

In Person Candlelight Vigil In Two Harbors Open To Public

By: Katee Rose

January is national human trafficking awareness month and the Lake County Sex Trafficking Task Force (LCSTTF) will be holding an in person candlelight vigil Monday January 9th between 4:30-5:30 pm at the Two Harbors Law Enforcement Center at 613 3rd ave.

The vigil will be taking place inside the law enforcement center on the ground floor and is open to the public. One of the founding members of LCSTTF, an all volunteer 501c3 organization based out of Two Harbors, Marlys Wisch says, "We really are trying to get the public to join us. Not that they would necessarily join the task force, but they would walk away looking at it in a different light and want to look for the signs, the red flags, that may indicate that trafficking is going on. Both sexual and labor, and report it to somebody. Not turning a blind eye. We want the event to be an intimate experience and have the folks in attendance leave having been able to internalize the feeling of yes I want to help prevent this."

There will be handouts with more information on resources in the area, Anne Ferrari will be playing harp during the vigil, Kate Cobbs from NorthShore Horizons will be speaking, as well as Marlys, and the president of Lake County Commissioners Rich Sve will be making a proclamation on behalf of the county about national human trafficking awareness.

The vigil is being held to honor the individuals that have died while in the life, people who have survived and come out of the life, and people who are still "in the life" and haven't been able to get out of it. "We want them to know we have not forgotten them. That we know about them. That we are still doing the work to prevent trafficking and to look for resources for them to be able to get help." says Marlys. Attendees of the vigil will find a calming and peaceful atmosphere that is both empowering and uplifting.

This is an opportunity that welcomes thoughts, prayers, strength, and resources. "We haven't been able to really do anything for almost 3 years now because of covid, and I want people to know we have not gone away, that we are still here and still wanting to educate people to help prevent trafficking," comments Marlys.

Maryls and two other women began their mission back in 2013 to educate citizens of Lake County what sex trafficking is and how to help prevent it. Moving forward in raising awareness through community education, and becoming advocates for victims, they began organizing community presentations, guest speakers, hosting community workshops, candle light vigils, and conferences.

The Lake County Sex Trafficking Task Force works extensively with numerous other organizations, collaborating together on community education and victim resources. There has been a huge growth in regional Restorative Justice programs and the LCSTTF is hoping to team up with these resources in the very near future.

Trafficking is a serious crime that not only hurts the individual and their families, but us as a whole community. The Minnesota Attorney General's Office, for example, states on its website that Minneapolis specifically is "one of the top locations in the U.S. for child sex trafficking," and that trafficking "affects people from all parts of Minnesota". Sadly, the average age of victims is between 9-13 years of age, disproportionately affecting BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), queer and trans youth, and not only include women and girls, but also young boys. Many sex trafficking victims in the US have run away from home or foster homes, or have been thrown out of their homes. Some have aged out of foster care and face unstable housing situations.

Trafficking is a global industry that stems from colonialism, power structures, racism and sexism. Statistics on child sex trafficking show that this has become a huge industry. Worldwide, the International Labor Organization estimates that trafficking is now a \$150 billion industry. Roughly \$99 million of that is from commercial sex trade, according to an ILO report, while the remaining \$51 billion is from forced labor. This is modern day slavery.

The LCSTTF works closely with several other organizations from the twin cities all the way up to Cook County. "With the education we have done, we have actually had people say to us, 'I understand more about what it is now, and now I watch.' So they are paying attention to see

what red flags are out there. Being more observant about behaviors and actions going on in the community. We feel very good about that. That people have learned something, and are actually thinking about it and trying to prevent it if they can," says Marlys.

The internet is one of the most common places traffickers find and trade their victims. There is constant pushback from advocates urging sites to have heavier surveillance to monitor and put an end to this. If you suspect or have any information concerning victims of trafficking, or may be one yourself, please reach out to one of the many agencies that can provide safety and aid. Do not let this abuse continue.

Lake County Sex Trafficking Task Force does not provide direct services, but will connect individuals with resources, including: North Shore Horizons, Pavs (Program to aid victims of sexual assault), Safe Haven, Life House, Violence Prevention Center, Breaking Free based in St Paul, Day One, Minnesota Indian Womens Resource Center, Minnesota Coalition against Sexual Assault, American Indian Community Housing Organization, and The Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse.

