

## Why I care about Domestic Violence

A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the *Quad Community Press* Newspaper (October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

Thursday, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009 was a devastating day in Circle Pines. Erica Ann Wilson had moved from her home in Wyoming, Minnesota to a secret apartment in Circle Pines just a couple weeks earlier to start a new life and get away from an abusive partner of 25 years. That morning she carefully left her new apartment only to be shot and killed in the parking lot by her former partner, who then killed himself. As Mayor, I got the call explaining what had happened and letting me know that our Police and Fire Departments had the situation under control.

Nobody could remember a murder-suicide ever happening in our small town. I tried to calm community members over the next few days by telling them this was an extremely rare occurrence, that it wasn't a stranger attack or a threat to the general public, reminding everyone that we have a wonderful, safe community. And then I heard myself rationalizing the tragedy by saying, "Well, she just moved into town and I didn't know her."

As soon as the sentence came out of my mouth, I knew I had made a mistake. Like hurtful words you say and can't pull back, my comment was wrong and inappropriate, and shocking to myself. Maybe it was a typical defensive and rationalizing response, but even as I was saying the words I realized that if I truly believed them, I needed to do some soul searching. What difference does it make how long she lived in town, if she was a new arrival or a long-time resident? What difference does it make if we knew her or not? A woman's courageous break to the freedom of a new life had been tragically ended, and it happened in our town, and on my watch.

It was at that point I decided I needed to attend her funeral and learn more about Erica and her life. After the funeral I went up to one of her three children and said words that I remember to this day: "Hi, I'm Dave Bartholomay and I'm the Mayor of Circle Pines, where your mom was living. We think of ourselves as the kind of community where when a woman is in trouble, we wrap our arms around her and keep her safe. I'm sorry we were unable to do that for your mother." And then I drove home.

It was the day I began to think about what I could do to help avoid unnecessary tragedies like this in my community. As Mayor, sometimes you find that your elected position, and your personal commitment, can make a real difference on a particular issue. Especially one that is not well understood or even admitted to in 'polite company'.

For example, did you know that 15% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls in Anoka County reported being forced to have sex or doing something sexual when they didn't want to? Or that Alexandra House in Blaine provided services to over 2,400 victims of domestic and sexual violence in 2009? Please take a minute to learn more about domestic and sexual violence at [www.alexandrahouse.org](http://www.alexandrahouse.org).

I've partnered with North Metro Television to create a powerful, 30-minute video with a discussion guide outlining domestic violence issues and steps each of us can take to help. It is available for checkout at all Anoka County Libraries, for online viewing at [www.northmetrotv.com](http://www.northmetrotv.com) or pick up a free copy at the Circle Pines City Hall. By learning and working together we can stop the often 'unseen' violence and build a safer community for our children, our neighbors, and ourselves.