

Confluence

Official Newsletter of the Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo

VOL 1 | ISSUE 3 | SUMMER 2014



Multicultural Association of
Wood Buffalo

Wood Buffalo is the epitome of multiculturalism. Our cultural intersections shape shift and enrich us every day, whether recently arrived or have roots that go back several years, many generations.

Though we may travel our own cultural corridors, there are an incredible number of points of intersection everyday in our city between people of entirely different cultural backgrounds.

How do these intersections influence us? What kind of patterns of behavior and lifestyle evolve as a result? How do we relate to one another and build our sustainable community enriched by each interaction?

You are invited to be part of Confluence by contributing a story, picture or poem about your everyday experience of multiculturalism on the streets, in workplaces or social events etc. in Wood Buffalo.

Email your contribution to Mary Thomas at executivedirector@multicultrefm.org or call us at 780 791 5186



Message from the President

Welcome to our Summer and Third issue of Confluence! In the very short time I spent with the Multicultural Association, one thing that stood out for me is the tireless work that our busy staff, board members and volunteers do each week in order to create rich cultural and multicultural experiences in our community.

Joining the board in an interim president role after Ed's transition to Calgary, I had big shoes to fill with an organization I knew very little about. In a few weeks, I found myself and our board of directors knee-deep into fine tuning Bylaws, reviewing and approving policies upon policies in preparation for Imagine Canada Accreditation, approving financial statements, recruiting new board members and running a successful AGM. All within a month's time or less!

It was such a joy to see interest amongst the public in our work and programs and to experience five nominations from the floor at the AGM for the 3 board positions available. This is when I knew that Ed, Mary, the board and the staff have done one heck of a job building strong stakeholder and cultural group-engagement.

It is too soon for me to boast successes of the organization in my time as President being as it were my official 4th day in the role ;) but I am confident of the current health of the organization and its programs. I am very much looking forward to working closely with our board executives on orienting the new board members, understanding and aligning on the scope of our mandate and activating governance structures on the board to enable the association to strategically execute our mandate and create high value programming for our community.

Sana Elache
President, Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo

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Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo

Executive Director: Mary Thomas
Program Development Manager: Caitlin Downie
Outreach Co-ordinator: Vicky Augustin
Event and Volunteer Coordinator: Krystell O'Hara
Administrative Assistant: Jyothi Muthal
Board of Directors: Sana Elache, Jonathan Song, Sara Florez, Ramazan Nassery, Kouame Adie, Cindy Julaton, Don Grose, Rita Zhan, Paul McWilliams, Doug Nicholls and Alexandra Tarasenco



A Greek in Fort McMurray Emma Stathopoulos

- And where do you live?
- Fort McMurray
- Ah!...
- ...
- And where is that?
- Up North in Alberta
- Ah!...

Little did I know back then that I would end up crossing the Atlantic to live in Fort McMurray. Fast forward three years and many adventures later, I am finally here in the Big White North.

Nothing could have prepared me for this when I first set foot here as a visitor in November 2011. Nor did I ever expect that fate would have me stay for a whole year. I experienced the freezing -45C, the long dark winter nights, the long bright summer days, the snow, the ice, the mud, the flies. Yet none of that prevented me from staying. I was love stricken!

No, it wasn't the love at first sight, young, crazy kind of love, even though there was a significant degree of infatuation. It was the slow growing, adult kind even though born

