

Community mourns the loss of three murdered women





By Nate Smelle

Residents of Wilno and the surrounding area are in mourning after three local women were shot dead on Tuesday, Sept. 22. The day after the shooting, OPP officer Dan Moore stood guarding the Wilno residence of Anastasia Kuzyk, one of the women killed.

Visibly shaken by the tragedy 24 hours before, Moore remembered his neighbour Kuzyk as a beautiful, kind and gentle woman who was loved and respected by her friends, family and the community.

Across the road at the Wilno Tavern where Kuzyk worked for almost 10 years, neighbours and friends of the three women killed ? Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton ? gathered to help one another cope with the painful reality gripping their community.

?Everyone is still in shock. No one believes this type of thing can happen to someone they know and love, but it can and it does,? Corinne Higgins, owner of the Wilno Tavern, said.

Rev. James Allman, a retired minister and president of the Stone Fence Theatre in Wilno visited the tavern on Wednesday to offer his condolences and to help in any way that he could.

Although retired from the ministry for more than four years, Allman volunteers his time counselling Canadian soldiers in Petawawa who suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

?When something like this happens we need to do our best to learn from it,? Allman said.

?Everyone will learn from it in different ways, but hopefully people will learn that social ills and anger destroy communities and individuals. Some people may learn, when they see the grief this has caused, not to be a part of what causes this sort of grief in a community. How to avoid anger, hatred and violence is one of the most important lessons people can learn from day one on this planet.?

After Kuzyk was found dead in her Wilno residence just before 9 a.m. on Tuesday, police launched a manhunt throughout the Ottawa Valley for a suspect identified at the time only as armed and dangerous. ?Information led police to a residence on Foymount Road where they found the body 48-year-old Nathalie Warmerdam. At approximately 11:10 a.m., police discovered the third victim, 66-year-old Carol Culleton at a location on Kamaniskeg Lake Road just south of Barry's Bay. ?For more than five hours while officers searched for the suspect, children at schools and residents in the Wilno area were placed under lockdown, advised to remain indoors and notify authorities of any suspicious activity. Around 2:30 p.m. Ottawa police apprehended Basil Borutski, 57, west of the capital in a wooded area near Becks and Kinburn Side Road. He appeared in the Ontario Court of Justice in Pembroke on Sept. 23 where he was charged with three counts of first degree murder.

In an incredible outpouring of love for the community and outrage towards the violence, people have been taking their pain and frustration to the streets to speak out against acts of violence against women.

On Friday, Sept. 25 more than 500 people assembled in Wilno, along with another 60 or more who showed up at the Manor in Bancroft to add their voices to the clarion call for an end to violence against women that has been echoing throughout the region since the news broke.

One of the main organizers of the event in Bancroft on Friday night, Marsha Depotier works as the victim services co-ordinator with the Métis Nation of Ontario in the Bancroft area. A powerful voice in the fight to end violence against women in the community for the past 22 years, she decided to devote her life to the cause back in 1993 after three women in her family were murdered by her uncle. It is disgusting and disheartening to see how violent crimes like these are repeated with very little action from the government to prevent them from happening again, she says.

?Everyone in our community is feeling this,? said Depotier.

?We are the life-carriers, life-sustainers and life-givers; nobody else can say they can do that. That's a gift the creator has given us as women. We have to continue putting ourselves out there and being the change we want to see. We make change every second but one day we will see that big change. When we all got together at Maggie's Resource Centre on Wednesday it was a time of fear and tears and disbelief. It was like, oh my God we devote our lives to this and we are still seeing it.?

One of only four men in attendance at the vigil on Friday night, Sean Lee-Popham, a nurse at Quinte Health Care North Hastings in Bancroft, voiced his anger with the men responsible for such violent crimes, and his frustration with those who do nothing to stop them. Because it is men who are committing these atrocities against women, he says it is time for men to start speaking out against the violence that has been claiming the lives of women for far too long.

?As a nurse I see these killings as a symptom,? he said.

?And it's a harsh symptom, it's an extreme symptom; but it's a symptom of a larger ailment. It's a symptom of a society and a world where men too often feel a sense of ownership, and feel that they can control and own women's bodies; and this a very extreme example of that.?

The public outcry continued on Saturday night at The Arlington in Maynooth with another 60 plus individuals coming together to take action as a community. Once the sun had disappeared, members of the congregation each lit a candle in honour of the three women violently murdered so close by, before silently making their way to the Loggers' Field around the corner. Upon the group's arrival to the moonlit expanse, they formed a circle around a sacred tree in the centre of the clearing. In a showing of solidarity those who had gathered on the field in Maynooth let out a unified scream followed a moment of silence to reflect on the cause of the violence that stole the life from their three fallen neighbours to the northeast.