

## Call to action on violence against women



By **Jim Eadie**

Dec. 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, was observed in Bancroft with a mixture of frustration and even anger, and included an art exhibit followed by a march to Riverside Park and a vigil. This year there was a larger than usual number of participants and a tone was clearly becoming impatient for real change, due in part to the murder of three local women in Wilno this past September. This national observation has been held in Canada every year since the murder of 14 women engineering students by a man, at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal on Dec. 6, 1989 because they were women. The names of these women along with the names of six local women who have been murdered by men were spoke aloud a number of times during the day to ensure they are honoured, and never forgotten.

‘We think of all of the women who live in torture, terror, war ? violence,’ said Jody Raven, a therapist and anti-violence activist. ‘I have been through that ? I know. So many stories of women are not acknowledged, and never told. We admire people who climb mountains, or play professional sports ? but we do not listen to women. It makes us invisible. This must end now.’

Another woman removed a red ribbon decorating the bonfire enclosure at the park, and dropped it into the fire. ‘The red ribbon represents the pain,’ she said. The ribbon was replaced with a green ribbon. ‘This ribbon represents hope,’ she continued. ‘My hope is that we won’t need to do this anymore some day.’

That represented a theme expressed during the vigil. A common question asked was: ‘How many more times do we have to do this before something changes?’

‘Men who hurt women don’t care what women think,’ said Rory McRandall. ‘That is why it falls to us men to shoulder this change. We need to open our hearts, and see with our hearts.’

Marcia Depotier, Metis Nation of Ontario victim services worker reminded everyone about the 582 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

‘We know the number is much greater than what is acknowledged,’ she said. ‘I want to offer thanks to my sisters of this land, the sisters who walk on this land.’ She paid tribute to the women who work to support other women and work to end violence against women every day. ‘It is very hard work,’ she noted.

Maggie’s Resource Centre for Women in Bancroft is one of the original community-based feminist women’s resource centres in Ontario, organized in the early 1980s by grassroots volunteers who saw the need to support women living in, leaving or recovering from abuse.

"I remember that day, I was in high school," said Tanya McKinnon, Maggie's executive director, referring to the Montreal murders in 1989. "Those women were killed because they were women. It has had a profound impact on me. Every six days a woman is murdered in Canada."

As part of their violence prevention programming, Maggie's offers seminars, workshops and support for women in the rural community through Tamarack, to build strengths in self-advocacy and empowerment, and a place to meet with other women. This fall, art has become the interest of a dozen women, who have been mentored by two volunteer local artists, Leilah Ward and Iny Weese.

Place for the Arts in Bancroft has donated the space to work in, and are currently hosting a showing of some of the pieces painted by the women.

"Art is a great communicator," said Jane Kali, a community volunteer.

"A person can express themselves through art. It is accessible and a safe way to tell your story. I believe that art can be transformative, for both the person making it, and the person experiencing it. We do need to transform our society."

"It was exciting putting your story and feelings into a picture," said Kerry Leslie, one of the artists.

"It is also therapeutic." Leslie had never in her wildest dreams ever thought of painting before, and was somewhat skeptical when the idea was broached initially.

"Today is a really important day," summed up Heather Sararas, Maggie's counsellor.

"Women in the community will read about this in the newspaper they will hear about all of us here today, and that there is support for them in our community."