

## **We need to stand up to racism**

By Doug Holmes

In recent weeks, Summerland has suffered several incidents of racist graffiti and vandalism. These offensive acts are part of a larger trend of hate crimes across the country.

There has always been an element of racism in Summerland, like anywhere. While no expression of hate is acceptable, the increasingly overt and public displays are generating more hurt and anger than ever, and they risk instilling a sense of insecurity and fear of violence amongst many of our residents.

This hatred is not representative of who we are as a community. Perhaps they're the actions of only one or two individuals, maybe some juveniles. But whoever is responsible, they are becoming more emboldened and their crimes more frequent.

They are damaging Summerland's long-standing reputation as a warm and welcoming community.

News media need to be more circumspect when reporting acts of hate. One-off reports and photos/videos of vandalized public spaces diminish the seriousness of the problem by making them appear as rare occurrences. At the same time, they provide perpetrators the publicity they crave, inspire copycat crimes, and serve as a recruitment tool for white supremacist groups.

We need our professional journalists looking under the covers at the root causes of racism and providing analysis on how they affect our social fabric.

With everything from social media to unfiltered music, youth today receive a lot of mixed messages. Education at both home and school is essential to help them learn what is and isn't socially acceptable.

School District 67 draws on guidance from the government to provide teachers with classroom resources and professional learning focused on anti-racism. The school board also has an Equity Committee that includes student representation.

As guardians of the public interest, local government must also do its part by sending out strong messages that racism will not be tolerated and must be condemned.

The District of Summerland has a 10-page anti-racial discrimination and anti-racism policy that aims to ensure all who work or interact with the Municipality can do so in an environment free from racism and racial discrimination.

Council also supports local groups working to create a more inclusive community, largely through our membership of the regional Respect Network and collaborations with South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS).

We further respond to acts of hate by bringing them to the attention of the appropriate authorities, including the provincial Human Rights Commissioner and the RCMP.

In fact, anybody who might have information about any hate crime should be contacting the police.

Sometimes incidents of racism go unreported. We need to start calling in everything. We need the RCMP to investigate these crimes, and they need to start catching the culprits and laying charges.

We all have a role to play in combatting racism by continually educating ourselves and holding conversations with our friends, family and children. We must denounce racism at every opportunity and show understanding and compassion to victims of hate crimes.

By coming together as a community, we can fight hate and construct a better future. We can show the world that racism isn't tolerated in Summerland.

*Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland.*