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Rally aims to raise awareness of sexual assault

Woman shares story of her rape during evening event

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About 50 people gathered at Lincoln Land Community College's outdoor Helen Hamilton Study Area to "take back the night" Saturday.

"Take Back the Night" events aim to educate people about partner violence and sexual assault.

Ashley Rook, chair of the Women's Issues Caucus at University of Illinois at Springfield, said groups from the University of Illinois at Springfield and Lincoln Land Community College decided to hold a local event last year because sexual assault is a problem on college campuses.

"When you combine alcohol and people who are away from home for the first time and in an environment where they're still figuring out issues of consent and how to be responsible with their sexual lives, I think these incidents are more likely to happen," she said.

For one of the evening's speakers, that issue reared its head sooner than that.

Amanda Page, 23, of Franklin said she was raped at an underage drinking party during her senior year of high school. A man who was friends with Page's then-fiance accosted her outside the party, she said.

"I turned around to walk away and he slammed me down on the hood of a car and raped me," Page said Saturday.

Initially she was afraid to tell police about the rape because she had been drinking. Eventually, however, she underwent tests that determined she was raped.

Because of bad police work and a dilatory state's attorney's office, she said, she ended up sitting through 17 pretrial hearings and reliving the event more times than she'd care to remember.

Her classmates called her derogatory names and said that she "wanted it."

"Imagine what that would be like, to leave (school) once a month and go back and face a person who single-handedly ruined your life," Page said. "I went from being one of the most popular students in my class to being the most hated."

Stories like Page's helped bring people to Saturday's rally.

"It used to be that it would hold up in court that if a woman was out at night, it was OK, whatever happened to her was OK," said Danielle Bantner, a member of Lincoln Land Community College's Feminist Activist Coalition and event organizer.

"It is very significant to say that we're doing this at 7:30 at night and it's getting dark, and this is just as much our world as anyone else's."

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