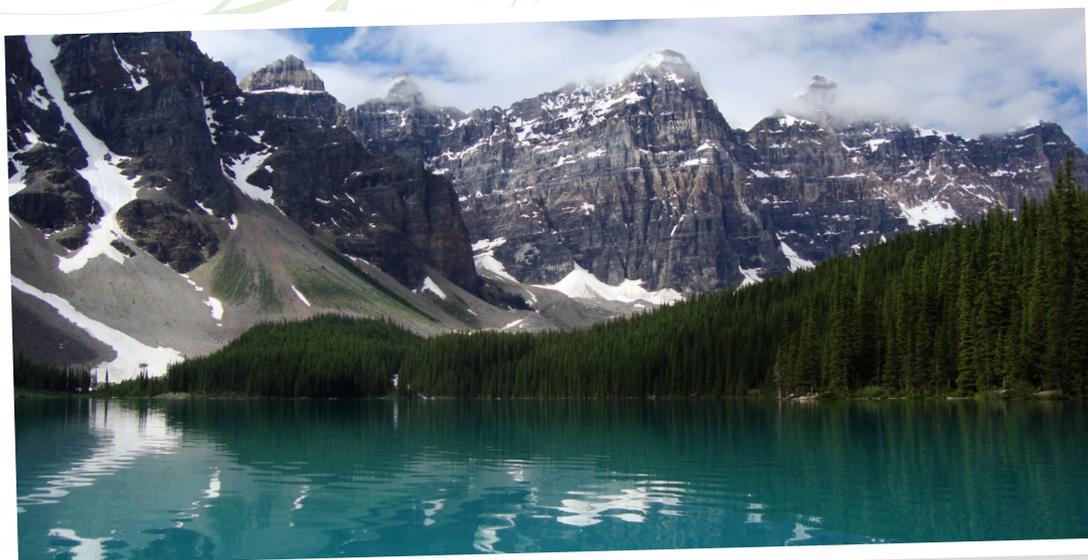
on the internet.

I had absolutely no clue where Fort McMurray was, or what it was like. Even though everybody back home in Greece thought I had lost my marbles deciding to jump on a plane to explore faraway lands, let alone frozen ones, I knew that I just 'had' to go, and it was not for the land but for a man. A man, who just like me felt that he just 'had' to communicate with me online, even though he too, felt that it was a 'long shot'. A man who discovered, just after he got his ticket to come to Greece for us to meet, that he has cancer.

That November day in 2011 that I landed in Fort McMurray the temperature was -22 and everything was white. I gasped from the cold coming out of the airport doors and the thoughts "Am I crazy? What am I doing here?" did briefly cross my mind.

That was a rollercoaster of a year in between the feelings of infatuation, the doctor's appointments, the nerve wrecking procedures, the operation, hospitals, travelling back and forth to Edmonton,

“I had absolutely no clue where Fort McMurray was, or what it was like. Even though everybody back home in Greece thought I had lost my marbles deciding to jump on a plane to explore faraway lands”



Multicultural Stories

the fear of the unknown, the emotional outbursts, the fear of death, but also the deep seated clarity that this was exactly what I was supposed to do.

After the worst was over and with a good prognosis for the future, that summer we travelled to the Rockies and canoed in Moraine Lake. The magnificence of that place left me speechless! That experience and my visit to see family in gorgeous, colourful Victoria BC, opened my eyes to the beauty of Canada.

However the time came for me to leave and I went back to Greece for about 15 months. Our relationship survived the distance and we made plans for a future together. So there I was on Valentine's Day this year – yes I did pick the day on purpose- landing in Fort McMurray again, this time coming to stay.

For some reason that made a huge difference to me. The finality of it was a bit scary at first. Knowing that now I was officially a permanent resident took a while to sink in. Leaving a life of 53 years behind was no small feat for me. Moving to a totally different environment, different landscape, and different lifestyle –even though I had experienced it as a tourist for a year- was quite disconcerting for a while and still is sometimes.

Being an Environmental Psychologist I understand how much and in what ways the environment can influence the psyche of a person. Being a Life Coach, I also know that

the angle of perspective with which we look at something, plays a crucial role in how we experience a situation.

Being used to great biodiversity in the environment, both in Greece and Europe as a whole, to a different culture, architecture, to a great array of colours in nature, millions of flowers and the presence of mountains all around me and the turquoise sea at close proximity, I must confess that the uniform flat land with boreal forests and muddy brown rivers and lakes do not exactly appeal to me and fills my heart with sadness and even dread at times, however the amazing lush greenery in the summer lifts my spirits up.

