

Family Transition Place marked International Women's Day

By Tabitha Wells

There is something amiss, when in a world where 50 per cent of the population is women, that the majority of prominent fields are dominated by men and where women still earn less than men for holding the same positions.

World-wide, women make up less than 10 per cent of world leadership positions and in Canada, women hold just 24 per cent of the seats in government and usually only in areas that represent social, family or cultural affairs.

“There is still so much gender inequality in the world. The only way to be able to reach equality is by being able to educate and make people more aware that it is still a present issue,” explained Stacey Tarrant, manager of development and community relations with Family Transition Place (FTP). “Sometimes, they know about or have experienced some form of the inequality in their lives, but they don't necessarily know that this is a broad, global issue.”

It's for that reason that International Women's Day, a day designated to recognize women for their political, economic and social achievements, was celebrated both worldwide and locally last week.

FTP hosted its annual International Women's Day luncheon last Friday, combining the celebration of women with a fundraiser to help provide money for the programs and services they offer for women to help move forward into a life free from abuse and unhealthy relationships or lifestyles.

“Every year it has sold out well in advance prior to the event date,” Tarrant said. “We have over 300 attend the event, we have a women's vendor marketplace where people are welcome to come a little early and shop the floor before attending the event with the guest speaker. It's great fun.”

This year proved to have the same pattern, with all tickets selling out shortly after sales opened in November. While the day of celebration has been going on for more than 100 years now, there are many who are just becoming aware of it, and the continued success of the luncheon proves that their message is getting across.

“There are a lot of people that had never heard of it, so this is definitely raising more awareness for the day, which then generates more awareness about what it is about,” Tarrant explained. “Even though it is a celebratory day, it's also about pointing out some of the challenges that we still have to conquer. I think the more people know about the day, the more we are going to bring attention to those challenges.”

Lesley Page, a former burned-out corporate executive turned award-winning pilot, was this year's guest speaker at the luncheon. She spoke with those in attendance about her story, and what led to the change in career, as well as the opportunities she has had to impact and change lives through her passion of flying.

“I was so excited to hear from Stacey last year to invite me to this event,” Page said. “It is absolutely the type of audience that needs to hear the message about how important it is to increase the number of women pilots as well as to celebrate the accomplishments of women.”

She added that currently, only six per cent of pilots are women, largely due to the fact that the perception is that aviation is for boys and men. Part of her work includes being part of an organization called The Women of Aviation Worldwide, which aims to show girls and women that there are options available to increase the diversity in the aviation and aerospace industries, through helping celebrate the achievements of female pilots.

“I think it's important to celebrate anything to do with women,” she said. “Women are half of the population, but we represent far less than half in many male-dominated fields such as government and world-leadership. Importantly to me, we only represent six per cent of pilots.”

Based on the survey results from the luncheon, people enjoyed listening to Page, and were enthralled by both her story and her passion.

“We've had lots of positive feedback about how she was a real woman telling her real story and was very enduring,” Tarrant explained. “For the past few years we've had very different types of speakers, and so I think that's one of the things that many enjoyed about her.”

But it wasn't just the guest speaker that was a huge success. The event brought in enough money to exceed their fundraising goal of \$50,000, which will go toward helping with the programs and services provided by FTP year-round.

“We're extremely grateful that the community continues to support this event and everything that FTP does,” Tarrant said. “It certainly motivates us as an agency to keep going strong because of the support we receive from the community.”

When it comes down to it, whether it's about helping women to change their circumstances in relationships and their lives, or working to change the position women hold worldwide, it's conversation and awareness that keep pushing the bar. The more

conversation there is, the more opportunity there is to make a difference. That is something that both FTP and International Women's Day both recognize.

?The sky is the limit,? Page said. ?Women can do whatever they want; they shouldn't be held back. Male-dominated fields should not be dominated.?