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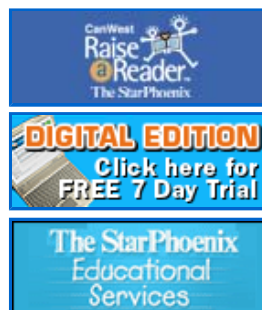
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Residential school reunion proposed

Former student uses Internet to spread word on potential event

Kerry Benjoe, Saskatchewan News Network; Regina Leader-Post

Published: Wednesday, December 26, 2007

REGINA -- A former student is taking on the ambitious project of reuniting those who attended residential school in Lebret.

"The initiative would be for everybody who went to Lebret. The whole idea is to set up a website so that there's a forum for everybody or everyone who went to residential school be it in Saskatchewan, Alberta or wherever. The experiences were the same," said Tony Stevenson.

Stevenson attended the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School from 1979 until 1991. The school was located in Lebret, about 100 kilometres east of Regina, and has since been demolished.



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He hopes the website will be a useful networking tool for former staff and students as a way to get in contact with one another.

"Or they can use it for questions, questions they have about businesses and law firms to share negative and positive experiences," said Stevenson. "That way everyone knows and has a heads-up as to who to deal with and who not to deal with."

He believes it's important to provide a support and networking service for former students in preparation for the Independent Assessment Process. Residential school survivors who experienced physical or sexual abuse while in school have the opportunity to have their case go through the courts. Stevenson estimates the settlements for those cases can be as high as \$400,000.

"It could be a pretty stressful experience. You are opening old wounds," Stevenson said, adding he hopes this initiative will help make the situation easier for abuse victims. "Whenever you can take a negative scenario and turn it into a positive you know you've done something right."

He was inspired by the work of former NHL player Sheldon Kennedy. Kennedy spoke out about the sexual abuse he suffered as a teenager at the hands of his coach.

"When (Kennedy) travelled across the country, everyone who was there, well, he gave them the courage to speak about the negative issues that happened to them," said Stevenson, who hopes for a similar response.

Over the summer Stevenson worked at a local law firm and part of his job was working on residential school files.

"About 99 per cent of the people I spoke to would ask if was in touch with so-and-so. Or they would ask, 'Who can I deal with? Where can I go?' " said Stevenson. "Unfortunately, there is only so many hours in a day to provide the help for your fellow peers."

That's when he decided that a reunion would be good for former students. Stevenson believes it's important to reconnect everyone. He realized that if he didn't do something on his own nothing would get done. Stevenson estimates during his time in residential school he met hundreds of people.

"Unfortunately a lot of bad things did happen, but at the same time there was a lot of positive things that came out of it like brotherhood and camaraderie," said Stevenson.

The reunion has been tentatively set for the third week in July or August at the Ramada in Regina. He said the date is dependent on the response of former students.

For more information contact Stevenson at qirs.lebret_reunion@yahoo.ca.

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