

Bancroft's women march in unity



By Chris Houston

On Sept. 19, Maggie's Resource Centre of North Hastings hosted the annual Take Back the Night event in Bancroft's Millennium Park. The evening event was organized to empower and unite women. Over 60 attendees gathered at the event, which featured ceremony, crafts, live music, speakers, and a candle-lit march. During the event, Noreen Tinney spoke to Bancroft This Week about murdered and missing Indigenous women. The number of women missing and murdered is "a huge problem and has been swept under the rug for years," said Tinney. Tinney is an Elder of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation. She is also a vocalist and drummer and was one of four performers of Shawashkong Ikwe Singers who opened the event. Tinney walked around the park during a Smudging Ceremony before singers began. She said that the singers were proud, as a women's group, to be supporting other women, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Tinney also highlighted how risks to women are exacerbated in rural and remote locations, where they are isolated and less likely to receive help. "Human trafficking is huge, and happening here," she warned. Statistic Canada notes that most human trafficking is done for sexual exploitation with the majority of the victims being women and girls. The Native Women's Association of Canada, wrote in 2018 that, "Canada's colonial legacy has forced Indigenous women and girls into dangerous and precarious social and economic conditions, which in turn has made them more vulnerable to different kinds of violence." Newmarket-based non-profit organization Bridge North reports that human traffickers tend to use social media to groom young women and girls. They manipulatively form relationships, manipulate them and coerce them into sexual exploitation. Speakers at the Sept. 19 event included Andra Kaufffeldt, the general manager of the Town of Bancroft. Kaufffeldt highlighted the important work that women do in rural communities as, "mothers, teachers, caregivers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders." She also noted that "women in Canada hold only about a third of management and senior management positions." "The numbers are even more disproportionate when we look at Indigenous women, who make up only one per cent of senior leadership positions," Kaufffeldt said. She noted that 18 per cent of mayors are women, 28 per cent of municipal councillors are women and that the "lack of representation means that policies, programs, and plans often fail to consider the true impacts of delusion on women and their communities." Kaufffeldt spoke of the importance of the Take Back the Night event. She described Maggie's as an "incredible organization," that provided "vital services to women who have been victimised by violence." Kaufffeldt noted that Maggie's, "fills the gaps left by purely government-led initiatives" noting that the organization provides shelter, service referrals and 24-hour support to women. Maggie's executive director Kimberly McMunn spoke of the organization's feminist, anti-racist and anti-oppression principles. She said that the organization exists to support, advocate, and empower all women. She credited outgoing president Cheryl Easton for hiring new staff and bringing in new board members. Bancroft's The Revelins performed some classic rock on stage before the march. One poster under the stage read "Yes is Yes. Everything else is No." Other posters encouraged people to "Stand Up, Speak Out" and to "Empower Others!!" To the side of the park activities included rock

painting. After the music and speeches, marchers gathered at the Turtle Mosaic near the park's band shell. People stood in a circle while the Shawashkong Singers sang to ready everyone for the walk. The crowd walked through the park holding candles and lit them as they crossed the metal bridge over the York River. People gathered in a circle and lit their candles. The march was led by Melissa St. Pierre, the administration manager of Maggie's. St. Pierre told Bancroft This Week that the need for Maggie's services is rising. The resource centre recently received funding to expand premises. The Shawashkong Ikwe Singers closed the event with the Travellers song. The 24-hour support telephone number for Maggie's Resource Centre is 613 332 3010. In Ontario, there is a provincial crisis line that can be reached by phoning 211.