



Women's House *Serving Bruce & Grey*

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International Women's Day Celebration held in partnership with Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey and Business to Bruce was to a success!

Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey partnered with the County of Bruce's Business to Bruce again this year to bring another fun and touching International Woman's Day celebration to the area. We, once again, had a sold out crowd at the March 3rd event, which was held at the Lakeshore Recreation Centre in Port Elgin, and the crowds were thrilled with the food, the speaker and all the activities that were planned throughout the evening.

The event is a celebration, and is also one of the major fundraisers for Women's House. The purchase of a ticket provided guests with some great appetizers and a decadent dessert buffet. From the moment guests walked in the door, the evening was filled with fun and entertainment. During the first part of the evening the din of chatter in the room continued to rise as guests networked, noshed, and made bids at the Silent Auction tables, finally finding their way to their seats.

The formal part of the evening began with introductions and welcoming words, from Business to Bruce, followed by a few words from dignitaries in attendance. Michelle Lamont, of Women's House, welcomed Women's House's Board Chair and Champion Sponsor Society of Energy Professionals', Sarah Beirnes to say a few words, and then the fun and interactive activities began. The Trivia Game is always a favourite, and this year did not disappoint! The Trivia Game questions are a guarded secret; only one person knows the questions, and that's Michelle Lamont. In a surprising turn of events, Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey's Board Chair, Tracy Primeau won the Grand Prize, a \$100 value Amazon Alexa Echo, donated by Bruce Power, so she generously donated the prize back to Women's House, so we could use it for a future fundraiser. The laughter and good times continued as the crowd was entertained, by our Auctioneer, Pat O'Connor, as they generously bid for 2 Live Auction items, donated by The Best You, with locations in both Kincardine and Owen Sound. The Best You also provided a donated gift to everyone in attendance, so everyone walked away with something!

Then Women's House moved onto awarding the annual Woman of Distinction and Young Woman of Distinction Awards to some very deserving recipients. We were honoured to have 6 nominations in our Woman of Distinction award category and 2 in our Young Woman of Distinction award category. Our nominees for the Woman of Distinction award were: Alana Murray, Anna Morrison, Colleen Trask-Seaman, Kathy Fraser, Amy Bross and Ruth Montgomery. And the nominees for the Young Woman of Distinction award were Eden Babbitt and Morgan Ritchie. It was a very difficult decision because all of these women contributed so much to our community, not only supporting women and young people, but focusing on improving the environment, education, supporting those less privileged and advocating for social justice, and recognizing and supporting our community's needs with kindness and compassion.

Ruth Montgomery was awarded with our 2020 Woman of Distinction award. Ruth believes that "we have never been so connected, but yet we have never felt so isolated and alone at the same time." So, she works to make connections and bring women together, to support, coach and mentor women, and she has been inspirational to many along the way. She is an entrepreneur who makes social enterprise a priority, who leads women in many areas, including camp-based retreats at Camp Maven. Through her Maven Project, she has given women a voice, an opportunity for personal development and is changing lives for the better. Her nominator, Kirby Proper, says she "creates a safe space for those around her to get real and get vulnerable, and is a true inspiration", and we, at Women's House could not agree more.

Our Young Woman of Distinction award winner's nominator, Margaret Visser, says that our winner is a "talented young woman that shines in everything she does". She is very musical, and an accomplished singer and dancer in her own right, but also as a teacher of both music and dance. She sets the bar high by leading and representing our young community as an Ambassador of the Fair and Vice-President on school council, and uses her positions to advocate, support and educate others, and to be the voice for those less fortunate, to make the community and the world a better place. Our 2020 Young Woman of Distinction award was awarded to **Morgan Ritchie**

Every year, we give out 2 AWARDS: our Woman and our Young Woman of Distinction award, but this year we were struck with a nomination that made us re-think our criteria and humbled us beyond words. This nomination did not meet one part of our criteria, yet she deserved to be a Woman of Distinction award winner. So, we created this one-time award, the Inspiring Woman of Distinction, for this year only, for a once-in-a-lifetime kind of person who inspired so many in her short life.

The nominator of this woman, Tami MacDonald described the winner of our Inspiring Woman of Distinction award:“with her beautiful smile, natural charisma, and unlimited positive energy, she knew that she could be the catalyst for others to become stronger, healthier, and more confident”. She empowered others to do better, to be better, to enjoy life. Her goal was to inspire others to be strong, to live life to the fullest every day, to follow their passion, and recognize their inner strength. She knew that if you have the courage take risks, commit to a new goal (even if it pushes you beyond your comfort zone), and stay focused, ANYTHING is possible. Through her business, and her presence and following on social media, she supported such issues as mental health/anxiety, fairness and equality, violence against women, and community support services, such as recycling, finding missing persons, animal shelters/adoption, preservation, and conservation ... she posted inspirational things, like ***“I don’t know who needs to hear this... but this planet needs you to give a damn”. “Aspire to be a giver of inspiration, a giver of hope, a giver of light, and a giver of love”. “You can and you will, because you’re a badass like that”. “It’s okay to be a badass as long as you’re going in the right direction”***..... She was definitely going in the right direction. But, unfortunately in August of 2019 there was a tragic accident, and Amy Bross’ life on this earth came to an end. That’s a little over 6 months ago. But Amy Bross’ memory and her message lives on through her family, friends and all the lives she touched.

She could not be at our International Women's Day event to accept the award, and so we couldn't give her the award, based on the criteria we had outlined for the award. So, we, at Women's House, chose to create this one-time award to award posthumously to her family, and her aunt, Tami MacDonald, also her nominator, came up to the podium, with hardly a dry eye in the audience, to accept this award on behalf of Amy and her family.

Our strong, determined keynote speaker, Jamie MacMillan, shared her story, earning admiration from the audience. She spoke about her struggles as a student, as a woman, and in her eventual career choice, as an ironworker, a very non-traditional career choice for a woman. She had lots of advice and a positive and encouraging message, lining up with a her mission: *Engage, Educate and Encourage* that can be seen repeated on her website, KickAssCareers.org. As she works to encourage, mentor and guide young women into careers in skilled trades and technology, her message also included a focus on creating inclusive and respectful work environments for everyone in the workplace regardless of differences. She advocates for both men and women to work towards creating this positive environment through her Workplace Equality Awareness Ribbon campaign. She travels all over North America inspiring young women to consider non-traditional career choices, has the support of many corporations in the skilled trade and technology industry, and also inspired many in the audience.

In the end, our fundraising efforts at the event were very successful, as we auctioned off the 2 Live Auction packages and 35 Silent Auction items, and held a Trivia Game, earning a total of a little over \$2600. The whole evening was an opportunity to celebrate how far the rights of women have come and to also the chance to support a worthy cause in our community. Women's House was fortunate enough to have some wonderful donations from community businesses towards the Silent and Live Auction items, and has also had some very generous sponsorship support from local businesses and corporations:

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During the evening's events, Business to Bruce announced that they will be offering the proceeds from the event ticket sales to Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey. We are so thankful, not only for their partnership in this event, but also their gracious offer, and will look forward to sharing the details with our supporters as we move into our new fiscal year in April. "Our union in producing this event together with Business to Bruce is the epitome of this year's theme #eachforequal. "It's been a pleasure working together with Business to Bruce to plan this evening", said Michelle Lamont, Community and Fund Development Coordinator for Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey. Together Women's House and Business to Bruce have a balance of unique qualities, connections and focuses that compliment each other, AND similarities in programs in services that help women to have better lives and give them the tools to fulfill their dreams.

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