

Unique society unites Jews, Muslims and Christians

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Western Correspondent

EDMONTON – Despite difficult times, the Phoenix Multi-Faith Society for Harmony has successfully been able to maintain positive Jewish, Muslim and Christian dialogue, particularly concerning local religious and racial concerns.

Phoenix, a non-profit organization founded in Edmonton, is dedicated to the promotion of interfaith cooperation. Its objectives – through dialogue – are to facilitate respect and understanding of all faiths, to seek peaceful coexistence and to organize initiatives that help quell negative stereotyping, hate, bias and prejudice.

In 2000, Edmonton's Beth Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues were firebombed. During the years incidents like these in Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities have raised the concern of community members.

This has led to Jews, Muslims and Christians working together with the Edmonton Police Service's hate and bias crimes unit to foster harmonious relations between faiths through the society.

Solomon (Sol) Rolingher, a law partner with Edmonton's Duncan & Craig LLP, will be the Beth Shalom Synagogue gala honouree on March 29. He is also the founding and current chair of Phoenix.

"This is the only society in Canada like this that we're aware of, where people of common mind and spirit are uniting in the interest of common good through mutual respect," explained Rolingher.

Just after the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, Rolingher said, "We called for calm and cooperation, talked about the issues and, in turn, Edmonton

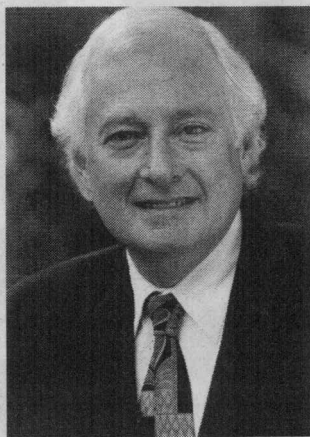


PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOL ROLINGERHER

Solomon (Sol) Rolingher, Phoenix Chair

was the only Canadian city that didn't see any reactionary hate attack."

The name 'Phoenix,' Rolingher explained, is apt, as it alludes to the rising out of the ashes – by uniting, starting anew.

The group consists of Edmonton Police Chief Mike Boyd and six representatives each from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities.

Rolingher said, "We now have a police liaison for our Jewish community and that has been great. There is also our chief advisory committee, with the police chief, where he gets feedback from a wide variety of communities."

The only incident in Edmonton related to the Israel-Gaza conflict occurred when, on New Year's Day, someone threw a can of chickpeas with a note attached saying "get out of Gaza" into a synagogue.

"We work to maintain an even balance here," said Rolingher.

Rolingher summed up the aim and result of Phoenix, as a group of "people who will always be working together and talking, because we all want a better world to live in for our children – and you can't ask for better than that."