

*We may have them .... Refugees may not.*

# SPONSORSHIP

## A Warm Welcome on a very Cold Day in Winnipeg

### Celebrating Human Rights Day with the Lieutenant Governor

By Ariana Yaftali

This was the second year that the Honourable John Harvard, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba honoured this day in a very remarkable way. December 10 has been marked as an international Human Rights Day by the United Nations. This day is a unique day. It reminds us how much we have done in the area of human rights work and how much more needs to be done now and in the future.

"On this Human Rights Day, it is my hope that we will all act on our collective responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration. We can only honour the towering vision of that inspiring document when its principles are fully applied everywhere, for everyone." Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

To mark this day in our province, His Honour, John Harvard, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, and Her Honour Lenore Berscheid extended their second invitation to the staff, volunteers and recent newcomers of Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) by welcoming them to Government House on December 18, 2008. It was an exciting

moment to have people from different backgrounds celebrating this day under one roof. This is a classic example of multiculturalism.

The Lieutenant Governor and Her Honour warmly welcomed all the staff and the newcomer families who arrived a few weeks ago. Some of the staff of MIIC (Welcome Place) wore their traditional costumes. After the greetings, Mr. Harvard acknowledged everyone's presence at Government House and extended his deep appreciation for the work of a settlement agency like MIIC (Welcome Place) to welcome and assist the new Canadians starting their lives in Winnipeg. "By bringing new Canadians to this province, we make our province more diverse and richer. We are proud to be a multicultural society," expressed the Lieutenant Governor. Later on, on behalf of MIIC (Welcome Place), Peter Flynn, the Chair of the Board, expressed his thanks to the Lieutenant Governor.

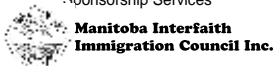
Everyone seemed to have a great time at Government House and enjoyed the hospitality, the warm welcome and the delicious meal. The group of recent

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## A Warm Welcome...

continued

newcomers who were still in temporary accommodation in the Welcome Place Residence was very happy with this invitation. The Honourable John Harvard first invited everyone to the dining room. The Lieutenant Governor and his wife spent some time talking with the newcomers. As they were having their meal, Her Honour Lenore Berscheid asked the guests whether they were happy to come to Canada.

"We thank the Canadian people and the government for bringing us to this beautiful country. We really appreciate it. We also thank your Honourable husband for inviting us here. We are happy to be here," expressed a group of newcomer women who spoke to Her Honour through their settlement counsellor, Mohammed Ali. "We also thank Welcome Place for helping newcomers settling in Winnipeg," another lady from the group expressed.

In response, Her Honour mentioned, "You made a beautiful speech. We welcome you to become a politician." Her Honour also appreciated and thanked them for accepting the invitation and coming out on a very cold day though they have been here for just a few weeks. Her Honour also spent time talking with every individual about their country of origin, their first experience in Canada, and life in general.

For us, it is our duty and obligation to respect, implement and advocate for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at all times. We must work to implement the UDHR to improve the lives of people regardless of who they are. We are the owners and defenders of human rights. This gives us the responsibility to advocate for justice until it has been restored. As part of this honourable duty and as staff of MIIC (Welcome Place), we assist newcomers in their settlement process and make them aware of their rights and responsibilities and how they can exercise their rights.

# Stateless family from Vietnam settles in Winnipeg

In the November 2008 issue of Options we mentioned the 13 stateless Vietnamese families who were recently given the opportunity to settle in Canada. This opportunity was granted in response to an appeal to the Government of Canada by the Vietnamese Association in Ottawa. We are pleased to report that one of these 13 families has chosen to settle right here in Winnipeg.

Despite the gracious assistance of friends from the local Vietnamese community, a single, middle aged man and his elderly mother found themselves struggling to meet some of the challenges of settling in Winnipeg. During the holiday period, the newcomer came to Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) on his own, asking for information and some assistance.

In response, the manager of our temporary residence offered them interim accommodations. Our housing coordinator provided information about available, suitable and affordable housing. The MIIC (Welcome Place) settlement counsellor, assigned to this newcomer family, made sure their basic needs were being met. A couple from the local Vietnamese community, who agreed to meet with us, offered their continued assistance. Our Family Class counsellor, who himself came to Canada as a refugee from Vietnam, helped discuss matters related to banking options.

Within a few days the newcomer man had found employment at a hotel on Portage Avenue. He was also able to find suitable subsidized housing within a matter of weeks.

So ends the 30 year chapter of the Vietnamese "boat people" who were sponsored to resettle in Canada. However, what will go on indefinitely are the rich and varied contributions all those who fled Vietnam and adopted Canada as their new home will continue to make.