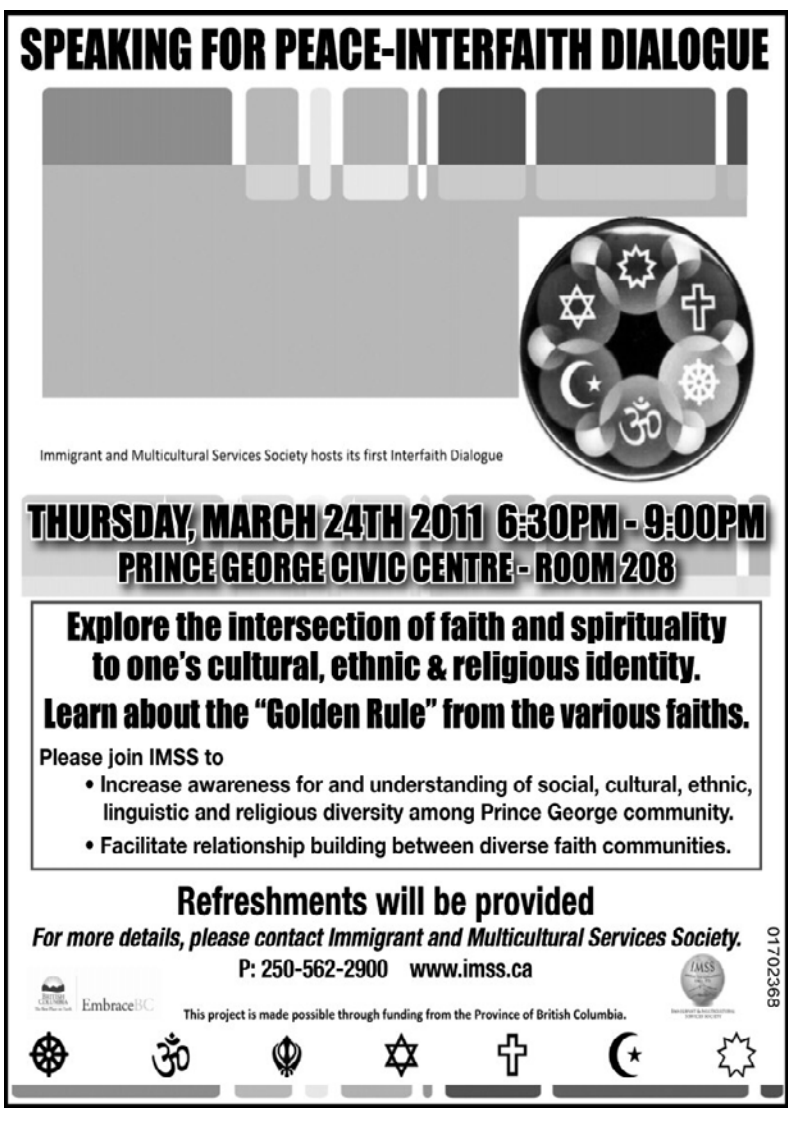
Lotto Max draw winning numbers were
02 05 10 21 25 35 49 The bonus number was **40**

Lotto Max EXTRA winning numbers for British Columbia were
47 57 82 98

Saturday's Lotto-6/49 winning numbers were
07 25 28 31 36 45 The bonus number was **49**

Saturday's BC-49 lottery winning numbers were
05 11 12 14 19 39 The bonus number was **29**

Saturday's EXTRA winning numbers for British Columbia
40 62 77 93

In the event of a discrepancy between this and the official winning numbers list, the latter shall prevail.