



Thursday, April 1, 2004

OU community rallies at Take Back the Night

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

For the third consecutive year, members of the Oakland University community and beyond gathered on campus to take a stand against sexual assault at Take Back the Night 2004. This nationally recognized event, sponsored by the **OU Police Department** and **HAVEN**, Oakland County's center for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence, sexual assault and abuse, provides a supportive environment for survivors of sexual assault while increasing public awareness.

Students, faculty, staff and community members participated in a day full of events, including a rally, campus march and speak out, during which survivors could share their stories of strength and survival. A sexual assault awareness table and "Clothesline Project" also were on display in the Oakland Center Exhibit Lounge. The project featured T-shirts decorated by survivors and their supporters as a testimony to the problems of sexual violence. In addition, a panel discussion titled "Sexual Assault Awareness and the Law" was held in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge. The speakers were Carol Hackett Garagiola, legal and policy director, Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board; Judge Lisa Asadoorian, 52nd District Court, Rochester Hills; and Cheryl Matthews, assistant Oakland County prosecutor.

"Breaking the silence (about sexual assault) is our No. 1 goal," said Maureen Jones, senior psychology and women's studies major and president of the Women's Issues Forum. "The Clothesline Project represents women airing their dirty laundry. It's about raising awareness. People are shocked when they learn about all the unreported rapes that occur. At the rally and march, attendees wear armbands that indicate if they're a survivor. The visual impact of the numbers of people you see wearing them, including children, is astounding.

"It's important for those who are survivors to not be afraid, to tell their stories, to be able to walk about freely. The march symbolically represents taking back the streets and sidewalks of our campus and society. It's a powerful community event that attracts a lot of people."

Among the community members who attended the rally and campus march was Elizabeth Ladd-Lee of Hazel Park.

"Just about every woman at some point in their lives has had a near miss or an unwanted touch," Ladd-Lee said. "It's important to keep letting people know that this happens. Women should also know that there are places to go for help. They do not have to be alone or live with shame."

Judge Asadoorian emphasized this point in her impassioned rally remarks and encouraged victims of sexual assault to not be afraid to seek help.

"I'm not here because I'm seeking an endorsement. I'm here because I'm interested in you," Asadoorian said. "I look around the room and wonder who is going to speak out tonight. For those of you who do, you have my utmost respect. When I'm in the courtroom and hear the testimony of a sexual assault victim, it's all I can do to keep still. Please remember that if this happens to you, the law is on your side. There is no stigma. There is no shame. Don't cover it up – apply the law. I'll continue to come to Take Back the Night year after year until there is no need for this event."

Take Back the Night is one of many campus events held as part of Women's History Month. It also serves as a prelude to National Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which begins in April.

For assistance in dealing with sexual assault issues, contact OU's **Graham Health and Counseling Center** at (248) 370-3465 or visit the **HAVEN** Web site or contact them at (248) 334-1274. If you would like to be included on the mailing list for next year's Take Back the Night, or if you would like to serve on the planning committee, e-mail myelin@haven-oakland.org or call (248) 334-1284, ext. 177.

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