There is a national HOTLINE 24/7 to CALL: 1-888-373-7888 or TEXT 233733

All of these organizations provide a vital role in advocating for healthy individuals and healthy communities in this area.

Visit the Lake County Anti Sex Trafficking

Task Force website at <https://www.lcsextrafficking.com/>. If you would like to donate to this incredible group doing important community education, you can find an option to print a PDF form at the bottom of the website. Simply print this form and send it in with a check made out to the Lake County Sex Trafficking Task Force to the address provided on site. With every donation you will receive a receipt and a wonderful thank you letter. The website also has a wealth of resources listed. Not only directories to services, but lists of books, movies, documentaries, informational posters to download, websites and upcoming webinars.

Marlys is grateful to report that people have been able to find the task force and reach out to receive support though both the posters and the website. There is also a Facebook group with information. If you are interested in learning more about the task force or would like to join, please email LCSTTF.info@gmail.com or Call Maryls at (218) 834-5988

Local contacts for resources:

NORTH SHORE HORIZONS-Two Harbors, Lake County (218) 834-5924

PAVSA (Program to Aid Victims of Sexual Assault), Duluth, MN (218) 726-1931

VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTER Grand Marais, Cook County (218) 387-1237

The Long Way Home

By Steve Fernlund

On New Year's Day, folks like to review "the best of..." from the previous year. The best movies, the best books, the best concerts, and the best sports highlights. Boring. I barely remember what I had for breakfast on any given day, so remembering something from the last 12 months is a problem.



The older I get, the more often I wallow in nostalgia for the good old days. In my case, that would be the decade known as the sixties-the boomer years. When I'm lucky, I find a like-minded 60-something to wallow in the nostalgia swamp with me.

Facebook is great for that. I follow pages that present nostalgic photos and memories of Edina, Bloomington, and Richfield where I was born and raised. Those three cities were literally brand new in the 1950s.

Pictures of Eddie Websters in Bloomington, the Mann France Avenue Drive-In theater in Edina, The Smorgasbord restaurant in Richfield, and the Southdale Mall which centered it all, remind me of the places where I had personal experiences. That's the thing about nostalgia, it is about being sentimental about a period or place with happy personal associations. The good old days.

I don't get too nostalgic about the 1940s. Not only was the world recovering from a long-term economic depression, but it was fresh out of the Second World War. And I wasn't born yet so, no personal associations.

For the nostalgic among us, there are historical societies in almost every community to remind us of the past. There is even a magazine called "The Good Old Days," a bi-monthly publication that claims to be "The Magazine That Remembers the Best."

We like to think that life was somehow better in the past. Everyone was better behaved. Politicians were honest brokers working for the people. A dollar was worth something. And electricity was penny cheap. Our memories of course aren't really accurate.

Franklin P. Adams, a newspaper columnist of some renown almost 100 years ago, pointed out, "Nothing is more responsible for the good old days than a bad memory."

I once thought my memories of the period of my nostalgia were dead accurate. My sister, a few years older and the true keeper of memories as I've come to realize, always seems to have a different recollection of events and people than I do. My weakening self-esteem leads me to accept her memories as the truth. At least I let her think so.

Another American Journalist from the time before my good old days wrote, "Nostalgia is a file that removes the rough edges from the good old days."

That may be a good thing, but we should not forget that rough edges did exist.

When I was growing up, a woman could not have credit in her own name. Women were deterred from having a career of their own, except teaching or nursing. Catholics and Lutherans were discouraged from intermarrying. Abortions happened, way before Roe vs. Wade was decided. Redlining kept black people from moving into certain neighborhoods. One scandal in my neighborhood was when a mixed-race couple moved in a block away. We kids didn't know why that was a problem, but for the "adults" it seemed to be so.

As history seems to be repeating itself in the Russian attempt to destroy the infrastructure and people of Ukraine, it seems more important than ever that we all learn about the past. Not with nostalgia, but with a clear-eyed vision to see the rough edges of the good old days and the action necessary to keep them from happening again.

Steve Fernlund is a retired business owner, living in Cook County. He was publisher and editor of the Cook County News Herald in the 90's. Got a good Cook County story for him? Let us know. Call 218-226-3335 or Email: steve.fernlund@gmail.com