Furthermore, as far as the built environment is concerned, what strikes me as awkward and difficult to get used to; the lack of neighbourhoods with focal points such as squares, with small shops all around, cafes, restaurants, so prevalent in Europe and Greece.

At first I couldn't figure out how people interact with one another, where they meet, what they do, except from working 10-12 hour days. It seemed to me that this town is here for one reason only: make money and get out.

So I surfed for Facebook groups, Meet up groups, associations etc and only then did I realize that there is a whole social network waiting to be discovered. That people here interact in different ways, most of them being more structured and a bit confined by

“ It seemed to me that this town is here for one reason only: make money and get out. ”





Multicultural Stories

their specificity, yet very much vibrant and lively, engaging and creative.

They say it is only when you lose something that you come to appreciate it and that couldn't be truer. Even though I had experienced loss in the past six years, I had not yet come to experience the loss of my country. All of a sudden, this chaotic, corrupted to the core, maddening, bankrupt place, became a jewel of beauty, freedom, social warmth and cultural vibrancy in my mind! I began to question my sanity and sank into a deep meditative state out of which I emerged a wee bit wiser and with more understanding.

I realized for example that the magic and beauty of life is revealed through contrast. Life and death, light and darkness, having not having, being in your country and being abroad. That when we lose something apart from appreciating it's good parts we also tend to idealize it and forget all the bad stuff.

That it is easy to get stressed out and feel overwhelmed in a new environment when the move from a tourist to an immigrant occurs. The fact that there is no turning back, that we have decided to start a new life in a new country feels like a death and rebirth. It takes time and can be quite painful as well as exhilarating.

Being an immigrant you have to adjust and learn everything from scratch, something a tourist has the luxury of ignoring. Especially after a certain age, it

feels more awkward to have to ask 'stupid' questions because we cannot make sense of the new reality's norms, values and ways of functioning. It is difficult to accept gracefully a ticket of 120 \$ for having parked your car outside your own house for more than 48 hours!

I learned that making new friendships in a foreign land is precious and something I must strive for. That the long dark freezing winters may cause one to feel very isolated and depressed, if they do not have an established social network or a job with opportunities to interact with coworkers/colleagues.

That you better never get sick here, because it is mainly a matter of good luck to find and get appropriate and timely medical care. Furthermore, having no option of private health care, it can be pretty scary to have to rely on sheer luck to get to see a specialist on time and procure treatment. This causes the ER in the hospital to be overtaxed with the number of people who end up having no other resource.

Not that the Greek public health care system is any better, it is actually much worse, but we do have the option of being able to see private doctors and specialists when needed and the price is affordable. On the other hand if you need surgery that is another story, it can be very expensive in a private hospital, and our public ones look more like concentration camps than anything else. So in that respect, the public

“ I learned that making new friendships in a foreign land is precious and something I must strive for ”



medical system is better here.

Having ranted enough about the negative stuff, I would like now to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude for having been given the chance to experience what a well functioning public sector looks and feels like.

What would have taken most Greek people, especially Athenians, at least 3-4 days to complete because of Greek bureaucracy and endless hours of driving back and forth in crazy traffic and suffocating pollution, can be accomplished here in 25 minutes!...

The simplicity, efficiency and common sense of the Canadian bureaucratic system- apart from a few admittedly odd exceptions - is something that I truly admire and cannot help but wonder why we Greeks are incapable of applying ourselves to in Greece.

Something that touched me deeply is the equality of opportunity, the meritocracy, the respect for the citizen, things close to non-existent back home. Not that there are no exceptions to this in a positive way, nor that it is all rosy here either, but in general terms, Canada is a well – oiled machine that functions well for the most part. The stressors here are of a totally different kind and these –for me - are the freezing cold weather, the long dark winters, the harsh climatic conditions and the problems these may cause, and of course the existence of wild animals.

