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## Cross Lake

### Blue Lights for Smoke-Free Homes

If you've ever flown between Winnipeg and Thompson at night you know it can look pretty dark down there. Imagine glancing out the airplane window and seeing a community sparkling with blue lights below you. That is the sight you'd see from the night sky over Cross Lake, and the blue lights are a sign that one house at a time, Cross Lake is working towards a smoke-free environment for homes.

Eugennie Mercredi started the Blue Light project in November 2007. She got the idea at a conference in Thompson and decided to run with it. With funds from CDPI, she bought blue light bulbs, then she and her partner Reg Mercredi went door-to-door asking people if they were smoking in their house. If the house was smoke-free, she gave them a blue light-bulb. "People were pretty excited about it," she said. They wanted the bulbs. At one house, a man opened the door and had a cigarette in his hand. He still wanted the bulb, but Mercredi said, "No way!"

*People are proud to bring awareness of their home being a smoke-free environment.*

By the time Christmas rolled around, there were a lot of blue lights in Cross Lake and "it really looked awesome." People are proud to bring awareness of their home being a smoke-free environment.

Mercredi has tackled the project from many different angles, advertising it on local radio and TV stations, distributing pamphlets, posters, stickers, and posting signs that say "Second-hand Smoke Kills." She ordered material from the Manitoba Lung Association and the Manitoba Cancer Association and made a package about what smoking does to people.

There are a lot of smokers in this First Nation community of 6,700 people, but the Mercredis believe awareness is growing and most people are smoking outside. Every year on May 31 people are challenged to give up smoking for 24 hours and are given tips on what to do instead.

Other communities including Brandon are interested in trying the Blue Light project. "It's good to network and to create awareness in our communities," said Mercredi. "We all strive for the same thing."

Mercredi herself quit smoking three years ago. As an aboriginal diabetes worker and CDPI leader, she has become aware of practising healthy eating and active living and being a role model. In conjunction with Manitoba Foods, she helped set up a community garden workshop which attracted 21 participants. A lot of people at Cross Lake are now making their own gardens with free seeds from Manitoba Hydro.

Some of the blue light bulbs are wearing out now. “I need more bulbs,” says Mercredi. Every time she goes to Winnipeg she checks at stores for blue light bulbs. At times she becomes overwhelmed by the health needs in her remote community. As part of CDPI Mercredi is working to initiate community walks. “Sometimes I walk alone,” she says, “and I motivate myself by saying, ‘I’m going to walk today for people that are blind,’ or, another day, ‘I’m going to walk for people in wheelchairs.’ Something always comes up to keep us going.”

Mercredi’s activism has just ramped up a few notches, since she’s been elected as a

councillor for her community for the next four years. Her experience as the Woman’s Traditional Chief will stand her in good stead, and politics runs in the family: her brother-in-law Ovide Mercredi is a former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. While Eugennie Mercredi is busy on Council, Reg Mercredi will carry on and get other community members to help keep CDPI projects growing.

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Take Note

**Second-Hand Smoke Dangers:**

- More than 1,000 non-smokers will die this year in Canada due to tobacco use -over 300 lung cancer deaths and at least 700 deaths from coronary heart disease will be caused by second-hand smoke.
- More than 50 of the 4,000 chemicals in second-hand smoke are cancer-causing carcinogens. The chemicals also contribute directly to other diseases, such as asthma, heart disease and emphysema – for smokers and non-smokers alike.
- Second-hand smoke has at least twice the nicotine and tar as the smoke inhaled by the smoker.
- Regular exposure to second-hand smoke increases the chances of contracting lung disease by 25% and heart disease by 10%.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/second/index-eng.php>