

Can We Nurture and Retain Famous People in Westman?

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This column continues to take up the challenge thrown out by *Community News Edition* co-ordinator Grant Hamilton: "Who is the most famous Brandonian ever?"

Grant makes the challenge extra difficult by adding two rules. First, the famous Brandonian must be from Brandon. That leaves out people like Jordin Tootoo or Tommy Douglas, he says. Second, the person must have gained their fame while in Brandon, not after moving away. That eliminates people like Dr. Wilfred Bigelow.

Trying to figure out who qualifies is, of course, enjoyable in itself. What is "fame"? Did we happen to miss someone's 15 minutes? Everyone will have a different take on the matter.

In my column last Thursday, I suggested that my friend Pat Mooney could be the most famous Brandonian ever. He qualifies as he was born in Brandon and achieved international fame while living here in the 1980s. He now lives in Ottawa, and his fame is still increasing.

Grant posed an interesting question along with his challenge: "I sort of think that 'famous' and 'living in Brandon' are mutually exclusive. Why is that?"

That question is worth pondering. Just as a community can nourish famous people, they in turn can enliven and enrich the community where they live.

Brandon's relatively small population means we will enjoy fewer famous people than larger cities. That's a reason to extend the challenge to the Westman region, where we could draw in potential famous candidates such as Izzy Asper from Minnedosa, Margaret Laurence from Neepawa, Nellie McClung from Wawanesa, or Maurice Strong from Oak Lake.

Famous people often have needed a really large centre, however, to continue to sustain them. Even a city the size of Winnipeg may not be big

enough, as the number of famous ex-Winnipeggers attests. Famous people can require the infrastructure - the institutions, the services, the support networks, the financing, the markets – as well as the other amenities of a larger metropolis.

Can we do anything to encourage famous people to develop, and even stay, in Brandon or Westman? Infrastructure is important, especially air service; famous people fly a lot!

Modern technology, however, now makes smaller places more like bigger places. In today's "global village," everywhere is brought closer.

"There are no remote places. Under instant circuitry, nothing is remote in time or in space."

That quote is from the famous Marshall McLuhan ... who once lived in Winnipeg, but then moved to Toronto.

Perhaps today, someone like McLuhan could live in Brandon, which is as wired as anywhere else.

Perhaps even more important than infrastructure is the support of difference. After all, famous people are famous because they are different – they excel, they rebel, they marvel at opportunities that elude everyone else.

Manitoba Premier Rodmond Roblin said in 1914 that "nice" women would not even want the vote. But Nellie McClung did not quietly accept that conventional wisdom. She later became a member of the "Famous Five" who dared to challenge the law that Canadian women were not "persons."

(Interestingly, political activism seems to run in that family: McClung's maiden name was Mooney; Pat Mooney is a relation.)

Who is the most famous Brandonian, ever? That's an interesting question.

But the other question is even more intriguing. Can we create in Brandon and Westman the environment that not only develops famous people, but also keeps them here?

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