

# Prom project available to all students

By Carla Antonio

For decades upon decades, prom night has been considered the single most important night of a teenager's life.

The Learning Foundation of the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board is doing everything in its power to ensure that not one student will have to miss out on their prom or graduation through their charitable initiative, the Prom Project.

"Prom project is open to all students in Hastings and Prince Edward County," said Meribeth deSnoo, executive director at the foundation.

"Students are able to attend and choose gently-used formal wear at no cost to them."

The initiative calls on the community for dresses and formal wear donations; however, it is through the teamwork of a number of groups that ties the whole project together.

"It's an incredible event that is supported by a number of businesses and community organizations," said deSnoo.

Donations begin in the last week of February at drop-off locations, which are found in Belleville at the Quinte Mall, and North Town and Parsons cleaners, who are cleaning all formal wear prior being sent out to each school as they host their own Prom Project events.

The initiative aspires to cover all parts of prom night.

The Beauty Boutique at Shoppers Drug Mart provides free makeup applications. Bentley's provides clutches. Lafferty's is providing shirts and ties. Stitch It is offering free alterations. Even the cost of a ticket can be covered for those students in need through Kiwanis club of Belleville and the Belleville Rotary Club, who have made cash donations specifically for the prom project.

"We know if students are coming in and they're needing support with clothing to go to prom, they're not going to be able to afford the ticket," said deSnoo.

The Quinte Mall has been on board since the project's second year when they noticed the advertisements for Prom Project and felt that they could be an immense help.

"We noticed that one of our own retailers, the Shoppers Drug Mart Beauty Boutique, so I reached out to them," said Martha Farrell, marketing director of the Quinte Mall.

"I just think it's such a great initiative to



Photo by Carla Antonio

**Martha Farrell, Marketing Director at the Quinte Mall pulls a rack of lightly worn formal wear that has been donated in honour of the Prom Project. The initiative provides formal attire to students in need for their formal events such as prom or graduation.**

be able to use the mall and use the space here and some of our retailers support to help make prom and graduation accessible to kids that just otherwise couldn't make it happen."

Although, despite the extensive efforts of everyone involved, sometimes it is still not enough to help everyone in need.

"Last year we didn't have nearly as much in the way of formal wear come in

so it was rather distressing for us at the school level when the events took place because we knew that we weren't sending out the number of items that we had in previous years," she said.

"We tried to address through our student emergency fund and Belinda from Dresses and Dreams was so incredible because she was able to help a number of students with items as well."

## Toronto broadcaster got humble beginnings at Loyalist

By Moush Sara John

The stately blue pine house with a distinct path between mounds of white on either side, lies on the edge of Lake Simcoe, and looks out onto a tranquil mass of white freezing in the snow.

It is as tranquil inside, when I meet Erin Davis, one of the most renowned media personalities of the Toronto landscape, a successful radio-broadcaster, and a graduate of the radio-broadcasting program at Loyalist College.

Each year, March 8 is celebrated as International Women's Day (IWD) across the globe, an opportunity to honour the achievements of women who have trail blazed their paths. It is easy to see how Davis has carved a similar trail for herself.

Since a very young age, Davis had believed nothing was impossible or off limits.

"As one of four daughters, there were no double standards: it wasn't as though the boys had later curfews or got different responsibilities. Therefore, it never occurred to me that some things would be

impossible for me to attempt or succeed at. I was lucky and grateful."

But success did not come easy. There were challenges, especially in the form of male hosts and managers.

"Mostly, early on from the standpoint of male hosts and managers. I was never going to be the laughing, adoring, 'you're so wonderful!' co-host that so many women were expected to be. My strength was news and observation. Thankfully, I didn't have to give up my principles in order to eventually succeed.

"Success came early in terms of being in a radio team on a number-one station; long-time co-host Don Daynard (1988-99) and I shared incredible rating victories. Today, Mike Cooper (2004-present) and I enjoy a generous share of the Toronto morning radio audience but we are always, always striving for more."

Davis was the first female co-host at many stations. In 1984, in the entire Detroit market, the fifth largest at the time in North American radio, there had never been a male-female team.

"Later that year, I moved to Toronto

and a series of male co-hosts on the now-defunct all-news station CKO Toronto. Then in 1988, I moved to CHFI. That's where I was welcomed to the morning show, where I eventually obtained co-host status. In 2005 my name came first in the show's billing; a small but significant move."

Loyalist College played a vital role in Davis' career and gave her the flexibility to work at local Belleville radio stations while pursuing the radio-broadcasting program there.

"Having a college in close proximity to, and with a good relationship with a real broadcasting company was a tremendous gift. Also the program's director, Bryan Olney, was the person I heard speaking at a local high school's Careers Day. His enthusiasm hit me like a lightning bolt: I suddenly knew – late in my final year of high school – that radio was what I had to do. Thank goodness he allowed an audition and shoehorned me into the program. I'll always owe Bryan a debt of gratitude."

