

Wildfire study shows people care

By Jill Hayward
North Thompson
Star/Journal

A public meeting (including a free supper) took place on behalf of a study facilitated by the University of Lethbridge, on Mar. 22, at the Ridge.

The study, Resiliency in Rural Settlements That Have Experienced Wildfires, has been an ongoing project within the Lower North Thompson area for the past few years, and the meeting was a preliminary report of its findings.

Presenting the findings to approximately 40 area residents were: Judith Kulig, University of Lethbridge, Alberta; Dana Edge, Queens University, Ontario; Bill Reimer, Concordia University, Ontario; and Ivan Townsend, University of Lethbridge.

Interviews, household surveys, and digital interviews all contribut-

ed to the data compiled in the report, which also took into consideration data gathered from the community of LaRonge, Sask., and a unnamed control community.

Here are some of the points made in the report regarding the area communities impacted by the McLure Fire:

- People care about each other and want to help each other

- The area was described as welcoming and friendly

- Newcomers say it takes time to feel a part of the community

- Most people have low levels of anxiety

- A high level of well being

- During the wildfire Barriere and area relied less on government help, and more on family volunteers, and business to provide critical support.

- Those who suffered the most from the impact of the fire - larger households, those with one child, those in their 50's, those with income

between \$40,000 to \$60,000, and those self-employed.

- There is strength in the volunteer sector but it is made up mostly of older men and women.

- There is a need for a grieving period after a wildfire disaster and more mental health counseling availability was needed.

Bill Reimer noted the study shows that communities that want to prepare for disaster "must have a strong volunteer base - that's what you are really going to rely on."

He noted the principals of resiliency are: know yourself, learn about others, and build on your capacity to work together.

"Barriere was very fortunate that it had a strong volunteer base and the wildfire just brought it out to the forefront," said Reimer, "Knowing who you are - what are your strengths? This is a tremendous asset; look at all the people who

turned up to help."

Reimer also stated that "Canada is an urbanized society and if rural societies don't figure that out they are going to miss the boat. They need to say "hey we feed you; hey, we harvest the timber. They need to draw upon that opportunity."

He also noted that due to the large aging population in Canada, many communities are losing their work force; people in the age 20 to 50 bracket.

"Most important is figuring out how to work together," said Reimer, "One of the most difficult things for rural communities is learning to work with outsiders. The future for community growth is not from within yourself, but from the newcomers who come into the community. Know yourself, know your assets and appearance, and then ask yourself - what do we want?"

Kulig stated, "The

results of this study are proving to be a really exciting way to help other communities."

For more information on the study and its findings go to: www.ruralwildfire.ca

NOTICE

Please Make A Correction in Your North Thompson Community Directory 2010

The District of Barriere number is incorrectly represented on pages 15 and 19 in the white pages listing section for Barriere.

Please change this number to read 672-9751.

We sincerely regret any confusion or inconvenience this error may have caused to all the parties concerned.

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