

# Features

## Reaching for Change Conference

### Various initiatives discussed regarding sexual assault

By ELIZABETH GALVIN  
The Herald

Space for Friday's 'Reaching for Change' conference filled so quickly, a waiting list had to be made up. The popularity of the program, held at the Howard Johnson Hotel in Oakville, may have had something to do with the panel of speakers that was scheduled for the morning session.

They discussed various initiatives regarding sexual assault that are underway or planned for Halton Region.

The panel included: Bob Alexander, a founding member of Metro Men Against Violence; Paul Bennet, executive director of the Halton Sexual Abuse Program; Donna Gannon, a councillor at Core Family Services; Linda Grear, human resources consultant for Dupont Canada; and Sue Amos, co-ordinator of physical education and health for the Halton Board of Education.

All five panel guests were contacted by phone before the conference, at which time they discussed their planned presentations for Friday's meeting.

#### Metro Men Against Violence

Since starting the Toronto-based group two and a half years ago, M.M.A.V. has decided to commit themselves to working towards ending male violence, especially against women, explained Bob Alexander.

"We don't all rape, we don't all kill," he said, "but we are part of a society that fosters violence and it fosters misogyny."

In his allotted time on Friday, he will put forth the argument that, "it's time men acknowledge that we're all part of (a violent society) and we have a responsibility to do something about it."

This conference could very well be the coming-out event for the group that has up until now remained fairly low profile. The monthly meetings usually attract a crowd of about 12-15 men and the group's mailing list is up to about 90 people.

"We have spent a fair amount of time educating ourselves," admitted Mr. Alexander. Over the last few months group members have been doing speaking engagements at half-way houses and even a summer camp. They participated in a peace march in Toronto in the belief that their message fit in, said Mr. Alexander. Right now, the group is busy developing educational programs and media strategy.

At a recent workshop at a battered women's shelter in Toronto, Mr. Alexander learned even more. It is this knowledge, together with what he has learned from other research, that he will take with him to Friday's conference.

"Male violence affects other men too," he said, referring to bar room brawls and street fights. "Part of the reality is that men have to start talking about it."

"We live in a society where men have power and that leads to situations where we take control over other people; this hurts us as well," he said.

To contact Bob Alexander call 392-0985 in Toronto.

#### Halton Sexual Abuse Program

"Our program deals with child sexual abuse, not rape," said Paul Bennet, pointing out that one out of three females and one out of five males has experienced some sort of sexual abuse by men.

He feels that the rapidly narrowing gap is due to the fact that males did not report the crime in the past and are only now starting to. Mr. Bennet estimates that 30,000 adults in Halton have been sexually abused and that 1,000 children are abused every year in the region. "Statistically, everyone has someone in their church or on their street," who is or was abused, he concluded.

What really concerns him, however, is that the issue may be going back "into the closet" after years of media attention convinced so many survivors to reach out for help. For the first time in years, there has been a decrease in reports in Halton, Mr. Bennet said. "It's not that kids are more educated. Not enough is being done at the preventative level," he concluded.

"It's fading from the community's consciousness and being overshadowed by drug abuse and

AIDS, he speculated. "Not only is that terrible, it's frightening. We can't afford to go back 10 years where child sexual abuse is shrouded in secrecy."

So the Halton Sexual Abuse Program will continue to offer counselling for child and adolescent victims, adolescent offenders and adult survivors and offenders, as well as support groups for mothers of child and adolescent victims. Their hours are Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the phone

number is 825-3242.

#### Core Family Services

Donna Gannon, who deals with domestic violence daily as a councillor at Core Services, is also concerned that society has forgotten about child sexual abuse.

"I feel this region has gone to sleep about this issue," she said. "Although there is more reporting, changes and services, according to the statistics, we're not getting the current child abuse victims."

She knows what the demand for some of the services her group offers, including a self help group for men called Re-Visions, should be like. "We're not physically serving Halton very well," she admits. "It's impossible with an office in Burlington."

