

# GOOD DEEDS

## Seeking a safer world for women

BY IAN DONNIS

Inspired by the grassroots international movement that grew out of *The Vagina Monologues*, Caroline Brown talked with a friend a few months back about organizing a local effort to help reduce violence against women. What began with discussion of a potluck dinner steadily gathered strength and grew into the International Women's Day Festival, a multi-faceted community-building event that will take place this Saturday, March 9 at the Monohasset Mill (532 Kinsley Avenue, Providence) from 2 to 11 p.m.

The festival offers something for everyone (yes, men are welcome), from a speaking program, music and poetry performances, art displays, and information and workshops on a variety of topics, to a late-night dance party with DJ Annathena and food and drink donated by local bars and restaurants. The event is free, with a suggested donation. Proceeds will benefit Sojourner House, the shelter for battered women, and MADRE, an international organization assisting women in Afghanistan.

Brown, a 26-year-old artist and actress who is a familiar face because of her bartending gigs at Nick-a-Nee's and the Decatur Lounge, says a bevy of individuals and organizations were enthusiastic about getting involved with what started as a modest project. "So many different ideas were being put out on the table that we just decided to do a celebration where we could do anything," she says. Those helping to organize the festival as part of Women Advocates Networking Together (WANT) include Martha Brunzos, Tara Cimini, Mary Hastings, Lisa Iglesias, Julie McGetrick, Sarah Meyer, Kristie Speck, Spyce, and Sara Struever.

As a fan of Eve Ensler, Brown admires *The Vagina Monologues*, the playwright's homage to women's sexuality, for sparking frank discussion and a growing series of community-based initiatives. "There's nothing obtuse about it," Brown says. "She started this major world movement just by speaking to her peers about something that hadn't been spoken about."

Similarly, part of the purpose of the Women's Day Festival -- which Brown hopes will lead to ongoing efforts -- is to dispel the stigma sometimes associated with women's activism and feminism. "Working for women may sound cliched," she says, "but it's working for everyone." In a world where violence against women remains prevalent, "There's a problem and it's not being hidden. It's out there. I feel that it's everybody's problem."

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