Another thing that amazed me here is how friendly and approachable people are, how willing to help and considerate they are. This is something that large cities like Athens have lost. Outwardly it seems that it is very hard to make friends here, yet once you get to meet a few people and get involved in activities, everything changes and it is up to you to pursue the friendship more or not. They are very discreet and polite, and extreeeeemely patient!

To conclude there are pros and cons in every place and these are both objective

and subjective. It all boils down to what the needs and priorities of the person are, what their reasons to come here are. What were the reasons that drove them away from their country of origin and what they left behind or not? What their dreams and aspirations are and how they envision their lives and their future. What has heart and meaning for them, what they can or cannot do without? One man's paradise may be another's hell and vice versa.

Fort McMurray is a town where people come for the money mostly, for a finite length of time and then go back or move elsewhere to live, or work like crazy and endure the conditions in order to spend the money they make on holidays in warmer climates.

Having said that, the beautiful places usually have high unemployment and low wages, and this is what drives people away and to Fort McMurray: necessity. If you think about it, it is a shame for this town, because it is 'invaded' by people who need its money, take it and leave to spend it elsewhere. It is a shame because this town could develop a better building plan so as to become a proud beautiful Northern heaven.

Unfortunately - in my humble opinion- building more impersonal large malls and commercial buildings for the big business will not create that sense of community needed for people to acquire the sense of belonging needed for them to choose to make Fort McMurray their place of permanent residence. Yet the encouragement of small businesses and the creation of focal points, as well as the twinning of highway 63 and improvement of medical care might. 🌱



“Having said that, the beautiful places usually have high unemployment and low wages”



Friends across borders



Are Cultural Differences REALLY Differences?



VERONICA

My background is more European; however I was born in Canada.



TEMI

I am a Filipino from the central islands of the region, Visayas. Despite being from entirely different continents with pretty much nothing in common, both of us shares the same beliefs, values and morals, and most of our cultural differences came from customs or traditions. Our cultures have influenced our identity, but through our characteristics we have connected. We believe a friendship between two individuals has no limits or boundaries.

When I moved to Fort McMurray, Veronica was attending, Dr. K. A. Clark. We were in grade 7. The relationship between the both of us only started to develop during high school. At this time, we were beginning to get most of our classes together, and were learning that we shared similarities, such as interest in music, a studious bent of mind and our spiritual beliefs. We both appreciate each other and help each other through our studies. When we took music classes, we both shared our talents with each other and motivated each other with positive feedback and encouragement. A connection in our beliefs strengthened the foundation of our friendship. Through prayer, we have supported each other in situations and helped guide the growth in our faith.



TEMI

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

- Proverbs 18:24



Who do you believe when you come to a new country?

Marie Gervais

Marie Gervais, PhD., Director,
Shift Management Inc.

In my daily interactions with immigrants I have heard many horror stories about bad advice from people's closest cultural community connections. Human beings tend to believe people who look and act like them rather than seeking out the best possible sources of information. In one instance, an Iranian woman enrolled in a questionable college that took \$20,000 of her money to enroll her in a program that provided her with no credentials in the end. Why did she do this? Because... another Iranian suggested she do it.

A Somali man found himself with a restraining order from the police because another Somali told him that if he didn't threaten the teachers and administrators of his children's school, they wouldn't listen to him.

"What did I do wrong?" he asked me. "That is not what people do here when they have a problem with the school. Threats are taken very seriously here," I told him. When he got a few tips on the appropriate protocol he almost wept with relief. "Why hasn't anyone told me this before?" he asked. Well the answer is simple; he was taking advice from the wrong people! He followed the source of information he knew best instead of the best source of information.

