

Allison to continue multiculturalism

By BARB JOY

Although the Oakville Multicultural Council will be losing its first president, multiculturalism won't be losing Bill Allison.

After a four-year stint on the council, Allison will help determine the need for similar councils in other parts of the region. From a recent meeting at the Howard Johnston's attended by representatives of ethnic communities in Burlington, Halton Hills and Milton, a steering committee was formed to conduct a feasibility study, possibly with the help of two hired summer students, to probe the need for expansion of multicultural services, he said.

As well, Allison will continue his work with the Regional Folklore Committee in which the OMC is a member. Because the federal government reconsidered its decision not to fund the committee, Allison can go ahead with plans to conduct two workshops, one with school principals and the other with school trustees, to encourage both to introduce multiculturalism into the curriculum.

"Their heritage is important to them (students). It makes them unique as Canadians," he said. "If we hope to prevent racial clashes down the road as there have been in other places like Toronto, we have to provide the kids with information."

TWO COUNSELLORS

On May 3, at the final council meeting over which he will preside as president, Allison will probably suggest an alternative to the position of co-ordinator. Since its inauguration in 1977, the OMC has had three. Allison felt the duties might be too onerous for one person. He thought two part-timers, each responsible for specific areas of work and working three days a week each (including Saturdays), might solve the problem. These "counsellors", as they may be termed, will implement the programs developed by the volunteer chairpersons of each of the three categories — immigrant services, educational programs and publicity — within the council.

The OMC with its budget this year of ap-



BILL ALLISON

proximately \$35,000, is funded by federal, provincial and local governments. The figure includes a fund from the province and Ottawa for the hiring of summer students.

Besides his innovative ideas (which he said stemmed from discussions in council), Allison helped sever the umbilical cord between his organization and the Oakville Social Planning council in 1978 when he became the OMC's first president.

ETHNIC ACTIVITIES

During his presidency, the Canada Day Celebrations were begun with the full blessing of Oakville's Mayor Harry Barrett. They have since become an annual event.

As well, the Immigrant Services Program was established, due partly to the language and service problems encountered by several Oakville families who had "adopted" Vietnamese families. The OMC, in conjunction with citizenship and Manpower personnel, stepped in to help.

"But sometimes the Oakville families didn't know how to let go," he recalled. "We told them they didn't need to feel

guilty about cutting people off at a certain point."

The OMC also arranged for a manager and coach of an immigrant soccer team, just one of the social activities to spring from the drop-in centre at Knox Presbyterian Church which, he said, "provided somewhere for them to go on weekends and kept them in Oakville".

Have established Oakville residents accepted its immigrants? Allison definitely believed so.

"That the immigrants remained here in Oakville is an indication that Oakville has not been hostile toward them," he said. "Houses and services were made available to them. Yes, Oakville people have been extremely kind."

'WASPS' ETHNIC

Allison's definition of "ethnic" includes everyone, even the White Anglo Saxon Protestants. Perhaps this broad interpretation is the reason he sees no barriers between the ethnic and established sectors of the town.

"Sure, the Portuguese, Italians, Croatians and others relate more closely to their own communities but I sense (established) Oakville people feel free to go out and become part of the general community," he said. "Maybe what's missing is the machinery to tell them how to do it."

To do it, residents can become members of OMC and, if interested, can even sit on the council along with representatives of Oakville's 13 active ethnic groups, he said.

"The OMC stresses participation all levels in the community," he added. "I am on the traffic advisory committee and happy to be there because it gives me the opportunity to make decisions on traffic patterns that are of concern to everyone. I think representation must come from a broad cross-section of the community."

Allison came from Jamaica to Canada "via England" 17 years ago and has resided in Oakville for the past eight. Besides his volunteer work, he is staff supervisor at the Ontario Correctional Institute in Brampton.

1983- Bill Allison helped make the Oakville Multicultural Council independent from the Oakville Social Planning council in 1978. He served the council for four years as its first president.

30th
Anniversary

Halton
Multicultural Council