

## Women march to Take Back the Night



EGANVILLE – After sunset as darkness enveloped the village, they marched through the streets chanting, singing, making noise and waving signs, united and determined to show they wouldn't be afraid anymore.

On Tuesday, Sept. 25, the Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County held its annual Take Back the Night march that saw about 50 women and children take to the streets to assert the right to walk at night, free of fear. The march and demonstration serves as a reminder that violence exists, and to make a public statement that rape, battering, sexual harassment and sexual assault are not isolated cases, but a pervasive problem in society affecting women every day in every village, town and city in Canada and worldwide.

This, the 26th annual march, took place on the same day that comedian and actor Bill Cosby was sentenced to three to 10 years in a state prison for drugging and sexually assaulting Toronto native

Andrea Constand at his home 14 years ago. JoAnne Brooks, director of the Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County, read out portions of Constand's victim impact statement just before the group began to march down Bonnechere Street East.

Brooks said Constand's impact statement and her strength and persistence in seeing the case through will encourage other women to come forward and talk about their experiences of sexual violence, which is how change will happen.

She also shared some troubling statistics such as that every year in Canada 460,000 women and girls are sexually assaulted.

"Can you imagine if this was any other crime? How would people react if these were attacks on police officers? And do we know about this? No. Sexual assault is a silent crime," Brooks said.

She continued explaining that out of every 1,000 sexual assaults, 33 are reported to police, 29 are recorded as a crime, 12 have charges laid, six are prosecuted, and three lead to conviction.



Chanting slogans, blowing whistles, ringing bells, beating drums and carrying signs, lights and glow sticks, the procession left the tourist information booth parking lot, heading west down Bonnechere Street East, to Bridge Street, across the bridge, then onto John Street before heading into Centennial Park by the Countdown Public Art Project, a massive stone pebble mosaic, one of four and the first of its kind in Canada.

In 2016, the Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County, Red Dress Productions, and Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio joined together with hundreds of community members to realize the Countdown Public Art Project — a community-wide initiative in Renfrew County, that engaged in the creation of one large permanent public art monument and three 'sister' monuments to honour survivors of sexual violence. The three smaller sister mosaics are located in Killaloe, Pikwàkanagàn and Pembroke with the big mosaic being in Eganville, the geographic centre of Renfrew County. The mosaic was crafted over the summer by hundreds of community members and it is made up of five tons of stones, carefully arranged into the shape of what resembles a flower.

As the group gathered in a circle around the mosaic, Brooks shared that during May, which is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, someone tried to break the glass sphere at the centre of the mosaic. While it was damaged, it did not break – which Brooks said made the metaphor even more fitting.

“You can’t fix it, you can’t repair it and you can’t make it back just as it was before, but yet it survives,” she said.

Roberta Della-Picca, a director with the Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio, announced to the group the Countdown Public Art Project legacy project, which will see the creation of four more sister monuments across Ontario.

“At the heart of the Countdown Public Art Project is the hope that the process of creating the monument and the amplification of this initiative will continue to play a regenerative role in inviting more people to the conversation, to be change makers in our communities by joining the Countdown Public Art Project to end violence,” Della-Picca said.

Brooks said they intend to include northern Ontario, southwestern Ontario, eastern Ontario and central Ontario but that each community has to be contacted to see whether they have the capacity to work on a monument in their community. The final decision is expect to be made in December.

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