When I was living in Japan I tried time and again to get answers to my questions from the Japanese. Mostly people looked at me like I was stupid and thinking they were being helpful, gave me what was usually useless advice. So I tried asking

other Canadians who were in Japan. In some cases they helped me understand things. But at other times, the advice was prejudiced or simply wrong. The worst sources of information were people from other countries who were convinced the Japanese were fundamentally flawed. They had lots of advice about what "those Japanese" should do. Once in a while I found a Japanese citizen who had lived and/or worked in another country, or an immigrant who had lived long enough in Japan to be able to speak from both perspectives.

These people were gold. Finally I had found some great people to help me answer my questions!

In summary, think carefully about whether your sources of information are credible before you jump to do what they tell you. Just because

someone looks like you or speaks your language does not mean he or she is more credible than someone who does not look like you. Ask questions to your "sources" about the authenticity of their claims. What has their experience been? Have they just "heard" second or third hand? Is that what they actually did themselves? How recent was their experience? The world is changing so quickly that what was correct a few months ago, may already be dated. Once you have checked the credibility of your source, ask a few more people who are not from the same background. Then use your own judgment and research. People as information sources can be very useful, just don't accept the first advice you get. 🌍



“The world is changing so quickly that what was correct a few months ago, may already be dated.”



My favourite **Cultural Dish**



Paella style rice with chicken Krystell O'Hara

5 cups of water

1/2 tsp saffron

5 tomatoes big

4 tbsp of olive oil

1/2 cup finely chopped red
onion

1 cup spicy sausage cut up in
cubes of a centimeter

16 chicken thighs

2 chicken breasts cooked and
crumbled

Salt to taste

Pepper to taste

2 cups of rice parboiled rice

1 cup tomato juice

1 spoonful salt

1/2 tbsp paprika

3/4 cup seedless green
peppers cut into half a centi-
meter cubes

3/4 cup seeded red pepper
cut up in half a centimeter
cubes

1 cup of sweet frozen peas



This dish is a fusion of Colombian food with Spanish from the brothers Rausch, *kitchen for the weekend*.

Preheat the oven to 350 F (180 C)

If you do not have paella pan we suggest you use a oven-safe frying pan

In a cup of hot water dissolve the saffron. At the same time, in a pot with boiling water dip the tomatoes for 30 seconds, remove them and pass them by cold water. Peel the tomatoes, remove the seeds and cut into cubes of 1 X 1 centimeters.

Pour into a paella pan or a large skillet over medium heat a tablespoon of olive oil and sauté the red onion until soft and transparent. Avoid onion turning yellow. Add chorizo and rice and sauté for another three minutes.

Continue cooking and add the cubes of tomato and cook for another minute. Add four cups of water, saffron along with fluid, and the tomato juice. Sprinkle with paprika and salt to taste. Stir and reduce the heat to low and simmer until the water is flush with the rice.

Seal with aluminum foil and put in the oven for 20 minutes or until rice is completely dry.

Meanwhile, season the chicken thighs with salt, pepper and two tablespoons of olive oil, put in the oven until golden brown. Avoid drying out too much.

In a skillet, heat a tablespoon of olive oil and sauté the remaining bell peppers. Add the peas and shredded chicken until all hot.

Remove the rice from the oven, add the mixture of peppers, peas and gently toss together. Add the chicken thighs and return to oven for five more minutes.

Ready to serve to approx. 8 people. 🌿

The time crunch: mending our lives

Nearly every parent in modern-day Canada suffers time-crunch. We need time to connect with each child, time to tend relationships with our partners and our wider families, time to tend our households, time to sleep and eat, time to learn new things, and time to relax. And time has been taken from parents in dramatic proportions over the last thirty years.

THE WORK OF PARENTING IS VITAL, AND IT TAKES TIME.

Connecting in a generous, loving way with our children is at the heart of parenting. So is thinking about our interactions with our children. Playing with them, which we often consider the frosting on the cake of daily care, is what they would love to do with us for hours each day. If our children had their way, we would play with them and their friends forty hours a week, and we would work an hour or two a day at most!

