

## **We All Belong**

by Anne-Denise Mejaki, Art About You productions [annd@personainternet.com](mailto:annd@personainternet.com)

On any given day, you'll find Peter Birnie at his desk with his nose to the grindstone, and working hard at continuing to grow his company, Wabi Iron and Steel . He might be chairing a meeting dealing with difficult issues where leadership and problem-solving go hand in hand. And often like the successful businessman that he is, you'll see him travelling the world, determined to prove he can create, accommodate and produce iron products in his little town of Temiskaming Shores, with a quality and service like no other. Finally, though maybe not often enough, he takes that long overdue break to enjoy a little relaxation with his wife, Lynne at their family cottage in Lake Temagami.

So, why in the world is this man gathering key community people and expecting everyone to get on board with a message about mental health that says "We All Belong"? Well, Peter Birnie has a mission... to deliver a message to all people in this country that mental health issues affect us all and in various ways, that there is no shame in accepting and admitting we may know or love someone with mental health struggles, and that any one of us can be afflicted by this potentially life-altering disease at any time".

This mission and his determination to succeed at it are what sincerely reflects who Peter Birnie really is. His leadership in chairing provincial mental health task forces to develop a province-wide mental health system resulted in, among other things, the development of the "We All Belong" program. The purpose of this program is to educate all people in this province, including the Timiskaming-Cochrane District, and across the country about understanding the issues of mental health. He's just a regular guy who likes to break down walls. He wants to help ensure that knowledge, understanding and education about mental health issues break down the barriers of fear and misunderstanding that keep people from being well. And he wants to make sure that compassion becomes widespread as a result of education about mental health issues. What too many of us don't get is found in statistics highlighted by the Global Business and Economic Roundtable website found at [www.mentalhealthroundtable.ca](http://www.mentalhealthroundtable.ca). Interestingly, one of the numerous supporting documents reports 2002 statistics that mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse cost employers, on productivity losses alone, around \$11.1billion/yr. When you add sub-clinical symptoms to the list, such as burnout, demoralization, disengagement and excessive substance abuse, the losses to Canadian employers could be three times this conservative estimate – or \$33B/yr.

How does Peter Birnie plan on making sure we all "get it" or that we all know "We all belong"? Well, he has a delightful innovative community event for all to enjoy as we receive the message about mental health. Wabi Iron and Steel Co., in conjunction with celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, is sponsoring an ART and TRADE show. The clincher is that all profits at the door and donations from the

sale of the artwork will go to funding the Canadian Mental Health public education program in the Timiskaming-Cochrane region and yes, the public education program is called "We All Belong". Along with an extensive display from the Canadian Mental Health Association and Wabi Iron and Steel Co., the local and outlying area artists have answered the call to participate in the event by way of selling their artwork. The event promises to be a show to remember with much creativity, a silent art auction, face painting for the kids, music, various community participants and attendance not only from the region but from across the world in honour of the Wabi's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

But why artists? Is it because the appeal and beauty of artwork is a way to make people stop, look and listen for a bit, which could be the perfect time to send out this message? Is it because artists are altruistic, passionate beings or is it just good business sense and a great fundraiser? Maybe all of the above? I asked Peter Birnie and he said to me: **"I have a deep appreciation for the arts. Lynne is an accomplished published photographer and along with an eye for beauty, we both support and recognize the incredible artistic talent found locally. I just thought that Wabi Iron and Steel's sponsorship and an invitation for all to enjoy the extraordinary world of the arts is the perfect way to raise important dollars and convey the obscure, yet delicate message we have to deliver. I expect to successfully do so on an annual basis."**

The first Annual Wabi Iron and Steel Co. Art and Trade show will take place at the New Liskeard Community Curling Club on June 16 and 17, 2007 in the City of Temiskaming Shores.



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**Anne-Denise Mejaki**, “Art About You productions-Home of the Tea Party Girls” resides with husband Tim and children Kyle and Cileah in Temiskaming Shores. In addition to fulltime Artist with a forte in portrait work, Anne-Denise is a songwriter/singer, enjoys creative writing, acting and the development of community enhancement projects.