

Concordia opens its doors to Mohawk voices

STEVE BONSPIEL
THE EASTERN DOOR

Concordia's First Voices Week is meant to highlight Native people and our issues for a wider audience of students, and the unique ways in which we deal with all of them.

This past week I was lucky enough to participate in two events – one was a panel with Tewatohni'saktha CEO Kyle Delisle and Mohawk Bridge Consortium's Amy Rice.

We talked about some of the issues we have here in Kahnawake, in terms of expanding our entrepreneur base and make our people more successful.

It's not an easy issue to address, as no one seems to have the answer that would make Kahnawake more prosperous overnight.

Our industry right now is tobacco and it is in decline, but according to Delisle, there's something we need to focus on, and that's technology.

"Whatever happens in Montreal impacts Kahnawake," said Delisle. "It goes globally all the way down to the local level. The biggest issues we're facing right now is all the disruption that's going to be happening in the economy – from the types of businesses that are starting, and automation and the impacts that's going to have on the workforce," he said, mentioning specifically driverless



COURTESY ONAWA JACOBS

Steve Bonspiel, Kyle Delisle and Amy Rice discussed the modern realities of entrepreneurship in Onkwehón:we communities such as Kahnawake at Concordia University on Monday.

cars and the trickle down effect of losing or shifting those human jobs.

Like it or not, the takeaway always is from him, Kahnawake is in this with the city, the province, the country and the world.

Delisle has given a presentation numerous times that touches on the issues of economic development and education, and offers some deep insight on how things are and where they need to be.

Rice talked about the difficulties of running a business she

inherited from her late father Wayne.

"It's constantly having to remind them of jurisdiction," Rice said of outside governments who deal with MBC. "For us, this is our territory so we work on the bridge and nobody else. It's Kahnawake first, and that's something we're always trying to push.

"It's our community. Respect the agreements and what's been created."

My message was simple: most people my age in the com-

munity have a similar story. Little to no post-secondary education, but chasing a dream and make a living takes more than just being educated – although I encouraged the students to at minimum complete a bachelor's degree.

The next night, Tuesday at the CJ building on the Loyola campus not far from here, I was chosen to give a lecture to first-year journalism students.

I wanted to give a good overview of Kahnawake and Native issues and I pulled few punches,

jumping into residential schools being one of the reasons our language is in peril.

I told them the education system has to change and until it does ignorance and racism will continue, however I put the onus on them and said they have to learn the true history of this country, a history they share with our people.

Also, I said it was up to them to broaden their perspectives on Native issues and come to Kahnawake to visit; for coffee, to eat, to play poker – whatever it takes for them to debunk archaic stereotypes.

These students are the future and we WILL eventually have to deal with them in some form or another: as leaders, workers, business owners, or maybe even as mayor.

I dream of a time when people aren't afraid of coming here, of nasty words spewed towards us the exception rather than the rule, of being able to talk about our issues online without being attacked because of pervasive racism in this country.

Concordia is more open and inclusive, and is changing to implement some of the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be better neighbours, ones with a social conscience.

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The women who may help with your labours

JESSICA DEER
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Kánahne Rice found her passion for helping women as a young teenager, after she witnessed the birth of a family member.

"I just fell in love with it. I just thought it was a very beautiful process, part of life," said Rice.

Rice is one of 15 Kanien'kehá:ka doulas-in-training through Konwati'shatstenhsherawi's (Women Empowering Women), a grassroots program started last fall to train community birth helpers.

"My long-term goal is to become a midwife, so I did some research and I found out I could be a doula for right now. It's just going to help me get experience and learn how to work with moms and families," said Rice.

On Wednesday evening, the women held an open house at the Family and Wellness Centre to show the community what kind of non-medical support available during the preparation for birth and throughout the birthing process.

"There's a lot of emotional things that go on when you're growing another human being, to have a doula as a non-judgemental person just to listen and to support and give them that space to share anything that they wish to share," said Jody Jacobs,



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Jody Jacobs (left) and Kánahne Rice are two of the doulas-in-training through the Konwati'shatstenhsherawi's (Women Empowering Women) program.

another doula-in-training.

"You're learning about interpersonal relationships, you're learning about how to be non-judgemental, to learn about how to make connections with people and to help them enjoy their birth, and that's such a sacred time for any mother or father or any family member."

Like Rice, Jacobs found her passion to become a doula after witnessing her first birth.

"It was after I had two of my own children I had witnessed my first birth that I wasn't the mother. I just felt at home, where I was supposed to be. I enjoyed it, I liked helping, I liked assisting, I liked the whole process from beginning to end," said Jacobs.

"I had attended several births as well and it still just felt that's where I was most comfortable, in that setting. Now that my children are older, I have more time to de-

vote to this new passion and path in my life."

The women's training started in October and will conclude in July. Coordinator Lee Scott felt there was a need for the program.

"I took training myself and I saw how amazing it was, and I thought about the community. It just seemed that we could use that and it's something that women did all the time. Women always supported other women, so it's a

way to revitalize it," she said.

The First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre, KSCS, the Kateri Memorial Hospital Centre, as well as Brooklyn Leblanc and Glen Delaronde, sponsored the grassroots community initiative.

Scott said the major difference between regular doula training and Konwati'shatstenhsherawi's is the incorporation of traditional Kanien'kehá:ka teachings. It's something doula-in-training Hayley Delaronde feels in the most important part of the program.

"Everyone is supporting pregnant women in our families, but it's reconnecting us all to our culture and who we are. If we have mothers that our empowered and confident and re-connected with who we are, that's going to their babies," said Delaronde.

"We want to bring back language, we want to bring back culture and our teachings, the importance and roles of women, so it's an empowerment-type course and I think the traditional aspect will bring people more back to who are born to be."

Doula services are already being offered for donation, with free services available as well. Those interested in more information can call 450-638-3433 or kahnawakedoulas@gmail.com.

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