

Asper Foundation receives rare honour

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Organization recognized for
promotion of human rights

FREDERICTON — The New Brunswick Human Rights Commission will honour the Asper Foundation for its promotion of tolerance Saturday by presenting it with its rare Pioneer of Human Rights Award.

The foundation, which is being honoured for its Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program, will be in prestigious company since the award has only been given three times in the past.

"The foundation is making a difference in allowing students to participate in a program that creates sensitization in tomorrow's leaders. The human rights commission is proud to support this kind of awareness," said Gordon Porter, chairman of the commission.

"The Asper family has set a great example for us to follow, and we challenge others to step forward and join their pioneer efforts to advance human rights among youth."

Started in Winnipeg in 1997 by the late Israel Asper, founder of Canwest Global Communications Corp., the program aims to promote tolerance and sensitize Grade 9 students of different backgrounds to the consequences of racism and allow them to become more aware of human rights and world issues.

"We were deeply honoured to be receiving this wonderful and prestigious award and very grateful that the province is recognizing our commitment to education on human rights and our commitment to providing that education nationally — because this is one of the only national privately-driven education programs in Canada," said foundation president Gail Asper.

"We could not be receiving these kinds of awards if we didn't have a wonderful team, so on behalf of all the people that helped to make this program a success I will be gratefully accepting this award," said Asper, who intends to attend the ceremony.

The program was meant to teach the students "the importance of understanding human rights and inspiring a personal call to action to take responsibility for the protection of human rights, not only in Canada but around the world," Asper said.

It's the first time the award is being handed out since it was created in 2002 and given to three individuals including former New Brunswick premier Louis Robichaud and Senate Speaker Noel Kinsella. The first chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Gordon Fairweather, was the award's only other recipient.

The award will be given during a youth forum at St. Thomas University.

"This program is a benchmark for students and chaperones to establish their personal convictions to ensure that future generations will be unconditionally tolerant, understanding and respectful of all human rights," said Porter.