

Antigonish celebrates women

by Corey LeBlanc
coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca

Unforgettable – a word heard repeatedly to describe the success of Journeys to Justice – International Women's Week 2013 in Antigonish.

"It was incredible. We are so delighted with how everything went," Annie Chau, who coordinates a project called Preventing Violence against Women at StFX and one of the organizers of the initiative, told the *Casket* Monday morning.

The weeklong celebration, highlighted by International Women's Day (March 8), was a collaborative effort of the AWRC and other community organizations.

The celebration explored the Journeys to Justice theme, which included stories of women's journeys, along with various speakers and events geared towards issues related to women's rights.

Chau described the turnout for each event as "inspiring," noting organizers were unsure of how attendance numbers would turn out.

Illustrating the high level of support, it was standing room only for two performances of *Vagina Monologues* at the Split Crow, while the Women's Day Breakfast at the Prissy Pig Café and Deli March 8 was a full house.

Describing the week as "moving and inspiring," Chau said the events provided a tremendous opportunity for the sharing of ideas and viewpoints.

She suggested each event "built on one another" as the week continued.

"There was a nice flow – a great learning experience – and it was a lot of fun, too," Chau said.

"It put a smile on our faces to see the level of participation and how people were engaged," she added.

Other events included a "lunch and learn" on Women in the Academy, which took place at StFX.



Juliana Julian of Paqtnkek First Nation was one of the guest speakers during the Women's Day Breakfast March 8 at Prissy Pig Café and Deli, which was held as part of Journeys to Justice – International Women's Week 2013 celebrations. (Corey LeBlanc photo)

The screening of *Black Mother, Black Daughter*, which explores the lives and experiences of African Nova Scotian women, including the strengths they pass along to their daughters, also featured a post-viewing presentation by Antigonish's Lorraine Reddick and her daughter, Tara.

International Women's Week 2013 events kicked-off March 4 with a keynote address from Jessica Danforth, founder and executive director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, who spoke about reproductive justice.

"It was an unbelievable week," Chau said.

She noted participation from the StFX and broader Antigonish communities was incredible.

"We are so thankful to everyone who not only organized the week, but also those who participated or attended events. Everyone made it so special," she added.

Chau noted the week also in-

en's Day (March 8), organizers added a new event – a women's day breakfast, a celebration that brought together a cross-section of women from Antigonish.

"You do so much to create the community in which we live," Lucille Harper, AWRC executive director, said to the breakfast participants as she took the podium at the gathering.

It was a full house at the local eatery, with the breakfast not only featuring food and friendship, but also the words of leaders Juliana Julian, Irene MacLeod and Jenn Laudadio.

"They pour themselves into making this place a better place to live."

Jenn Laudadio

Harper described the trio as "women who don't take 'no' for an answer."

Julian, from Paqtnkek First Nation, spoke about the evolution of Antigonish town and county embracing "my people and my community."

"There is still a lot of work to do, but we have made tremen-

dous progress," she noted.

Julian said her community has and will continue to build many great relationships.

MacLeod said she was raised to understand "we all have a voice," describing Antigonish as a "community of possibilities." "There is a lot of choice available to you," she noted.

She also talked about the incredible level of community engagement in Antigonish.

In keeping with that theme, Laudadio reflected on the "sense of community and caring" she has found since making Antigonish her home, while learning more and more a "real sense of the interconnectedness."

She noted the many inspiring women who have made Antigonish so special.

"They pour themselves into making this place a better place to live," Laudadio said.

The women's breakfast was dedicated to Pat Skinner, a longtime community activist and women's leader, who died Feb. 15 in a car crash.

Harper remembered Skinner for her "caring, sharing and nurturing work."

"She was a matriarch extraordinaire," she noted of Skinner.

With files from Rachel Psutka



It was a full house March 8 for the Women's Day Breakfast at the Prissy Pig Café and Deli in Antigonish. The celebration was one of the highlights of a successful International Women's Week 2013. (Corey LeBlanc photos)