

Jefferson vigil remembers victims of domestic violence

By Ryan Whisner Union regional editor | Posted: Friday, October 30, 2015 9:21 am

JEFFERSON — Sixty-four people were killed in domestic violence incidents in Wisconsin last year. To raise awareness of that tragic statistic and remember those victims, People Against Domestic & Sexual Abuse of Jefferson County held a candlelight vigil at Stoppenbach Park Thursday.

Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ was the guest speaker at the event, which took place as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month drew to a close.

“It is so important to raise community awareness about domestic violence,” Happ said. “... when you think about domestic violence, you think, ‘it can’t happen to me; I don’t know anyone who is abused.’”

However, Happ noted that the victims are women — and men — whom you see at church, at PTA and in the grocery store.

“Domestic violence, like so many other crimes, does not discriminate. It reaches across all races, ages, sexes, sexual orientation and economic status,” she said.

The district attorney pointed out that there are many myths associated with domestic abuse victims: they must lack self-esteem, be uneducated and not have family support.

“We know that’s just not true,” Happ said.

She said that fortunately, Jefferson County is home to PADA, which helps educate the public and bring awareness to the facts about domestic violence. PADA works jointly with law officers.

“It really is a coordinated effort,” she said. “Law enforcement are often the first responders when it comes to criminal investigations in domestic abuse.



TRAGIC MEMORIES

TRAGIC MEMORIES — A candlelight vigil was held at Stoppenbach Park in Jefferson Thursday to raise awareness of domestic violence and recognize October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The event was organized by People Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse of Jefferson County. For more photos, click [here](#). — Daily Union photos by Ryan Whisner.

However, she said, PADA plays a really important role for those victims who are not ready to report abuse.

“When our (district attorney’s) office is involved, I’m constantly emailing the PADA office about victims whom I’m worried about,” Happ said. “It is just a really great relationship and I hope we do a lot of good.”

Happ noted that it is well known that not a lot of domestic violence is reported.

“We know every nine seconds in the United States, a woman is beaten. We know that on average, nearly 20 people every minute are physically abused by their intimate partner. We know that during one year, this can equate to more than 10 million women and men,” the district attorney said.

Happ pointed out that one in five women and one in seven men have been victims of severe physical violence by their intimate partner, and that 19 percent of domestic violence involves a weapon.

“What we also know is it impacts our children, our communities and our families,” the district attorney said.

Citing more statistics, she said one in 15 children is exposed to violence in the home and 90 percent of them are witnesses to this violence.

“We’re here to raise public awareness and support victims of domestic violence and remember those we lost last year,” Happ said. “In order to stop domestic violence, we need to see domestic violence.”

Happ said that while doing research for her remarks, she came across some images. One read, “During Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we’re inviting everyone to speak up. To spark change, we have to talk openly and acknowledge how domestic abuse affects our communities, our families and our lives. We have to be brave. We have to see domestic violence.”

Another stated, “Every day of every month of every year is a good day to help someone get free of domestic violence because it happens every day of every month of every year and it is probably happening to someone you know.”

“That is why we’re here: to raise that awareness and remember the people that lost their lives to domestic violence, and that their loss, their tragedy, not be in vain,” Happ said.

Teen Day Broadcasting Program team member Amanda Gilbert, a Jefferson High School senior, served as the master of ceremonies for the event.

“Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone,” she said. “The problem is often overlooked, excused or denied. This is especially true when the abuse is psychological, rather than physical.”

Gilbert pointed out that noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step toward ending it.

“No one should be living in fear of the person that they love,” she added. “If you recognize yourself or someone you know who is abused, please reach out. There is help available.”

Gilbert noted that police reports indicate that between 40 percent and 60 percent of all the calls they receive are domestic violence disputes. She added that approximately 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year.

PADA legal advocate Sue Whitstone said that PADA has been fighting domestic abuse for nearly four decades.

“We have a 24-hour crisis line and we assist with helping get services in the community,” Whitstone said.

She shared a pair of poems about domestic violence.

In addition, the names of those who died from domestic violence incident during 2014 were read.

Among them were those of Heather Stewart, 28, of Clyman, and Zoey Krueger, 22, of Jefferson.

Stewart’s body was discovered in her car in the former Pick n’ Save parking lot on South Church Street in Watertown on May 28, 2014. She died from a bullet wound to the head.

Her ex-boyfriend and father of her child, Michael C. Henderson, of Waterloo, was found guilty of killing her in August.

Largely a circumstantial case, prosecutors presented evidence that the two had met in the parking lot so Henderson could pay Stewart some child support payment. Cell phone records, along with a baseball cap, placed Henderson in the area the night of the Stewart’s death.

Krueger, 22, was found dead early Monday, Nov. 5, 2012, at the Hilltop Motel in Jefferson. An autopsy conducted the next day by Milwaukee County Medical Examiner Dr. Brian Peterson determined the cause of a death to be a single gunshot wound to the head.

Through a plea agreement with the Jefferson County District Attorney’s Office, Carl L. Avery pleaded no contest to the homicide. A remaining count of possession of a firearm was read into the record for sentencing purposes and dismissed.

Avery had past convictions for violating a restraining order and violating a domestic abuse injunction and was on probation at the time of shooting. He was not supposed to have a gun on the day of the murder due to his probation and a domestic abuse injunction.

For more information on People Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse of Jefferson County visit <http://www.padajc.org/>. The 24-hour crisis line is (920) 674-6768 or toll free at (800) 228-7232.

PADA, a nonprofit organization, receives funding from Jefferson County, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, the state Department of Justice, United Way of Jefferson and North Walworth Counties and United Way of Watertown.

People may donate online at www.padajc.org.