

Vigil held in Bolton Friday to reflect on violence against women

By Bill Rea

Friday marked the 24th anniversary of what is known as the Montreal Massacre.

It was the day when gunman Marc Lépine walked through the halls of École Polytechnique, singling out women to shoot and killing 14 of them before taking his own life.

About 20 people gathered at the Albion-Bolton branch of Caledon Public Library late Friday afternoon to mark the anniversary.

Norah Kennedy, executive Director of Family Transition Place, commented that National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women was established in 1991 to commemorate what happened to the 14 women two years before.

“They died because they were women,” she said.

Kennedy added marking the day offers a chance to reflect on violence against women, and to think of women and girls for whom violence is a daily reality. Remembering what happened 24 years ago serves as a reminder of what came from what went on in Montreal and leads into the concept that violence against women is senseless and must end.

“There is a journey ahead,” Kennedy said.

She added what happened 24 years ago was a tragedy, but even worse, she said it didn't engage the public outrage to the point that such violence was wiped out.

As well, Kennedy said such violence represents major costs, in such terms as health care, social services, lost productivity at work, demands on the justice system, etc.

Kennedy also quoted from former American secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton that “human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights,” commenting she was bothered that such a statement had to be made at all.

She said women have been stripped of their rights all over the world, even probably in Caledon.

“As long as women are being harmed and killed, we will need to come together to remember them; to honour them,” she said.

Tony Maxwell spoke on behalf of the Headwaters White Ribbon Campaign, which involves a group of men who have joined together to raise awareness of the cause.

“We believe it's not a women's issue, he said, adding it's broader and others, including men, have to deal with it. “The silent majority of men cannot remain silent any longer.”

He said more than 125 men in Dufferin-Caledon have taken a pledge not to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison observed this is a complex problem, requiring a comprehensive approach. She acknowledged that Caledon is a safe community, but cautioned against people thinking the town is immune to such problems.

“If they think that, they're wrong,” she remarked. “We do have a problem.”

Morrison stressed the need to address things like strategies to eliminate poverty among women, adding there are women who need the tools to get themselves out of violent situations. She added one of the reasons she's able to do her job is she has a secure home where she feels safe.

Kelly Potter of Caledon Public Library, reflected on the opportunities she has had that the 14 women in Montreal did not get, and that they did not get to grow beyond where they were that day. She added this was not just one mad act, because the violence continues.

“We need to be shocked to the point of action,” she said.



Alessandra Napoli and Kate Moura of Moura Music Studio provided the music at Friday's vigil at the library in Bolton. Photo by Bill Rea