

Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden Ceremony, Keynote Address – June 4, 2012

By Commissioner Tom Tremblay (Ret)

Greetings and welcome to the third annual Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden Ceremony. Sharon and Judy; what an honor for me to be asked to provide brief comments for this year's ceremony. Thank you for thinking of me. It's always my pleasure to work with you and your dedicated staff at the Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services.

I would also like to mention that this year marks the 20th Anniversary for the Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services! The Vermont Center has brought people together for so many important causes. What a journey, how far you have come, and while the road ahead is full of twists and turns, we know it is best traveled together. Throughout my career I have been inspired by your work, your leadership, compassion, determination and spirit.

For all of you here today, and for **all of the advocates** in our state who answer the call for help; who have offered guidance and hope to those in need. I know the burden of your heavy hearts, the desire to want to do more and the hope that you make a difference. Please know that you do make a difference. Please know that you are all deeply admired and respected for the work you do advocating for, and supporting crime victims.

The Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden Project is just one example of the efforts to support victims and survivors. As stated three years ago during the opening ceremony for this garden, and on the Center's Website; the garden is a symbol of growth and renewal; like survivors of crime, gardens need attention, care and support.

One measure of a community's values is how individuals and communities respond when crime occurs. This garden is an example of those values.

This garden started with one voice and a collaborative effort among many organizations who work with victims of crime. The entire community united in support and helped make this garden become a reality.

From survivors and their families, to advocates, law enforcement, elected officials, businesses, construction companies, community members young and old, many of us here today. From design to completion, together we moved the earth, placed stones, planted shrubs and flowers and created this sacred place for those impacted by crime, and in memory of those you love.

The Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden is not only for remembering and honoring victims and survivors of crime; it is a place to gather to build public awareness and support for issues impacting victims of crime.

It's a garden where we can plant seeds that will grow new ideas, new energy and commitment for the prevention of crime, and improved services for victims and survivors.

But most importantly, it is a garden where the beauty and wonderment of our earth are in bloom with the triumph of human spirit and courage....

Everyone here today, and many of you personally understand the impact of crime on the human spirit. The Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden has significant meaning to all of us, but most importantly I hope it is viewed by you, and all Vermonters, as a sacred space.

I will always hold a special place in my heart for crime victims and survivors, their families, and all those I have served. Their stories, and the images, will be a part of me forever.

My experience is not unique. As you know, many Officers, Sheriffs and Troopers carry with them the heavy heart of knowing what they know, and wishing they could have done more.

What is also clear is that from time to time, despite our role as neutral fact finders, the police need to remind ourselves, why we do what we do... for we are all in need of human compassion. Knowing we share a partnership, and have support from the advocacy community is so meaningful to help remind us, that what - we - do - for - victims, we – do - together.

It is sometimes difficult for me to say that I am now retired from law enforcement and public service. Throughout my 30 year career I always tried to model Respect and Compassion, and lead with a commitment of professional service to victims of crime. Like police officers everywhere I was also relentless in the pursuit of justice with efforts to hold offenders accountable.

What has helped me make peace with my decision to retire is the commitment to these same values by many of our state's Law Enforcement Leaders that I have worked with. I have also expanded my circle of influence providing leadership and training nationally. I am able to focus on my passion for the prevention of violence against women crimes and encouraging improved services for crime victims.

The message many of you have heard from me here in Vermont is now being heard nationally: **We need strong and bold leadership; we must do more to stop "Victim blaming;" and we must do more to educate boys and men about their role in violence prevention.**

Perhaps not realizing the impact on crime victims and the rest of society, following a crime we often hear "**victim blaming**" statements from citizens, the media, and even community leaders. Statements such as:

"Why was she out walking alone at night?"

"Why didn't she call the police?"

"Why didn't she leave him?"

"Why didn't she....

We need to be asking; WHY – DID – He?

We need to be asking about the offender's behavior;

We need to be asking about the offender's conduct;

We need to ensure that law enforcement focuses our investigation on the offender's actions, not the victim's. Society needs to understand that the offender is solely responsible for the crime; not the victim.

Ending Violence Against Women International has started a new campaign directed at ending victim blaming titled; “Start By Believing.”

It encourages law enforcement and society to support victims when they report crime, and for law enforcement to investigate the offender behavior, and not blame the victim. A simple, but necessary message...

Many men become uncomfortable when we start talking about men’s role in preventing violence, or their role in confronting a harmful culture of violence against women. The good news is that most men are not violent - most men would never commit an act of violence against a woman.

But we must challenge boys and men, we must ask ourselves: if we are not responsible for the violence, what are we doing to stop it? We all have a responsibility; men and women.

The White Ribbon Campaign and promising practices such as bystander intervention training, and making sure men understand the difference between “consent” and “submission”, as well as training young women and men about what constitutes a healthy relationship, are all steps in the right direction.

Vermont has done a lot through the years to strengthen our laws, but more work needs to be done to address our continued challenges regarding the interconnected nature of domestic and sexual violence. Continued growth and training for our SIUs and National best practices such as predominant aggressor determination, lethality assessment, and possession of firearms by unauthorized persons, should be priorities for our state.

This Memorial Garden is just steps from the Statehouse where we make our state laws and set our priorities. Priorities: I am a true believer in the Quote from Roman Statesman and orator: Marcus Tullius Cicero; ***“the safety of the people shall be the highest law.”***

When I was Public Safety Commissioner and would need a break from the legislative debate, I would come here to clear my head, reenergize, and remind myself of the important work that needed to be done.

I also had more than one conversation, with more than one legislator, in this very garden, sharing with them the realities of crime and the impact on the victims and survivors, and our communities.

Many of you here today have shared your personal story and inspired others to act and bring about meaningful change.

One of the rewards of our justice system is watching the difference one person can make. Having the courage to stand and tell your story, seeing people come together to create meaningful change. Change that adds value to our state, change that improves the safety and security of our people is powerful and rewarding.

All of you here today have done just that in some way, shape or form; and you have truly inspired me and others to continue our efforts to reduce crime, and better serve those impacted by crime.

Again, this Memorial Garden is just one example of that.

Today we gather in remembrance and honor for those we have lost. We gather in support of one another and with hope that this Memorial Garden remains a strong symbol of growth and renewal for all who are impacted by crime.

Let the Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden be a reminder to our citizens, lawmakers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges that we need to focus on crime prevention. We need to focus on holding offenders accountable, but that justice, first and foremost, starts with care and compassion for victims and survivors.

Let the Courage in Bloom Memorial Garden be a place of hope and reverence for victims and survivors of crime, and their families. A garden where you are not alone; a garden where we can hold hands, and in the silence of our hearts and minds, we can find, COURAGE IN BLOOM...

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Public Safety Commissioner Tom Tremblay (Ret)