Community Calendar

Just a sampling of upcoming events! For a complete listing, please visit us online at rmdmedia.coop to list your event in the community calendar, or to receive the community calendar by email once a week, email community@rmdmedia.coop

February is black history month.

Battlefields of the War Child presents Battle of the Arts - a showcase of local talent from the middle school, high school and university levels who all want to show how their art makes a difference in their community. They will be at the Edmund Casey Auditorium at St. Thomas University, from 7-9pm. For more info or to register, contact Nazal Abdur Rahman, nazzal@designsbn.com or Kayle Mitchell of the War Child.

Dr. James Orlowski to speak - Past president of Mennonite Brethren Church, Dr. James Orlowski will advocate in Fredericton at MacLaggan Hall, UNB, on March 22nd at 7pm. To reserve your seats, call Fred Soucy at 458-4527. The event is hosted by the UNB Black History Month committee.

Town Hall meeting on proposed NB Power sale - 7pm at the Moncton Louis Commando Centre, 473 St. George St. The Town Hall meeting will be the guest speaker. Question period to follow. Organized by Common Front for Social Justice and New Brunswick Community Action Committee. Contact: yadhira@nbsb.org.

UNB International Film Series: Women in war and peace - Women in war and peace: Co-hosted by the UNB Black History Month committee. Women in war and peace: Co-hosted by the UNB Black History Month committee. Lecture: February 25th, 7pm, Sandhurst. Thursday nights 6pm Mitchell Room, Hammond Hall, UNB. For more information, go to: http://www.montrealistimposium.com.

How accessible is NB? - New Brunswick municipalities are starting to purchase low floor accessible buses, but there is still a long way to go to improve accessibility for those with mobility disabilities.

By JULIE MICHAL

While New Brunswick is seeing some improvements in accessible public buildings and transportation, Helen Flans, President of the Canadian Paraplegic Association (N.B.) says that there’s still a great deal of work to do.

New Brunswick is one of the provinces in Canada without an amendment to the Building Code Act to assure accessibility in all homes. While this will be revised in the fall, these basic accessibility regulations are only a first step in making our society accessible to everyone regardless of their mobility disabilities.

One step further in accessibility is known as 'visibility'. It’s a requirement that any newly constructed 900 sq ft homes with a 10’ entrance, wide doorways, and a half bath on the main floor. These requirements ensure that everyone regardless of mobility can visit someone else’s home, use the washroom and exit the home.

In Prince George, there is now a new Variability Act in which all new dwellings will have to have a zero level entry on their main floor, stairway to washroom, and stairway to bedroom. They also have excellent city planners (who recognize the benefit of making sure that homes will be visitable, and that people can age in place).

In contrast, Flans notes that she knows of a couple who recently moved to New Brunswick from British Columbia who were unable to find a home in Fredericton that could be easily retrofitted to be wheelchair accessible. The couple ended up finding a home in St. Stephen. "I think in 20 years we’re going to be killing ourselves for having been so archaic in our accessibility and barrier-free policies," said Flans.

She notes that the arguments for improving accessibility are not limited to moral arguments. "I want people to recognize that it makes good business sense because New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in the country. It’s a problem not just for New Brunswickers, but for all those who sell mobility aids and home accessibility aids. Improving wheelchair accessibility also has benefits for seniors and others with reduced mobility, as well as parents with young children in strollers.

Public changes are starting to pop up here and there. For many years downtown Fredericton was notoriously inaccessible because of its lack of accessible public washrooms. It meant that people with mobility disabilities could not attend council meetings, New Brunswick Legislative Assembly, and festivals that take place throughout the year. New washroom facilities in Officer’s Square have changed that.

New Brunswick cities have also started purchasing low floor accessible buses for their cities, but there is still a long way to go to completely convert its bus fleet. This means that while someone with a mobility disability may be able to board one bus, there is no guarantee that they will be able to transfer to another bus.

Flans recommends that municipalities develop a target to have fully accessible transit systems in place by 2020. The federal government has a 15-year plan to create a $2.5 billion fund for the construction of new transit systems; they have thus far only funded a few projects.

Northern students in Connaught and Havelock are conducting a door-to-door survey of accessibility in their towns to gauge how much progress has been made. Flans hopes that the students will be able to make a presentation at the New Brunswick Accessibility Summit in May.

In Brief...

• New Brunswick announces it will increase the provincial minimum wage by 40 cents per hour this year. The Common Front for Social Justice celebrates this decision as a victory for the more than 100,000 New Brunswickers who work for the minimum wage. The province needs to keep increasing to a living wage and then be pegged to the cost of living, and argued for the increase to be made.

• Ratifies against the proroguing of parliament were held in Fredericton on January 23rd. The Fredericton Peace Coalition condemned the Conservatives for their actions. An estimated 3,000 to 4,000 people took part in the rally.

• Canada’s military has been ordered to prepare for the possibility of fighting in Afghanistan, in support of the U.S.-led war. The Canadian Forces are expected to send two battalions to the country later this year.

• Canada’s 100 highest paid CEOs were paid an average of $1.4 million in 2008. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the top CEOs were paid 134 times more than the average Canadian income. The top CEOs’ income is expected to increase by 10% in 2009, with inflation taken into account. During the same time period, the Canadian workers’ income decreased by six per cent.

Haiti’s untold story (end of front page) - 90 million francs as compensation for the loss of their colony and its slaves, in return, France agreed to end its military occupation and extended diplomatic relations. France finally paid off the indemnity to France to repay the extended exteriors, which today would be $400 million. France now has the second highest rate of disability in the world. It’s a problem not just for New Brunswickers, but for all those who sell mobility aids and home accessibility aids.

While Haiti is recovering from the devastation of the earthquake, Antilles remains in exile in South Africa and his children are all working full-time jobs. With the Canadian government’s policies, Haiti is becoming dependent on U.S. forces where many changes are occurring. Haiti continues to be occupied by U.S. forces where the current administration is in the process of creating a new agreement that will allow France to use the country as a base.