



Gannon takes a stand against sexual violence



Gannon University hosted its annual Take Back the Night march in Perry Square Monday evening.

This event is one of Gannon's Students Against Violence Everywhere's (SAVE) signature events for the spring semester.

Katie Allison, the coordinator for violence prevention at Gannon, said that the idea is to bring students, staff and faculty together to create a safer campus and raise awareness about sexual assault.

The event is held in collaboration with several community partners including the Crime Victims Center, Safe Net and the Women's Care Center, as well as Mercyhurst University.

The Pride of PA Battalion – including the ROTC students from Mercyhurst, Gannon and Penn State Behrend, were all there in full uniform showing their support.

Allison said that the battalion also led the march through the Gannon community.

"It was just so impressive and so powerful to have that kind of presence," Allison said.

The theme of this year's march was "Stand Together to Unmask the Faces."

Allison said that the premise behind the theme was that victims, offenders, bystanders and survivors all wear masks from sexual violence.

There were four stops on the march – Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel, North Hall, the Counseling Center and the Erie County Court House. Each stop represented one of the four groups of constituents of sexual violence.

Two students stood at each stop and audience members called out stigmas or myths. The two students would then lower their masks and tell the audience the truth about their position.

"It was kind of powerful to have the masks removed and then the students say 'You might have heard all of this, but these are our truths,'" Allison said.

After the march, the group retreated to the Yehl Ballroom in the Waldron Campus Center, where Feliesha Shelton-Wheeler, a counselor and psychologist for Gannon's counseling services, was the guest speaker and shared a very powerful and private story.

Afterwards, President Keith Taylor, Ph.D., brought everyone together with a speech and talked to everybody about holding ourselves accountable and holding everybody else accountable, but that we're still a family. The Mercyhurst dance team did an interpretive dance to "Fight Song" by Rachel Platten and the event was ended with refreshments.

There was also a ribbon where students could use teal Post-it notes and fill the ribbon with messages of support for those who have been involved in sexual violence.

The Crime Victims Center, Safe Net, Women's Care Center, Knight Watch, SAVE and the Counseling Center had tables set up to provide resources to those who wanted more information about sexual assault prevention and awareness.

Allison said that she thinks that the event has definitely grown over the years.

"I think students think that it's OK now to talk about sexual assault and to hold trainings," Allison said.

"Four or five years ago, it wasn't something that we talked about very often and it wasn't on people's minds intentionally."

Allison also said that she thinks it's important that Gannon is very intentional about creating a safer campus and giving students the tools that they need to recognize risky situations.

"[Sexual assault] happens everywhere, so let's make this the best campus we can and let's be as smart as we can about helping those in need," Allison said.