We parents also have needs. We need warm human contact with other grown-ups. We need support and reassurance for the job we do as parents. We need a way to release pent-up feelings, while we do the best we can with our children. And we need a chance to relax and free ourselves of worry and guilt.

But we are hard-pressed to meet our own needs and our children's! Thirty years ago, one employed parent could usually support a family of four. Today, it takes two parents working to support the average family of four. The workweek for parents today averages six and a half hours longer than the workweek of thirty years ago. This amounts to six weeks of extra work days each year! It's no wonder we're under pressure!

Given that we are backed so tightly into the overwork

corner, how are we to organize our lives so we can, at least sometimes, be satisfied with ourselves as mothers and fathers? How can we get the time and peace of mind we need?

There's no magic formula, but there may be a few practices that can help us to satisfy our needs to connect well, to relax and play, and to think about our children.

ORGANIZE HELP

We might think of parenting as a one- or two-adult project. So when we get worn, we blame ourselves for our lack of energy rather than seeing that we are expecting ourselves to do a superhuman task. The truth is, when you are tired and lose your temper, day after day, you need help. When you've run out of energy to talk with your partner or get together with your friends, you need help.

Parenting is like building a bridge or keeping an intensive care patient alive through a crisis: it is not work that's meant to be done in isolation.

We need to identify the toughest times of our week, and experiment with setting up assistance at these times. Extended family members, neighbors, church or temple members, and teenagers in the neighborhood looking for work can be asked to do childcare or errands or cooking. Parents in a neighborhood can cook for each other's families, forming dinner co-ops. Parents can organize childcare co-ops, in which time is exchanged, rather than money. Some city recreation programs and libraries have services for parents of young children. Even weekend exchanges between families, in which one set of parents gets Saturday through Sunday noon away from their children, and the other set does child care, can be arranged.

BUILD A LISTENING PARTNERSHIP WITH ANOTHER PARENT

Make the commitment to tell someone what it's like for you, what your victories are, and what is driving you up the wall, and then listen back so that parent can do the same. It's surprising what a difference this makes, even if it's just five or ten minutes of listening each way over the phone. The time you invest in connecting with another parent won't make you less busy, but it will help you see the choices you have, solve problems more quickly, and feel less alone with the challenges you face.

LIFT SOME EXPECTATIONS

Do you really have to have a clean house? Must you





really fold the clothes? Is a hot meal at dinner time really essential every night? If you are a harried parent, these questions can be irritating. It feels like, "Of course! What would people think! And how can I stand things being more undone than they are?!"

When we're overloaded, we often keep working as though the sky will fall if we don't get it all done. We feel resentful, but don't move to change things to benefit our children or ourselves. Instead, we drop time with our children but continue with the cleaning and the housework and the expected visits to the relatives. However, that tactic can prove to be costly.

Given too little contact with us, our children sprout aches and pains and complaints and explosions that take up a lot of our time. So serving raw carrot sticks and peanut butter on toast for dinner (three food groups!), stuffing the unfolded clothes into drawers or letting them sit in a pile in the corner (they're clean!), and vacuuming once a month (it just gets dirty again, anyway!) are viable tactics with which to fight against the overload that so much work creates.

Remember, as a parent, you get to construct your own way of doing things. Anything goes. You get to set your own priorities. There's no "right way" to run your household. Above all, don't blame yourself for your overwork. It's not your fault.

Remember that we live in a society that cares more about your ability to produce than it does about your time for parenting, so the pressure you feel is the sign of backwards priorities at large, not a sign of personal failings. To take the ease every parent needs, you'll need to be active in working on your own behalf at home and at work. Think, listen, talk, and see what you, and fellow parents, can do to make the time and make the change. 

Literally Speaking

Poetry from the community

The Quilt

Scattered bits of cloth, scraps, and remnants

Some new, others stained, tattered, faded, forgotten

Small and expansive, of cheap thread and the finest silks, colors of the soul

Heaped by turmoil, chaos by circumstance, abandoned by change.