And even to this day, Davis is firmly

enconced with the Loyalist community through the Erin Davis – Women in Media bursary, a fund she established in 2008 to "not only to show my gratitude to Loyalist for such a solid start in the industry I love, but to provide even a small advantage to a woman starting out. It is, after all, still very much a male-dominated industry."

Davis has been active in women's health issues, particularly in raising money for breast cancer treatment and stopping violence against women. But she hopes her work reaches beyond that.

"My work is hopefully for the better of all, and not just for women. When women are educated, the entire community benefits. That's why I'm such a proponent of Plan Canada's "Because I am a Girl" program. It brings attention to how much better each community can be if only girls are allowed to learn, to leave and to return to help their own people.

"In a small way, I guess that illustrates to me what the Loyalist bursary is about. But on a much larger scale, it's why we have to put aside our cynicism and

help young women in developing countries, and in poorer parts of our own, to better themselves. We all benefit when a girl gets an education."

In admiration for Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate, Davis thinks she is "the perfect example of a young woman speaking out in favour of something as basic as a right as education, and nearly losing her life for doing so. What kind of world are we living in, where this is all right?"

As a strong advocate for women, Davis believes although a lot has been done, it's a long way ahead still.

"A feminist is simply someone who supports women's equality – in life, in pay, in opportunities. It's what you are if you hope your daughter has a chance to succeed to the same degree that your son does. It's just hoping for equality. What on earth could be wrong with that? And why is 'feminist' still such an 'f' word – even to today's young women?"

For more photos and a video on International Women's Day, go to page 5.

## Local performers show off their talent at Legion event

By Dillan Cools

Country music fans were treated to a great night of local talent at the February instalment of the Belleville Legion Country Jamboree and Open Mic this past Saturday in Belleville.

"We like to bring local talent from the area or the surrounding areas to the Legion. It's like a rising star, that is the way you would look at it, like a rising star in our community," said Rita Harpell, performer and organizer of the event.

"We try and help promote them so they can move on to maybe bigger and better jamborees," added Harpell.

The idea to host an indoor jamboree at the legion started with Harpell and her husband John, who wanted to recreate the experience they enjoy so much at outdoor jamborees during the summer.

"When there is absolutely nothing to do outside, come inside and enjoy the same kind of music we would get in the summer time when you're camping with your trailer," said Harpell.

She was not only the organizer of the event but also kicked off the show with her band The Harpells where she plays guitar and sings alongside her husband, on drums, and her son Brad, on guitar.

Their rendition of Don Williams classic love song *You're My Best Friend* was a massive hit with many couples in the audience who quickly filled the dance floor as the first note was played.

Second on the bill as a special guest was Harpell's longtime friend and former bandmate Julie Simpson.

"I help out at the events sometimes here and she just said, 'Hey, you know, you haven't done a show with us so you need to come down.' She gave me the date and I put a little show together and came out and sang," said Simpson.

Accompanying Simpson as well as everyone per-

forming throughout the night was an ensemble of distinguished country musicians including Steve Piticco, Chester Mccann, Dan Washburn and Brad McCumber.

"It's been fantastic. The pickers here are just amazing like Steve Piticco himself ... He's world renowned and he just donates his time," said Simpson.

"He's Canada's No. 1 guitar player. He has played with Dolly Parton, Merle Haggard, all the Nashville stars. We've brought his group in called South Mountain, a fantastic band. It's like being in Nashville all over again," added Harpell.

Following Simpson's performance was an open mic in which many local musicians took advantage of taking turns getting on stage to perform a few of their favourite country classics.

"The open mic part is for people who might be a little intimidated and ... maybe less professional in their eyes, so they will come up and they might make little mistakes here or there but they sang in front of some people and made their day," said Harpell.

The open mic also included performances from some more notable personalities from the area such as Stompin' Jon Finlan, well known for his Stompin' Tom Connors tribute and Lorraine Marie whose notoriety is growing as "the Patsy Cline girl."

"I've been doing this singing since I was eight and I am 88, so do your arithmetic," said Jack Foster, a former sergeant of detectives in Toronto and longtime police chief in Stirling.

Foster stole the show during a pre-performance speech in which he paid his respects to John Harpell, the man who saved his life.

On July 17 last year, one day after finishing his St. John Ambulance course, Harpell gave Foster the Heimlich manoeuvre in the bathroom of a lo-



Photo by Dillan Cools

**Marilyn Mann and Jone Marvin dance while Steve Piticco plays the guitar at the Belleville Legion Country Jamboree in Belleville last Saturday night.**

cal restaurant and ultimately saved his life. The two went on to perform the last song of the open mic.

Foster also attended with the hopes of enquiring about the Hasty P's, a local regiment that his brother had belonged to during the Second World War and during the time of his death in Italy on Dec. 14, 1944.

The monthly jamboree takes place on the fourth Saturday night of every month, beginning after the

Thanksgiving weekend in October and running ending in April.

"We stop because once May arrives, it's May 2-4 and everyone starts their camping and starts their jamboree season," said Harpell.

"The more you build it, the more you advertise it, the bigger it grows, so we're finding tonight is actually a really good crowd. We're enjoying that."