

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Winnipeg's compassionate past still needed today

By: **Staff Sgt. Bob Christmas**Posted: **10/4/2014 1:00 AM** | Comments: **0**

Some characterize the police as an oppressive arm of government, yet they are among the first ones called in almost any kind of crisis. While social justice is not their primary mandate, police officers are the ones who, day in and day out, help homeless people get in from the cold, protect people suffering debilitating substance-abuse or mental-health issues and advocate for them.

In the vast majority of cases, police officers try to do their best for people in need. This phenomenon is not unique to Winnipeg, but our history has a particular social-justice character. We are a compassionate city, perhaps because of our diversity and the deep social issues we have struggled with.

People come to Winnipeg from around the world, often from conflict zones fleeing political violence, economic hardship and oppression. We have one of the largest urban aboriginal communities in North America and one of the largest French-speaking populations outside of Quebec. We earned an international reputation as a bastion of labour rights with the 1919 General Strike. Following the Second World War, Winnipeg's standing as a centre for human rights grew as women of all classes and ethnic backgrounds protested against rising milk and food prices. We tolerate a harsh winter climate that draws us together and nourishes our rich contributions of art, music and literature.

Winnipeg is an international centre of learning about human rights and justice. The Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice at the University of Manitoba trains master's and doctoral students from over 30 countries for peace-building around the globe, and the University of Manitoba has several faculties, such as the Centre for Applied Ethics, focusing on human rights. Menno Simons College, Canadian Mennonite University and the Global College at the University of Winnipeg also train students for international peace-building.

It is no accident the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the first national museum established outside the Ottawa capital region, was opened in Winnipeg to serve as a beacon for human rights and social justice.

This intellectual underpinning is part of our compassionate culture. However, it is the people at street level who actually look out for vulnerable peoples' basic human rights. It is the people who do the right thing for fellow human beings when nobody is looking that are our real protectors of human dignity. It is

the business person who volunteers at a soup line and the child who stands up for a bullied peer at school. Each of us plays a part in our own unique ways, but we are all a part of our community.

The thing we know for sure is working together we are all stronger. As long as we continue to have problems in our community, we all must ask ourselves what we have done today to help make the situation better. "A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle." (Khalil Gibran). We all know ways we can contribute, but until we act, we know we haven't unleashed our full potential.

Staff Sgt. Bob Christmas is in his 25th year with the Winnipeg Police Service.

Find this article at:

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/winnipegs-compassionate-past-still-needed-today-278104791.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.