

Out of the depths

COMMUNITY RALLIES TO SAVE TRUCK FROM WATERY GRAVE



Feb. 6, 8:55 p.m.: "We did it!"

BY OLIVIA RICHMAN
NEWS STAFF WRITER

CHARLTON/EAST BROOKFIELD — "We made it halfway across the lake! One thousand feet today with the recovered truck with another 1,000 to go tomorrow and she'll be on shore. The truck doesn't run and frozen iceberg tires don't help the rolling process. It made the job tougher but we will not give up. Back at it tomorrow! Thanks to the helpers today."

That message was posted Feb. 4 at 2:15 p.m. by Cheryl McKissick, Cheryl and her husband, Bruce, of Basic Maintenance Truck Center in Charlton, had taken on the intense project of getting a truck stuck 2,000 feet out in Quaboag Pond, in East Brookfield, stuck under the ice.

Cheryl also made sure to document their intense, weeklong process on Facebook, complete with photos of each step in their attempt to pull the sunken truck to shore.

"This was a job that many other towing companies in the area had turned down."

"I got a call last Saturday. A lot of people were ice fishing. One of the people that had been out there was Gary Seifert, who was participating in the fishing derby," she explained. "He went a little close with his plow truck. We



Feb. 5, 11:45 a.m.

Photos courtesy Cheryl McKissick

were called in to do recovery. Many turned down the job because of the challenge and difficulty of dealing with the ice for various reasons."

Because of the initial hesitance of other companies it was first thought that Seifert had abandoned his truck in the pond. On Saturday night, Jan. 31, officials in East Brookfield had become aware of the sinking truck. Luckily, that is also when Basic Maintenance Truck Center also caught wind of the story.

"There had been 30 trucks at the fishing derby. Many people were out on the water — that's what a fishing derby is," said Cheryl. "He just was out of luck and got too close to the shore and sunk. There have been a variety of public opinions, some negative. But the real story is that Charlton takes care of their own. Everybody has put in a team effort to get this truck out."

At 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, Cheryl and Bruce came out to assess the situation. Gary is not only a Charlton resident, but a family friend. They felt obligated to help in any way possible. The next day they brought in all of their heavy-duty trucks and started a 15-hour day trying to recover the truck from the ice.

"When we first came down here we were just trying to help out," she said. "Nobody is trying to make a buck. We

aren't wondering about getting paid. We just wanted to get his truck out of the pond."

Upon seeing the effort put in by Cheryl and their team — "Team McKissick" as they were called on Facebook by their followers and supporters — many other local towing companies stepped in to help in various ways, donating cables and coming out to help during some days.

"Everybody helped out locally," said Cheryl proudly. "Everyone is pulling together. Everybody is helping out in the area. People gave us motivational words. It's just Charlton helping Charlton."

The process was made even more difficult by multiple snowstorms throughout the week. With snow piling on top of the pond and temperatures in the negatives, Team McKissick continued to show up every day to work on the truck.

"The truck is OUT OF THE HOLE. Now to drag it 2,000 feet across the lake! Wool, wool!" read a post from Cheryl's Facebook on Wednesday, Feb. 4 at 2:15 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 6 was the team's fifth day at Quaboag Pond. With the truck 2,000 feet from shore it would have been dangerous trying any trucks on the pond, with fear they would fall in.

"What we have done is based our truck at the end of Stone Road in East Brookfield," Cheryl explained. "We walked across the lake and attached a cable to the truck. It was a little scary. We had to pack up and pull the cable



Feb. 3: "Cables going out; we got off to a late start today."

back in every day for public safety."

Many people began to follow Cheryl's updates on Facebook closely. With so much at stake it was exciting to see their process. Many Facebook users offered support through comments. Some even asked when more photos would be uploaded, unable to wait to see the process that had been made.

"We are thankful for all of the local towing companies in the area that came together and are getting this done in an unbearable situation," said Cheryl. "That's what it's all about. It was nice to know that we had so much support and people rooting for us. It was great to have a few helping hands. That's the best part of the whole story."

Gary's supporters showed up as well — friends and neighbors made their way to Quaboag Pond despite the unbelievably cold temperatures. Cheryl said that it was negative ten a few nights ago, but supporters and workers were all there until three in the morning with ski masks on.

That night there was only 250 feet left.

On Feb. 6, at 6:55 p.m., Cheryl posted, "We did it!" to Facebook. The truck had been successfully removed from the frozen lake. She uploaded a photograph of a convoy of heavy-duty trucks leaving the lake, Gary's truck on the back of a flatbed.

Success.

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'Yellow Dress Assembly' opens eyes of Hill sophomores

BY OLIVIA RICHMAN
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DUDDLEY — "I would never do that. I would never do something like that," muttered a teenage boy.

A young girl his age leaned over and whispered in his ear. "I wouldn't even let someone do that to me in the first place."

The teenagers are students at Shepherd Hill Regional High School. Besides a few muffled whispers, the auditorium — completely full of 10th graders — was completely silent. The room stayed dim, a spotlight on a young woman on stage.

