



Shaunna Jimenez from Friends of Burma with St. Mary's Band Chief Cheryl Casimir

A First Nations welcome

From Front Page

"He and Joe Pierre sat down in the tipi for over an hour and shared stories. It was amazing, the similarity between the African and Ktunaxa stories."

Jimenez says Amaren is already a success story, welcomed with open arms by the Cranbrook community and already working and going to school.

"And Bobby from Burma, as everyone calls him, has been around for quite a while," she said. "He was there and he's quite a character. He made it all through the years in a refugee camp and then got run over in the Safeway parking lot."

Jimenez says she is interested in working more with the refugee and Ktunaxa youth, perhaps finding some common ground there.

This summer, she will be touring through the East and West Kootenays, bringing the success stories from Kimberley and Cranbrook to other communities, seeing if there might be interest and will to sponsor more refugees.

"Because Kimberley and Cranbrook have been so wonderfully welcoming we want to encourage other communities to do the same. I'd like to see what community might be up for it," she said. "But if you don't have the wonderful volunteer base we have here, it won't work. We will do a bit of an assessment, because when a resettlement falls apart it's not good for anyone."

She will be bringing some of the new residents with her on these trips, sponsored by Church groups or community groups.

"I'm taking the Karens to Nelson with me and in Kaslo, they have a Colombian refugee family so I'll bring

our Colombian family.

She will also bring along Susan Dancer, who helped August Paw write a book about her experiences in the refugee camps. Dancer is now making a film about the family's resettlement in Kimberley.

"Kimberley is getting really well known in immigration circles, in the government, for successful sponsorships. 'They can do it in Kimberley' is what they say. Our families in Kimberley were also special needs, which is often more difficult and can lead to sponsor burnout. But the fact is that Kimberley just comes up smiling.

Jimenez says Kimberley's schools have really done a wonderful job. "The people at Selkirk have really gone out of their way to make sure the kids make it to all the extra events and the College of the Rockies put on a wonderful ESL program."

It's a feel good story, what's happening in Kimberley and Cranbrook, she says.

"People should feel good because they've done such a wonderful job in Kimberley and Cranbrook. It keeps their energy up. Because we will be taking in more families in the next years. There are ten million refugees left in the world, so we're not done."

Gary Dalton photo

