

Stitching Fabric and Causes

Hung Dao | Sports Editor

On Feb. 20, St. Norbert College welcomed Dorothy Burge, a self-described “Quiltivist” based in Chicago, to speak about her social activism.

She started her talk by explaining her background as a descendant of black women who quilted, though she disliked quilting until later in life. She started quilting in earnest after seeing quilting shows on television. Her quilts at this point were wall decorations and gifts for family members.

Her motivations for quilting changed after the murder of Trayvon Martin. Outraged, she attended protests, but she decided that she needed to go further, so she quilted a piece of Trayvon holding iced tea and Skittles. Her piece was noticed by a number of people which prompted her to work harder on her craft. She then went through a list of projects she has worked on since Trayvon Martin, including Laquan McDonald, Renaldo Hudson and George Floyd among others. She also spoke extensively about the victims of torture perpetrated by police chief Jon Burge. For an exhibition, she quilted all of the still-imprisoned who are held because of their forced confessions due to the torture. All of these are just some of the causes she spoke about.

At the end of her speech, Burge answered some questions from the audience. She gave some fun facts about her quilts, such as her grandniece not liking a quilt portraying her because she was not wearing pink, and that her biggest pieces are ten feet tall. She also gave tips for those who wanted to learn how to quilt. One of the last things she said was a word of advice for protesting where she highlighted the dangers and how each person can protect themselves while protesting.

Combining activism and quilting is not necessarily obvious, but by the end of her talk, the audience definitely learned more about the causes she championed, and some expressed interests in learning more.