

A Community in Action

Special to Main Street – Joseph Graham joseph@ballyhoo.ca

The backwoods of Ste-Lucie is usually a quiet place, but one night this past August, it vibrated with the rhythms of Rwandan drum music.

On Saturday, August 4 we attended a potluck at our neighbour's house in Ste. Lucie. Louise Lachapelle, our host, and Devora Neumark, both long-time community activists, had not planned to organize a Rwandan drum concert, but when they learned of Vincent Nsengiyumva's plight, they felt compelled to act.

Devora met Vincent following the refusal of the Canadian Embassy to process visa requests for some women drummers from the Rwandan group Ingoma Nshya, who were to take part in an intercultural exchange project this past May. After four years of planning, they were faced with cancelling the event entirely. Then



Marie Kayitesi, a Rwandan community organizer, suggested they ask Vincent for help, and his troupe Komezinganzo stepped in, saving the project. During the event, they learned that Vincent was facing deportation.

Vincent is neither Tutsi nor Hutu, but a member of a persecuted minority called the Twa. He lost his entire family in the 1994 genocide and ongoing madness of reprisals and is at high risk if he is forced to return, yet our refugee review board put him in front of a judge who has refused virtually all claimants (see <http://bit.ly/As9K7p> for a related CBC story).

The potluck, organized to help Vincent in his appeal, was a great success with delicious food supplied by more than 50 people from all possible backgrounds. Vincent and his colleagues Dada and Jean-Claude put a lot of thought into their show. They entitled it INYENYERI, which means 'fireflies' in Rwandan, and they chose that because the event was to be held in Sainte Lucie, and luciole is French for firefly. An hour before the show began, they used their drums to call out to the neighbours who were waiting for that signal, and as day turned to night, we were entertained by magnificent music and dance on a small stage at the edge of the forest. Afterwards, a hat was passed to help Vincent in a humanitarian appeal process.

Email Joseph Graham to learn more.