"I wanted to tell someone. I felt ashamed," she proclaimed to the audience, wearing an elegant purple prom dress. "He always checked my work schedule so he could check to make sure I was there. One day after work he told a guy at work to stay away from me. It sounded like... It sounded like he might beat the kid right there. And when I got in the car... well, he grabbed my hair roughly and yanked it. He threw my head around. He really hit me. Over and over. I couldn't make him stop."

She explained that her boyfriend, Rick, proceeded to "go off" on every little thing and she couldn't understand why. Her family finally caught on to the abuse she was going through and forbid she continue seeing him. Being an impressionable, naive teenager, she said she chose Rick over her "crazy" family.

"Isn't this dress pretty?" she asked the audience wistfully. "This is the dress I will go to prom in. But there was another one. It was my favorite dress." She leaves the stage. An intermission. The 10th graders burst into feverish whispers and nervous laughter. A few minutes later she emerges in a yellow dress. The dress is splattered with fake blood.

It was the dress she was killed in — by Rick — the day before prom.

This is the Yellow Dress Assembly at Shepherd Hill. The "Yellow Dress" is a performance put on by Rydia Q. Velehr of Deana's Educational Theater, sponsored by the school's Students Against Destructive Decisions (SAAD) group. The one-woman play is based on multiple stories of real life victims of dating violence. It aims to bring awareness of dating violence to high school students, show them the signs to look for, and how to get help if they know someone who is going through dating violence.

"Every school teaches things differ-



Olivia Richman photos

At the beginning of the monologue, Rydia Q. Velehr comes onto the stage spinning in a purple prom dress. The sophomores cheered, whooped and whistled. They slowly began to realize that the issue at hand was very serious.

ently," said Velehr. "Schools don't always cover things like this. Growing up I never had a program like this come to my school. Looking back it would have been helpful. Looking back I think, 'That probably was good and I didn't even realize it.' It never occurred to me. In high school it's helpful to recognize behaviors."

Case in point: Velehr followed the monologue with some discussion. She asked the 10th graders if they felt domestic violence could happen at Shepherd Hill. Only half of the students raised their hands. More than half also felt that Ana — the woman Velehr was portraying — was "dumb" and "should have just broken up with him."

The obviousness to the seriousness of teen domestic violence made the program all the more necessary, according to Graeces Rodriguez, a science teacher and Advisor for SAAD.

"I think I like that this program is so serious," she said. "Kids will laugh at things. Every year they start off laughing when she comes out. Then they slowly realize that it's not funny. Having this program is totally worth it if they have that moment of realization."

SAAD aims to raise awareness of different things that may affect teenagers, including drugs, drinking and driving, texting and driving, eating disorders and cigarettes. The domestic violence program arrived just in time for February, Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.

Studies show that one in four women will be in an abusive relationship at



Rydia Q. Velehr is part of Deana's Educational Theater, spreading awareness of dating violence, bullying and promoting healthy relationships.

some point in their life. With so many young women at risk, Velehr hoped to spread awareness of the signs of dating violence, as well as discuss how to prevent it and deal with it.

"Let's say you know someone like Ana," said Velehr. "She's been your best friend your whole life. What can you do to help her? Any ideas?"

Barely any hands are raised. The crowd of 10th graders are silent.

"A lot of times people in these situations don't want to hear it," she said, "but try to talk to them. Try to talk to the victim. Convince them that if they won't break up with their abuser to at least hang out with other people more often. The abuser becomes their whole world. They may feel they have nobody to turn to. Be there to listen. It's the best thing you can do for them. Encourage them to seek out property authorities or go to the authorities yourself."

Then she asked the students what they would do if they were friends with someone like Rick, the abuser. Again, no hands shoot up. Nobody knows what to do in this situation.

"They need to get help, too," she said. "Even if they break up, he'll do it again to someone else. It can take between

four to nine interventions to finally break up an abusive couple, because they've been dating for so long. It's important to be there."

And the breakup is not where it ends. According to Velehr, the breakup is the most dangerous time period, where stalking and harassing become very common. Many abusers feel that if they can't have the victim, then nobody else can either. That is a major source of violence that often leads to death.

Rodriguez is aware of the importance of discussing dating violence for high schoolers.

"Kids are experimenting with relationships right now in high school," she said. "Relationships are getting more and more serious. They need to be exposed to things that can go wrong and be able to see warning signs to help each other."

"This day and age, abuse has become easier with help from technology and social media. It gives the abusers more control."

"When I first began this program we talked about pagers," laughed Velehr. "I actually met a woman who was married to a man who had given her a pager. She had to check in all the time just like in the show I perform. Cell phones are even worse, since you can track people. You can read their text logs and check phone bills to see who they call."

Unfortunately, Rodriguez said that as a teacher she has seen signs of abuse amongst students, whether the students are aware or not. She has seen students come into class completely devastated over relationship issues. She has suspected most cases are verbal and mental violence. A lot of teenagers are becoming comfortable with relationships and may not know what is appropriate and what is not appropriate.

Deana's Educational Theater discusses violence as young as elementary school, teaching children about bullying. Saying that one can never start preventing violence too early, Velehr stated that many bullies are the ones who become involved in abusive relationships later on in life.

"If you or someone you know is going through domestic violence," said Rodriguez, "see a trusted teacher, see a guidance counselor. We have a school psychologist. There's a lot of avenues they can take."

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