

# Stolen Dreams exhibit launches this evening

By Jim Mosher

GIMLI — Imagine as a child having to work in depressing, dangerous and dank conditions. It would seem improbable today, but there remain places where children work as virtual slaves.

An exhibit at the New Iceland Heritage Museum provides a glimpse of the world of child labour. *Stolen Dreams* formally launches this evening at the First Ave. museum at 7:30 p.m.

Mounting *Stolen Dreams*, a Manitoba Museum travelling exhibit, is a joint effort among the museum, Fair Trade Manitoba and the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation.

*Stolen Dreams* runs until the end of July.

Tammy Axelsson, executive director of the New Iceland Heritage Museum, says the exhibit arrived Tuesday in 27 crates.

"We had a whole crew of volunteers unpacking and putting the exhibit together," Axelsson said. "It's one of those things where you realize that partnering with other people is a good thing."

Free trade coffee and non-alcoholic free trade beverages will be available, as will a light snack. Also expect a presentation about the exhibit.

*Stolen Dreams* features photographs taken by Minnesota occupational health physician Dr. David L. Parker. "Taken in Mexico, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh,



India, Morocco, Turkey, the United States, Bolivia and Peru between 1990 and 1998, the photos document the nature of work conducted by children in different parts of the world," exhibit literature states. "The exhibit encourages visitors to consider under what circumstances and conditions children should work; what work children should be allowed to perform; and the role of nations in the control of child labour."

Perhaps the most rivetting and touch-

ing story is that of Iqbal Masih, a young Pakistani boy who would become a lightning rod for change. At age four, Iqbal was bonded to a carpet maker in Lahore. He was forced into child labour because his parents borrowed money to buy food and clothing for their children. It was left to Iqbal to pay that debt.

After six years slogging away in horrible conditions — working 14 hours a day, six days a week to pay his family's loan — Iqbal would find that the debt was greater than when he started.

Then he learned that Pakistan had passed a law prohibiting child labour. Iqbal would become involved in advocacy, speaking to groups in Europe and elsewhere about the plight of children.

Carpet sales fell, as consumers became educated. Iqbal, it would seem, had made a difference.

However: "On Easter Sunday, April 16, 1995, Iqbal was shot and killed while riding his bicycle along a rural path," states a panel in the exhibit devoted to Iqbal. "Debate continues over whether Iqbal's death was a murder or an accident. However, a week after his death 3,000 children and adults marched through the streets of Lahore demanding an end to child labour. Since that time Iqbal Masih has become an international symbol for the struggle for human rights for children everywhere.



Iqbal Masih was bonded, at four years old, to a carpet making company in Lahore, Pakistan. He died mysteriously after talking to audiences in the United States and Europe about the plight of child workers.