

Ruprecht hears ethnic cultural concerns

By WILMA BLOKHUIS

Recognition appears to be the greatest concern among ethnic groups wishing to preserve their culture — while at the same time adapting to their new Canadian lifestyle.

These concerns were expressed by various ethnic representatives who spoke to Tony Ruprecht, Minister Without Portfolio responsible for Citizenship and Culture, on his visit to the Oakville Holiday Inn last week. It was the 14th of a 21-stop tour by Ruprecht, MPP for Parkdale, to gather input from the ethnic community regarding the Ontario government's future policies on multiculturalism. A report on the minister's findings is to be prepared and made public in June.

Ruprecht's visit to Oakville to discuss multiculturalism "is the first time I'm aware of a minister and his senior bureaucrats, plus representatives from the premier's office, making an appearance here," said Bill Allison, founding president of the Oakville Multicultural Council for eight years since 1978.

"We have a problem selling multiculturalism in Oakville, and we continue to have an image problem — that of the ethnics doing their own thing. How can we change that image?" he asked. Allison felt more media exposure on the council's objectives may be beneficial, but "will the media consider it sufficiently important to reflect what the



TONY RUPRECHT

services to Oakville's various ethnic communities. "We've settled two groups of refugees from Viet Nam and Poland, and we've had no praise for it." He added the annual Canada Day celebrations organized by the council have failed to draw the attention of the "people at large. Suffice to say, we're having difficulty in the whole area of image."

Leslie Nero, current president of the Oakville Multicultural Council felt special concessions are necessary to include the ethnic population into the mainstream of society. "I lived in the United States during the turbulent 1960s, and anybody who

necessary for concessions to be made to get blacks into the mainstream of American society."

ETHNIC ISOLATION

After hearing a brief dialogue mid-way during the meeting between Joe Fava, founder of the Italian Roundtable Cultural Club — Tavola Rotonda — and Father Luis Lima of St. Joseph's Portuguese Roman Catholic Church, Nero urged the Portuguese community to join the council. "Nobody in Oakville needs to feel left out. As (ethnic) groups we have to interact."

Father Lima, who came to Oakville 13 years ago and launched St. Joseph's with 90 families, and increased its membership to more than 700 families, told the meeting: "Multiculturalism is a beautiful subject idealistically, but putting it into practice is difficult. I came to Oakville in 1968, and living here is totally different from Toronto — it's like two different countries. In Toronto I can go anywhere and people are friendly — we are just people. Oakville is colder. People live more by themselves. This is not good, but it's a fact. The Portuguese people go to English stores, but do the English come to Kerr Street?"

Fava, who founded his conversational cultural club about 15 years ago, told Father Lima he touched on a "very sensitive subject. My kids were born here, and I've spent all my Canadian life in Oakville. Unless I'm forced to, I won't exchange Oak-

ville's a beautiful place and I don't know any other place."

Father Lima stated he would like improved communication and opportunities to meet with other groups, as "others have the same feelings I have. It's tough to practice multiculturalism in Oakville. I would like to see multiculturalism taught in the elementary schools, so the students grow up knowing a bit about everyone."

NO PORTUGUESE

"And why is Portuguese not taught in high school?" Father Lima asked. "We have 3,000 Portuguese people in town; yet we have Spanish and German, although there are not as many of them as there are Portuguese. It's taught in Toronto, but not in Oakville?"

"Oakville is not just for the English people, but for everyone. We (the Portuguese community) are also Canadians."

"Kerr Street has 'the ethnic district in town' label. People are living separate lives. The Italians and the Portuguese meet at church, where they have no problems, but (otherwise) they live separately, and it's not because of politics. It's because we (the Portuguese people) don't feel accepted. That's the way I feel and I'm sorry," concluded Father Lima.

His feelings were shared by Maria Henson, a volunteer interpreter with the Oakville Multicultural Council, who feels the ethnic community is greatly misunderstood. "In Portu-

home, and the man goes out to work. In Canada, the child is at school, mother could be working and father stays home. If this happens, a Portuguese man is stripped of his manhood. And the child? He is considered stupid and not given proper access to social activities." She stressed social workers assigned to helping ethnic families are not properly trained, nor sensitive to their understanding. "They need social cultural training. You can't apply the English social culture to the Spanish social culture. Social workers are not properly prepared."

Dan Hunter, a retired teacher, feels "eliminating cultural prejudices in the classroom" ought to be a high priority for educators. Of both English and East Indian origin, he feels added ethno-cultural training for teachers should be mandatory and that school children from an elementary age should be exposed to cross-cultural lifestyles. "Such exposure can free children in Grade 3 and up from prejudice, but if you start in high school, it's too late," said Hunter.

He added a course on world religions should be part of social studies programs, to explain why Hindus don't eat beef, and Sikhs wear turbans, for example. "These are religious customs and teachers should have a basic knowledge of the beliefs of these people. That's the only way they can help the peers of ethnic students understand visible minorities."

1986- Tony Ruprecht, Minister of Citizenship and Culture, visited Oakville, to gather input from ethnic communities regarding the Ontario's future policies on multiculturalism.

30th
Anniversary

Halton
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