

Tourism centres done in by Internet, MPP told

BY CARL CLUTCHEY
NORTH SHORE BUREAU

Ontario's Tourism ministry says a trend for travellers to rely more on the Internet when making plans is a main reason behind the closure of three provincial information centres west of Thunder Bay.

"Visits to Ontario Travel Information Centres have declined as travellers adopt a self-service approach and increasingly rely on Internet services to make their Ontario travel plans," ministry spokesman Rob Foote said in an email.

"The closure of some centres is a necessary step forward in the transformation of ministry programs and agencies to secure a sustainable future for tourism, culture and sport programs," Foote added.

The province spent \$617,000 last year operating regional travel centres in Fort Frances, Kenora, Rainy River and Pigeon River southwest of Thunder Bay.

According to ministry statistics, even big tourism draws have experienced drops at their provincial travel centres.

Niagara Falls dropped to 114,212 visitors in 2012, compared to nearly 175,000 in 2002. Sault Ste. Marie's 2002 figure of 216,504 visitors dropped in half over the same period.

Foote was responding to a letter from NDP MPP Sarah Campbell, who said the decision to close the provincial centres in Kenora, Rainy River and Fort Frances was both heavy-handed and short-sighted.

Though the ministry noted that traffic at those three centres has dropped in half over the past 10 years, Campbell (Kenora-Rainy River) said it was unfair to single them out because the statistics show that tourism has been down across the province.

"But the numbers are rebounding," said Campbell, whose parents operate a tourist camp. "And the information centres continue to play an important role."

She noted that visitor numbers at the Pigeon River travel centre have dropped more significantly in the past decade — to 24,000 from 77,000 — yet that centre was not closed.

"The suggestion was made that Pigeon River remains open to serve the vital United States market, (but) Fort Frances is the primary entry point for American tourists in Northwestern Ontario," Campbell said in her letter last week to Tourism Minister Michael Chan.

The ministry closed seven travel centres this summer. Eleven remain, with a combined budget of \$6.3 million.

Cash pledged for research

NORTH SHORE BUREAU

A Lakehead University research project to help reduce dependence on oil through the development of alternative fuel and energy sources has received a \$219,000 provincial grant.

"Research and scholarly activities at Lakehead have yielded, and will continue to create new knowledge and innovation in strategic areas, such as bioenergy and bio-refining, to speed up regional economic development," LU research and innovation vice-president Rui Wang said Tuesday in a news release.

The project, to be led by LU bioenergy and bio-refining researcher Sudip Rakshit, is to explore "techniques to overcome the major bottlenecks in the production of biofuels and renewable chemicals from organic materials," the release added.

"We're proud of the exceptional work happening at Lakehead University," said MPP Bill Mauro (L-Thunder Bay-Atikokan).

"The contributions of our researchers are making the world a better place, starting right here with new ideas and jobs in our community."



PHOTOS BY THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL/SANDI KRASOWSKI

The joys of childhood

The sun was shining, the musicians were playing and Thunder Bay's Vickers Park was packed Tuesday for the annual Teddy Bears Picnic. Top left, Monika Ruppenstein sends a stream of bubbles into the air at the Children's Aid Society activity tent. Above, Savannah Jesso dances to the music of the Grumpy Grandpas who performed Tuesday. Left, Randi Warren registers her children, Ben Maheson and Damien Stolz, with the Masonic Chip-Child Identification program. Digital photographs, fingerprints, a taped interview, and personal information of each child is recorded and given to the parent along with a DNA sample and bite wing for a teeth imprint.



Sharing the honour

Thunder Bay woman receives Order of Canada

BY DOUG DIACZUK
SPECIAL TO
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

Every refugee is unique and every refugee's story is different.

But what all refugees share is a need for someone who will listen to their story and offer a hand of support.

Elizabeth McWeeny of Thunder Bay has heard many refugee stories and has devoted her life to helping those seeking protection in Canada.

As a result of her work advocating human rights for refugees, McWeeny has been named to the Order of Canada.

The former president of the Canadian Council for Refugees and the past co-ordinator for the Refugee Sponsorship Program of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Thunder Bay, McWeeny has built upon a family tradition of helping refugees, her father having advocated on behalf of refugees as well.

"It's certainly shaped my life deeply," McWeeny said in an interview with The Chronicle-Journal.

"It's very important to me to be able to make a difference. When you help a refugee to achieve protection,



Elizabeth McWeeny

you change their life and you change their family life, and you change the course of that family. That is a very magnificent feeling to have. It is very fulfilling."

The Canadian Council for Refugees is a national organization that advocates for refugee rights. The organization assists refugees already in Canada who need settlement and integration, refugees who come from overseas through government or private sponsorship, and refugees coming to Canada seeking protection through the asylum system.

McWeeny said she has met some amazing and wonderful people, and many refugees have been an inspiration to her.

While every individual stands out in different ways, she cannot help but feel moved by the resilience and

determination of women refugees.

The women are focused on protecting their children and keeping their family together at all costs, McWeeny explained. When a woman refugee arrives in Canada, the struggle continues as she learns how to live in a new nation.

"The women refugees are absolutely amazingly full of courage and spirit," McWeeny said. "Once they get here they laugh, they dance, and they are just wonderful additions to our society."

McWeeny, who is still involved with the Canadian Council for Refugees as a co-chair for the working group on overseas protection and sponsorship, said it is a special time to be honoured with the Order of Canada because the current state of the refugee system in Canada is troubling.

Changes by the Harper government, including funding cuts to refugee health care, is a step backward, she said, adding the government is feeding the Canadian public misinformation, and Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney's rhetoric borders on bigotry and propaganda.

"This government is systemically dismantling that balance of open-hearted support and consideration for those refugees who need it," she said. "What they are doing is pitting volatile groups against each other."

"It breaks my heart," McWeeny continued. "We have worked in Canada very hard over the last few decades to create a system that, while not perfect, was really set up to achieve protection for those refugees who need it. It has been a model for the world."

She added that there is much work to be done and advocates for refugee rights have to do their very best to support refugee and human rights in the environment set up by the government.

She said she is hoping that receiving the Order of Canada will encourage others to help and strengthen the resolve of her fellow advocates.

"It is encouraging for my colleges," McWeeny said. "We've been in the trenches for a long time and I share this honour with many hundreds of Canadians who work on behalf of refugees."

She will be named in the Order of Canada in a fall ceremony in Ottawa.

LOTTERIES

Here are the winning numbers from the Ontario Lottery Corporation for Tuesday evening's Encore, Ontario Pick 2, Ontario Pick 3, Ontario Pick 4, Daily Keno, and Poker Lotto draws:

The winning **Encore** number was 0741837.
The winning **Ontario Pick 2** number was 17.

The winning **Ontario Pick 3** number was 635.

The winning **Ontario Pick 4** number was 9150.

The winning **Keno** numbers were 3, 4, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 36, 42, 43, 46, 50, 51, 60, 65.

The winning **Poker Lotto** hand is: 8-C, 3-S, 6-D, A-C, 7-S.

In the event of any discrepancy between this list and the official winning numbers, the latter shall prevail. —olg.ca

WALMART CORRECTION NOTICE
Our flyer distributed on July 4 - 6 and effective July 6 - 12: Trampoline with Enclosure Combo (#30263706) may not be available at all stores. Sorry, quantities limited. No rain checks.
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