



Friday, April 12, 2002

Participants speak out at Take Back the Night

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

More than 150 people from Oakland University and surrounding communities gathered on OU's campus April 11 to speak out against violence and provide a supportive environment for survivors of sexual assault at Take Back the Night.

The event is held nationally and organized in local communities. This year's Take Back the Night event in Oakland County was a joint effort between OU and **Help Against Violent Encounters Now (HAVEN)**, a Pontiac-based center with the mission of eliminating domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. This is the first time the event was held on the OU campus.

"I was very impressed and thought it was a wonderful event," said OU senior and elementary education major Melissa Kero. "It was great to see survivors and supporters come together. I hope it's something we can do on campus every year."

Take Back the Night supporters gathered at the north side of O'Dowd Hall for a rally, where OU Police Officer Nan Gelman spoke along with several HAVEN representatives. About 50 handmade T-shirts with stories written by victims of sexual assault or their supporters hung nearby.

After the rally, participants marched to the residence halls, passed through the Hamlin Circle and proceeded to the Recreation and Athletics Center. In the Pioneer Room of the center, a speakout was held for attendees who wished to verbalize their emotions or experiences on surviving sexual assault before a safe forum.

"The most amazing part of the event was the speakout," Kero said. "I was impressed by the courage that people had to tell their stories in front of strangers. It let others know that the victims still have a voice and can reclaim their lives.

"The T-shirts were also some very moving pieces. It was an interesting way to allow people to tell their stories. And the victims or their supporters ranged in age from 2 to 100 – the shirts represented every realm of violence. It was so moving to see people's reactions at the clothesline. There was a lot of silence."

Jean Ann Miller, director of OU's Center for Student Activities, said the large gathering of supporters was impressive for the event's first run on OU's campus.

"There was a good mixture of OU students and people from the university and local community, including a number of men," Miller said. "The march and rally were very uplifting – it was a kind of celebration of life. Everyone was very supportive of the struggles many faced with surviving sexual assault. The speakout was actually quite somber. For many survivors, it's part of a recovery process. Some of them got up for the first time to share their story.

"The event was a real collaborative effort between OU and HAVEN. We hope to continue hosting the event on campus and make it an ongoing event."

Take Back the Night was held in conjunction with Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Recent estimates indicate that every hour in the United States 78 women are sexually assaulted.

For assistance in dealing with sexual assault issues, contact OU's **Graham Health and Counseling Center** at (248) 370-3465, visit the **HAVEN** Web site or contact them at (248) 334-1274 or (877) 922-1274.

SUMMARY

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