

A light at the end of the tunnel

By Jason Isaac
The Villager Editor

RUSSELL - Judy McFaul of the Russell Agricultural Society along with her organizing committee co-chairs Lynn Rochon of Scotiabank joined Wyatt McWilliams of Navan and his Aunt Judy Armstrong of Russell as well as Laurie McWilliams at the announcement of the 2011 edition of Ladies Night to be held at the Russell Arena on April 29. The theme of the 8th annual event, is the Wild West and according to McFaul, expect things to get quite wild with the women of Russell and the surrounding area letting loose for one evening without the boys. She promises a fun-filled female-only event with many surprises and musical guests, local country fan favourites, Ambush. Dinner is being served up by A.J.'s Catering.

Each year, Ladies Night raises funds, through its tickets sales and a silent auc-

tion, for a charity or organization that McFaul says doesn't get the publicity of the more well-know ones. This year, the committee selected the Foundation Fighting Blindness as the events beneficiary which is why McWilliams and Armstrong were on hand at the kick-off. Each suffers from a condition called retinitis pigmentosa a gentic disorder that causes the gradual loss of eyesight.

"I was told to get a white cane and live with it," said McWilliams, who never let the disease slow him down. A horseman by trade, he spearheaded Food Aid Day in support of beef farmers and is also famous for the 50-horse hitch in celebrating the Navan Fair's 50th Anniversary in 1995, a feat that made it into the Guinness Book of World Records. McWilliams continues to tinker around on his Navan farm and helps with the Proulx Sugarbush operation in Cumberland, although he admits that he

requires help getting around due to his extremely limited vision.

Armstrong explained that the disease usually misses the women in the family but she recalls that her father had it and her grandmother before that. Retinitis pigmentosa can also cause blindness in children or the symptoms such as night vision or tunnel vision become apparent at an early age and worsen over time, gradually rendering people in their forties or fifties legally blind.

While both say that they will not benefit directly from an eventual cure due to the progression of the disease and the length of time that they have been afflicted with it, they are grateful for the support of Ladies Night and the Foundation Fighting Blindness that they believe will help the next generation along in beating the disease. Already there are ways that can give eyesight back to those with retinitis pigmentosa, including ocular

implants, but McWilliams says more money needs to be given for stem cell research to find a cure and give back the eyes to those who need it without additional apparatuses.

In the past, Ladies Night has raised roughly \$175,000 for the various charities it has selected and with a target goal of \$25,000 for this year's extravaganza, the total could hit \$200,000. With Scotiabank as a sponsor, through their matching funds program, a donation of \$5000 is already earmarked from the bank.

While they are expecting 650 ladies to make a night of it, the \$40 tickets for Ladies Night are expected to go fast, so get them early either by calling McFaul at 613-445-4161. Doors open for cocktails at 5:30 p.m. with dinner at 7:00 p.m. and the entertainment to take the stage around 8:00 p.m. For more info head on over to the www.russellfair.ca website.



Above, from left, Ladies Night Co-Chairs Judy McFaul and Lynn Rochon are joined by Laurie Hamilton, Wyatt McWilliams and Judy Armstrong to announce the 8th annual female-friendly evening expected to raise needed funds for Foundation Fighting Blindness.

Photo By Jason Isaac

