

Men honoured for making a difference for women

by **Nathan Howes**
Special to the Beaver

Twenty Halton men who have stepped forward to stand against inequality and violence for women, were recognized Wednesday for making a difference.

The Women's Centre honoured the men for being caring and compassionate role models in the community, at its inaugural Men Who Make a Difference Gala.

While 20 nominees were applauded for their efforts, six received awards — Dan Blackburn, Ron Couchman, Angus Coll-Smith, Oakville MPP and Minister of Labour Kevin Flynn, Scott Graham and Judah Hernandez.

The ceremony, which took place at the Oakville Conference and Banquet Centre, was preceded by a keynote address from Dr. Michael Kaufman — international activist and co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign.

The campaign, begun in 1991, is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women and girls through promotion of gender equity, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity.

"It's fantastic these men have been nominated in recognition of their contribution to the community. They are men who are making a difference in promoting equality between women and men and ending men's violence against women," said Kaufman.

Making a difference first requires equal opportunities for men and women in work, education and sports, among others, Kaufman said.

"If we're going to fight for basic human rights, one of those is equality. There is no but when it comes to equality," said Kaufman.

The reason more men are taking a stand, Kaufman said, is because of the "inspiration



The Women's Centre's inaugural Men Who Make a Difference Award Gala recognized Halton men in the community who are making an impact. Melvina Walter, centre, Women's Centre executive director, the evening's keynote speaker Dr. Michael Kaufman (third from right), and the award winners, from left, Scott Graham, Angus Coll-Smith, Judah Hernandez, Dan Blackburn, Minister of Labour and Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn and Ron Couchman.

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of women around us, but also because of the challenge."

"It's critical that women's voices have challenged men's power. Inequality is still with us. If there aren't strong voices challenging the inequality, change will never happen," said Kaufman. "But finally, men are saying, 'We are going to be at your side. You should not be doing this work alone.'"

The White Ribbon Campaign co-founder said violence towards women escalated in the past because of the lack of men speaking out against it.

"If we men remain silent, it really gives tacit permission. It's really important that good men speak out. If we see our friends talking in abusive ways towards women, acting in abusive ways, it's really important we speak

out," said Kaufman.

But now more men are stepping forward to speak out against abuse, he said, noting the efforts of the local 20 nominees as examples.

"It used to be that most men who might be appalled by violence against women just felt it was a private matter, maybe it wasn't any of their business or what would the other guys say if I say anything about that joke or comment?" he said.

Over the last 20 years, an increase in awareness and action to end women's violence has led to more men supporting gender equality, Kaufman said.

There are several things people can do to stop the negative attitudes towards and treatment of women, he said, adding it starts with how children are raised.

"We have to think about what we say to our children in terms of the values we teach them. If you're in a household with a mother and father, we have to model equality and share all the jobs," said Kaufman. "We can't say that some jobs are not a man's job or a woman's job."

A key to raising children without violence is to avoid using "corporal punishment," the activist said, explaining it's ineffective and teaches it's OK to hurt someone you love.

"We've got to examine how we raise our children and get rid of things," said Kaufman, noting that means not allowing and speaking up against inappropriate jokes, attitudes and behaviour.

"Change the subject or if you feel you're able to, just say, 'That doesn't go here. I don't find that funny.'"

As much as "we've come a long way" in ending inequality and violence against women, he said, "we still have a long ways to go."

Since its inception, the White Ribbon Campaign has spread to 80 countries.

Kaufman credits the spread in awareness to Canadians and women's organizations "inspiring people globally to take up the issue."

"White Ribbon is making a contribution, but the real accolades have to go to the women's organizations. The Women's Centre should have the appreciation of everyone in this community," said Kaufman. "Men can play a really important role in ending the violence and bringing a much healthier, happier, safer community for everyone."

Other nominees included Halton Regional Police Const. Leslie Baylis, Todd and Trent Courage, Murray Etherington, David Foster, Chris Giles, David Haslett, John Howlett, Brad Kerr, Tom Ormerod, Don Pangman, Oakville Chamber of Commerce President John Sawyer, Ron Shantz and Peter Wilson.

For more information, visit www.haltonwomenscentre.org.

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