

Culture ... Arts ... Entertainment

INVERNESS ORAN

Friends United aims to bridge the divide between our cultures

-by April MacDonald

One sees clearly only with the heart.

Don't let the unassuming exterior of Friends United deceive you, the beauty of what lies within will stop you in your tracks.

As young people, we are told to "not judge a book by its cover." But how many people can honestly say that they never waived from this metaphor for life?

The general idea is don't assume anything at first glance.

Like the building at Friends United, we as people need to practice not prejudging a person's worth or value by their outward appearance alone.

Honouring the lives and legacies of the First Nations people is the primary goal at Friends United. And the space is like none other in the province.

More of a museum or art gallery than a convention centre, Friends United provides incredible space for talented and emerging Aboriginal artists.

They help these artists to get recognition and exposure, but also the business skills and support needed to become independent, self-sufficient entrepreneurs.

Their mission is to eliminate misconceptions and prejudice, promote equality, peace, and mutual respect among all peoples, cultures, genders, and races by sharing

the deeply moving and meaningful stories of First Nation artists as told in their beautiful works of art.

The man behind Friends United is Rolf Bouman, he immigrated to Canada from Germany in 1987.

When he first arrived, he worked at Dean Evans' Coal Mine.

He quickly got into the real estate business and that is where he found his success. He made his money by buying large tracks of land on the water, developing the land, and selling it. He bought large parcels of land in places like Marble Mountain and St. Peters.

After living in Canada, he became acutely aware that many First Nations people were not only impoverished but highly underappreciated.

He also witnessed the unfounded friction between First Nations people and other North Americans.

For nearly 30 years now he has been working on eliminating prejudice by focusing the world's attention on the talents of First Nations peoples.

Meeting with Bouman and getting a personal tour of the facility, Bouman spoke of Edward Cornwallis, the military officer who founded Halifax in 1749.

Recently, Halifax regional council voted to remove the bronze monument commemorating Cornwallis. The decision came after increasing controversy over Cornwallis'



Rolf Bouman, Nancy Regan, and artist Jay Bell Redbird.

scalping proclamation that offered a cash bounty to anyone who killed a Mi'kmaw person.

Bouman was not shy to address his own country's dark history regarding genocide and attempting to eradicate an entire people.

But righting the wrongs of the past is just the beginning.

Bouman began researching and working on securing long-term funding for a facility

for First Nations people and in 2009 he created the Friends United initiative.

In 2010, former Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald joined the initiative, as did (in 2012) Regional Chief Morley Googoo. Together they have been promoting and assisting many First Nations artists to become cultural ambassadors for Canada.

"It's important to give back and fight back against prejudice," said Bouman.

He added that art is so important to First

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



Residential School by Loretta Gould of We'koqma'q.



Missing and Murdered by Loretta Gould of We'koqma'q

Friends United...continued from page 15

Nations people, to their creative nature and on their journey towards healing.

He posed the question, "What do you find so important about history? Is it learning from and experiencing a culture that is thousands of years old?"

He spoke to the fact that so many people seek out culture and history abroad, in Europe.

"If people are seeking a culture that is thousands of years old, they should look no further than their own backyard," said Bouman.

Friends United works to help Aboriginal people take their long overdue and rightful place as cultural ambassadors for their communities and country.

"By promoting a deeper understanding of our shared humanity, our fragile relationships with nature, and our common responsibility, we will learn to treat each other and

our planet with care and respect," explained Bouman.

Much of the profits made at Friends United goes back into the facility itself, but also to First Nations people. For instance, Bouman explained that on seven different occasions Friends United has traded land they own to First Nations people for their artwork.

"So much land was taken away from the First Nations people, we should give some back," said Bouman.

The latest project from Friends United is a number of documentaries in both English and German, with the English interviewer being Nancy Regan.

The Oran visited Friends United while they were filming and got to meet the crew and Regan.

Because it was being done in both English and German, there were two camera crews.

The Canadian one is called Mirror Media Image and the

German company is called Bildsprache.

All nine interviews will be visible separately on the Friends United website in English with German subtitles over the next few months.

The following people were interviewed by Nancy Regan over the course of three days:

1. Senator Mary Coyle along with the Ojibway artist Jay Bell Redbird from Toronto and Manitoulin Island and Loretta Gould from Waycobah.
2. Rodney MacDonald, former premier.
3. Steven Augustine, hereditary chief, vice president of CBU in Sydney.
4. Jay Bell Redbird and his spouse Halina Stopyra, both artists.
5. Loretta Gould and daughter Shianne Gould.
6. Patrick Lamey, who has a permanent exhibition at the EMM Law building, Lamey is president of Port Hawkesbury Rotary club.
7. Rolf Bouman, founder of Friends United and president of Canadian Pioneer Estates Ltd., Canec Land Development Inc., (Ad)venture Publishing Inc.
8. Regional Chief Morley Googoo. (upcoming interview taking place in Halifax).

Bouman stressed numerous times that the Friends United initiative and the Friends United International Convention Centre Complex are not funded by any government agencies and take no government funding. Both are solely funded and supported by the Bouman Group, which consists of Canadian Pioneer Estates Ltd., Canec Land Developments Inc., Kelly Robertson Consulting Inc., and (Ad)Venture Canada Publishing Inc.

Local artists who are featured there are: Loretta Gould, Waycobah; Shianne Gould, Waycobah; Darren Julian, Wagmatcook; Amanda Julian, Wagmatcook; Sandra Simon from Pak'ntkek (Pomquet) Quillbasket maker; Kathy Denny, Eskasoni; Jay Bell Redbird, Walkerville, Ojibway artist from Toronto and Manitoulin Island, who moved here recently; and Virginia McCoy.

The Friends United International Convention Centre complex features the largest private collection in Atlantic Canada of Native art including Inuit carvings.