

Cowichan Valley Citizen
Wednesday, March 01, 2006

Cowichan businesses asked to become Safe Harbours

Cowichan Intercultural Society is celebrating 25 years of standing up for diversity and wants for businesses and community groups to get on board.

With support from the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C., Cowichan Intercultural Society is one of the B.C. organizations that have been chosen to implement the Nanaimo Safe Harbour Model.

This province-wide initiative involves and trains one or two key staff people of agencies and businesses in reflecting an inclusive province that celebrates strong, healthy and diverse communities.

"Safe Harbour locations announce to the community that they understand and welcome diversity, and that they serve as temporary sanctuaries for people who experience discrimination or harassment and briefly need a safe place to go," says CIS Executive Director Martin Breuhan. "Each Safe Harbour location is also part of a growing network of smart, forward-looking businesses and agencies that proudly embrace the richness and diversity of B.C.'s communities."

The Safe Harbour project began in Nanaimo in 2004, when a range of enthusiastic businesses and agencies, from Royal Bank to ACME Foods, became the first Safe Harbours in British Columbia. Today, dozens of locations proudly display the Safe Harbour window decal.

"Over the next decade, the Safe Harbour decal will become as widely recognized as Block Parent," Breuhan says. "Our training helps agencies, businesses and institutions better serve and provide Safe Harbour for their clients, customers, students and employees of diverse backgrounds. Each training session will identify simple steps that their staff can take to welcome and better serve a diverse population, and to support someone who needs temporary refuge."

When an agency or business has completed the two-hour training, it will receive the Safe Harbour designation and a Safe Harbour window decal to display as a visible marker of commitment to promoting diversity in its business and community. Cowichan businesses and agencies will have an opportunity to display this decal as a visible marker of promoting diversity. This should be of interest in view of attracting newcomers, investors, and visitors to the Cowichan region.

A recent Open House at Cowichan Intercultural Society attended by Jean Crowder, Nanaimo-Cowichan MP; Jon Lefebure, Mayor of North Cowichan; North Cowichan Coun. Anne Murray; Duncan City Councillors Sharon Jackson and Ray Cadorette; Duncan City Administrator Paul Douville; school board Chair Wilma Rowbottom; school board Vice-Chair Brian Simmons; and school Trustees Ann Anderson and Eden Haythornthwaite provided opportunity to introduce the Safe Harbour initiative. Society co-founder Phyllis Bomford also attended the Open House.

"Twenty-five years ago, our society was founded by caring persons like Phyllis in response to the needs of so-called 'Boat People,' individuals and families seeking refuge from turmoil in South East Asia," says society board member Gifty Serbeh-Dunn. "The metaphor of 'Safe Harbour' as a

symbol of business and community groups committing to respect and dignity for everyone shows a journey of growth."

"Safe Harbour is as essential as First Aid," says Cowichan Intercultural Society board Chair Anne Matheson. "We encourage all community groups, businesses, and local government organizations to be on board. It takes all of us to bring to life our motto of 'Diversity Cowichan - Welcome Home'."

To learn more and sign up for free Safe Harbour training and certification, contact Martin Breuhan at 748-3112.

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