The trip to Core Family Services may well be worth it for a person though a wide range of issues is dealt with at the centre. They have a child sexual abuse program in place but that, said Ms. Gannon, is not their primary function. They deal with violence against women through the Re-Visions program, which involves one-to-one therapy for both abusers and the abused. A self-

help group for men who have come through the program and are committed to change is also available.

The centre deals with women who are abused, men who are abusers, children who are survivors, adolescents who are from violent homes or who are in violent dating situations, and elderly abused women.

"We are looking to do more collaborative work" in the future, said Ms. Gannon, "with area agencies and specific topic agencies."

Core Family Services is located at 2289 Fairview Street in Burlington. The phone number 637-5256.

#### Dupont Canada

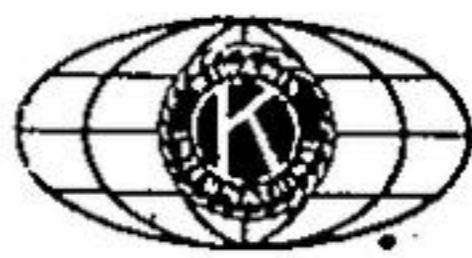
Linda Grear has been invited to the panel to talk about certain progressive initiatives that Dupont offers its employees.

The first is an eight-hour workshop for women only about rape prevention, the myths and facts about rape and after care. The second program is a four-hour workshop for managers and supervisors, designed to give a clear understanding of what sex-

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### SEXUAL ASSAULT ... SOME FACTS

- Sexual assault is a violent crime — not a sexual act.
- Females of all ages are sexually assaulted. The youngest victim on records was two weeks, the oldest 93 years.
- Women are singled out as victims of sexual assault because they happen to be available at the time and they are vulnerable. Attractiveness and style of dress have nothing to do with the selection of a victim.
- 1 in 5 women are likely to be sexually assaulted at some time in their lives.
- Between 60 and 90 per cent of sexual assaults are never reported.
- 60 per cent of sexual assaults are planned.
- A woman is just as likely to be attacked in her own home by an acquaintance as on a dark street by a stranger.
- A sexual assault can be both a physically and emotionally scarring experience for a woman.



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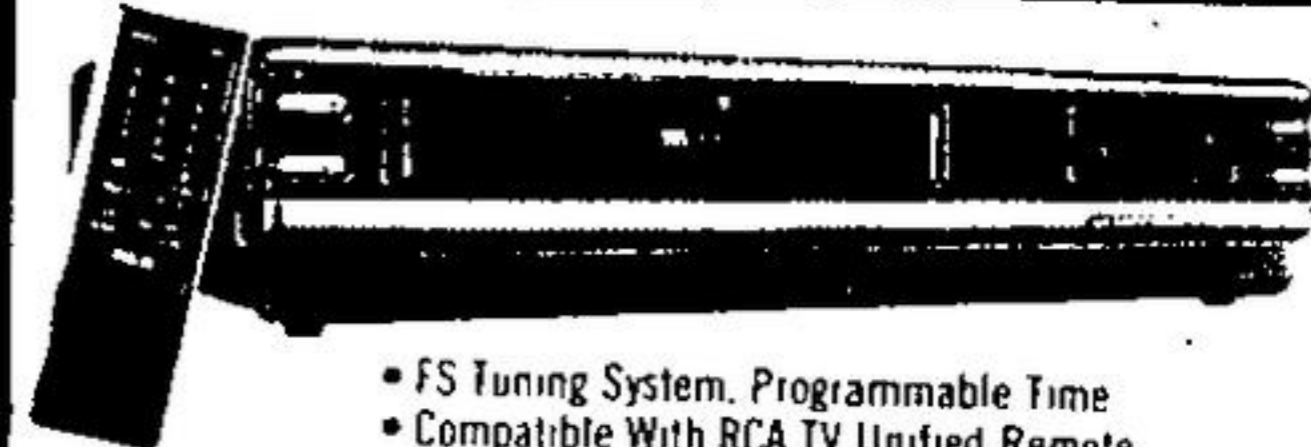


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