

New Canadians need good jobs more than platitudes

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Author: FRANK ETHERINGTON

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Every time there's an opportunity to bray about our multicultural region, we trot out another citizenship court complete with a group of grateful new Canadians.

One such event, attended by the usual array of politicians, formed part of Oktoberfest festivities that ended this weekend.

During the court, organized at a Waterloo school, 20 local immigrants who became new Canadians were told by Judge Frank Hayden that citizens are treated with respect, goodwill and humanity.

Kitchener-Waterloo MPP Elizabeth Witmer added that, because Canada is a land of opportunity, citizens could "dream dreams and your dreams can come true."

Speaking as an immigrant delighted to live in such a beautiful, peaceful country, I would never rain on any citizenship parade because I appreciate the chance to live in a democracy where, as Hayden said, I can vote, run for office and, within reason, speak out without fear of persecution.

But in booming Waterloo Region -- an area that has the fifth- highest per capita immigrant population of all Canadian urban areas - - immigrant life isn't always as rosy as the Mountie uniforms brought out of mothballs for those citizenship ceremonies.

The same week the court was held, a report written by a Kitchener- based research group showed how Witmer's dreams can become nightmares for many immigrants who can't find work.

The report by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services is based on interviews with about 200 highly trained and educated new Canadians living in Waterloo Region.

It showed that between 1996 and 2001, 14,304 immigrants -- many with job skills required by local companies -- arrived in our area.

Unless they just blasted in from another galaxy, local residents know all about the unhealthy situation where 40,000 adults and children don't have family doctors at the same time we have more than 80 foreign-trained physicians living here who are not allowed to work.

But most people don't appreciate that a similar problem applies to immigrants who want to work in other trades and professions.

After talking with immigrant engineers, university professors, teachers, economists and other professionals who are forced to drive cabs, work as security guards or do house-cleaning work in Waterloo Region, I wasn't surprised when researchers found the following:

Trade and professional qualifications of 88 per cent of immigrants surveyed are wasted because they are not working in their occupational fields.

After being told their job skills were required in Canada, 68 per cent are unemployed and, of those who have jobs, 37 per cent do part-time work.

Only one of 29 immigrant professionals interviewed works in his or her appropriate field while the other 28 are unemployed or working part-time at survival jobs.

Politicians participating in citizenship courts should read the report and, instead of mouthing their usual platitudes, provide additional support for immigrants.

They should consider the human waste and mental-health consequences that result when we bring immigrants here on a phoney premise they will find jobs in their trades and professions.

MPs and MPPs should also correct the false information given immigrants by Canadian embassy officials competing aggressively with bureaucrats from other industrialized nations to attract the best and brightest foreign-trained professionals.

And they should clamp down on Canadian professional organizations that erect so many barriers for foreign-trained immigrants.

Considering the ignorance and discrimination described in the report, we need more political leadership and less multicultural tokenism.

Frank Etherington can be reached at 894-2250 ext. 2608. E-mail fetherington@therecord.com

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