

'Big goal' set for Talk on the Walk

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A few small steps around the Essar Centre concourse could add up to big change in Sault Ste. Marie.

Centre for Social Justice and Good Works invites residents to attend its first Talk on the Walk at the downtown arena Aug. 18 from 6 to 9 p.m.

Ideas will be sought to help the city in five areas – entrepreneurship, youth, community mobilization, employment and community safety.

Participants can choose to walk along slowly and chip in ideas on three topics. Ideas will be recorded. Christina Coutu, executive director for Centre for Social Justice and Good Works, plans to release a report of collected ideas by mid-September.

"Sometimes it's hard to sit in a room and put up your hand and share your ideas because it can be intimidating," she told The Sault Star.

So, Coutu borrowed an idea from Steve Jobs, the late Apple co-founder. When he found his staff were stumped on a topic, he'd gather the troops and they'd walk and talk about the issue they faced.

"We're really focusing on trying to gather positive input because we're aware of the circumstances that are in our community and the world today," said Coutu. "We really want to encourage people to start looking on the brighter side and start telling us what they have to offer."

Just who can act on the suggestions offered next week is wide open. The centre has a mandate to do good works, but not exclusive rights on helping out.

"If any of these ideas intrigue anybody, they're free to be taken," said Coutu. "We're just providing an outlet for people to speak."

She anticipates Talk on the Walk will return in later years, with different topics suggested by Sault residents.

"It's really going to be what's affecting our community at that time," said Coutu.

Next week, she wants 100 ideas from 100 people.

"I know it's a big goal," she said. "There's a lot of talent here."

Featured speakers include Rory Ring and Jason Naccarato (Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce), Sonny Spina (NORPRO), Josh Ingram (Downtown Association), Karol Rains (Sault Ste. Marie Career Centre) and Donna Hilsinger (Algoma's Water Tower Inn). Invites have also gone out to municipal, provincial and federal representatives.

"I think it's going to be a great way to get the residents involved and find ways to make our community better," said Spina in an email.

Talk on the Walk falls on the first anniversary of Centre for Social Justice and Good Works opening its doors at the former Sacred Heart Convent on Herrick Street.

The ecumenical organization just wrapped up a four-week recreation program at The Tech. About 25 youngsters, ranging in age from five to 13, attended each week. No fee was charged. Children learned soccer and basketball skills. Most participants came from the downtown area. Several agencies, businesses and private donors donated cash and supplies to the first-time program.

"It seems like once you start talking about some of these projects that we're doing, and how we're creating positive change, people become more interested," said Coutu. "If we all just do a little bit, we really do create big changes."

Centre for Social Justice and Good Works has also mentored five young adults to start businesses. They're sharing their talents as a seamstress, greeting card designer, three-dimensional printer, cleaning properties for landlords and photography.

"It's been a lot this year," said Coutu of the centre's work.