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The advertisement features a green circular logo with a white shopping bag icon. To the right, the word "shopping" is written in a bold, lowercase font with a trademark symbol. Below it, the tagline "Know more. Buy better." is displayed. A photograph of a man and a woman walking and carrying shopping bags is positioned on the left. To the right of the photo, the text "Shopping starts here." is written in a bold, orange font, followed by "7 day archive of daily ads at your fingertips" in a smaller black font. At the bottom, the "LEADER-POST" logo and a small red RSS icon are visible. Below the advertisement, there is a red home icon and the text "Make Regina Leader-Post my start page".

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Asikinack recalls his own journey

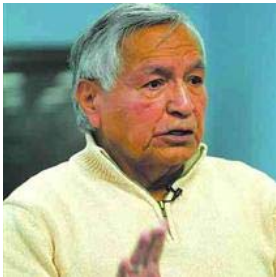
Trevor Newell, The Leader-Post

Published: Wednesday, February 13, 2008

It's been an incredible journey for Bill Asikinack.

That was the theme of a speech Asikinack gave to students at the Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training on Tuesday, part of the centre's "Nourishing Thoughts" series of lunchtime lectures.

Asikinack's journey began when he was a six-year-old student at a Brantford, Ont., Indian Residential School and it has taken him to the First Nations University of Canada, where he now heads the department of indigenous studies.



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Bill Asikinack speaks at the Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training at the Regina Food Bank

Bryan Schlosser, The Leader-Post



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Asikinack's career as a teacher has spanned nearly five decades and he quickly summed up what he gets out of his work.

"The enjoyment of watching people succeed," he said.

Asikinack got his teaching certificate from the Teacher's College in London, Ont., in 1960. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree at the University of Western Ontario in 1979. In 1980, he came to Saskatchewan to serve as the first director of the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program.

"It incorporated ... the cultural components that the students would need in order to understand the various cultures with whom they were working," he said. "We threw those courses into the overall training right from the start."

Asikinack, who also holds a master's degree from the University of Regina, will soon be working to find ways of incorporating indigenous studies into the province's regular school curriculum, which he said is especially important because of changing demographics.

But the path that led Asikinack to teaching was sometimes rocky.

Asikinack said he was strapped by the principal of the residential school his first day there for "speaking Indian" on the playground.

Asikinack said he never had enough to eat at the residential school. He said it was so bad that he and four classmates once took oats from the school barn to fill their stomachs. When they were caught, each of them was given the strap for stealing animal feed, he said.

However, Asikinack admitted that residential school had some redeeming aspects, too. He said he fell in love with "an older woman" when he was in Grade 5 -- the older woman being a girl in Grade 8. One day, his teacher, Mrs. George, intercepted a love note Asikinack had written to the girl.

Asikinack assumed his teacher would humiliate him by reading the note aloud. To his great relief, Mrs. George quietly approached him and told him it's "nice to be in love," he said.

Asikinack's academic journey was later side-tracked for five years when he was in a Windsor, Ont., hospital with tuberculosis. Staff at the residential school had ignored his symptoms for years and, by the time he finally got to hospital, the disease had nearly crippled him, he said. As a result of the tuberculosis, a severe bone infection had set into his left knee. Asikinack was told he wouldn't walk again until one of his doctors offered some hope.

His knee was surgically fused and he learned to walk again, albeit with a limp. When Asikinack left the hospital, there was never any doubt in his mind that he would complete high school and go on to university, he said.

Asikinack concluded Tuesday's lecture by saying how we all have the ability to make choices for ourselves, even if we don't always appreciate it.

"Every time you think you're not making a decision, you're really making a decision," he said.

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