Yet all precious and pure

The story behind, the memory within

The purpose, the character, the comfort, the terror

Wanting order, remembrance, inclusion, reason

Searching for meaning.

The Maker prepares the frame. The backing is laid.

Batting for comfort.

Expertly sown together with the finest threads.

Threads of love. Threads of strength. Threads of hope. Threads of forgiveness.

Each piece a hand on is needed. Each piece trusted to hold the next.

Working in harmony yet identity preserved. Purpose.

The Maker builds and the edges grow.

More pieces found behind closed doors. The dark areas reveal their treasures.

All have a home. All are part. All are welcome.

Together a cherished masterpiece.

-Anonymous



Teaching your child playground safety rules will help them avoid injury.

Terri Flemmer

Supervise your child closely. If your child is under five years of age, stand right beside your child when he/she is climbing, swinging or playing on equipment. You should be able to reach your child so that you can help prevent falling.

Children aged 5 -9 like to take chances. Make sure you are actively supervising, so you can guide your child appropriately.

Check the playground to make sure that there is a soft surface underneath play equipment. Sand, wood chips and rubber matting are soft surfaces. If it is

hot outside, teach your child to check the surface of the equipment before playing on it.

Ensure equipment is in good repair. Check for exposed bolts, sharp edges, loose joints and wood splinters. If the equipment needs repair, contact your local parks and recreation department. Pick up any garbage or broken glass prior to your child playing.

Teaching your child playground safety rules will help them stay safe. For more information contact Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5464. 

Teach your children some playground rules:

- Wait your turn; go single file up steps to equipment
- Go down the slide feet first
- Sit down on swings and slides
- Keep away from the bottom of the slide
- Remove any clothing that could hurt your child, such as draw strings or scarves.
- Make sure your child takes off helmets and puts away skipping ropes before playing
- Make sure your child is not wearing necklaces, jewellery etc.
- Keep your child off equipment that is meant for older children

“Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.”

John F. Kennedy



Activities



1. Citizenship Ceremonies hosted by MCA and Westview School
2. Moroccan Lunch at Holy Trinity Food Lab
3. ASTP program starting fall at Westview and St. Gabriel's Schools gets a \$5000 donation
4. James Dragon with Vicky and Mayor Blake at the Metis Festival
5. Free Financial Literacy session by Jay Falcone
6. Fort McKay Treaty Days parade
7. Fort McMurray non-profits make their presence felt at Vitalize 2014 in Calgary
8. Talks for a quiet multi-faith room for prayer at the new International Airport launched with Scott Clements





1



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3



4



5



6



- Canada Day Pancake Breakfast**
July 1st 8.30am
MacDonald Island Curling Rink
- Vibrant Culture Parade**
July 1st 11am
Franklin Ave.
- RCMP Musical Ride Opening Cultural Dances**
August 2, 3, 4
MacDonald Island
- Alberta Culture Days**
27th 7-9pm; 28th 2 – 4pm
Holy Trinity Theatre



7



8

1. Shaun Geurts speaks about the collaboration with MCA
2. Theodore Tape plays African drums
3. MNP's Alice Stewart explains the Financial Review Engagement
4. FMPL's Nicole excited to collaborate with Mary and Caitlin from MCA
5. Mary shares the table with MLAs Sandra Jansen and Heather Klimchuk at the Leading the North Conference Banquet at Sawridge
6. Mary Thomas shares Executive Summary at the AGM 2014 at RBC's new Stoney Creek location
7. Mary Thomas gets the Girls' Inc. Woman of Inspiration Award
8. Our board executives, Jonathan Song, Sana Elache and Don Grose

Please register on
www.multiculturefm.org/programs



www.facebook.com/MulticulturalAssociationOfWoodBuffalo

www.twitter.com/MCA4WB

Creative Design by:
Amar Deshmukh

