

Speaker addresses low number of reported sexual assaults



Natasha Alexenko spoke about ending the backlog of rape in the United States in the Laurel Forum on Nov. 7.

Photo by Tina Scruggs - Staff Writer

Statistics show large percentage of perpetrators escape justice

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Students packed into the Laurel Forum last week to listen to **Natasha Alexenko, founder of Natasha's Justice Project** and a sexual assault survivor.

Alexenko said she started Natasha's Justice Project to empower survivors of sexual assault. As a survivor herself, she said she wants to encourage people to step up. The movie *Sex Crimes Unit*, by HBO featured her story. Alexenko showed a clip of the film at her presentation.

"Sexual assault is so underreported.

Reporting it was my choice, and I didn't make it lightly," Alexenko said. "I talked about it openly in the hopes that others would be able to, because guess what – it wasn't my fault."

According to Alexenko, only 20 percent of sexual assault cases are reported. That leaves 80 percent of victims not coming forward and not saying they were assaulted.

"One in 4 girls will be sexually assaulted while in college. That's a staggering amount. Twenty-five percent is pretty scary," Alexenko said.

When a rape occurs, the victim goes to the emergency room where they undergo an invasive gynecological procedure.

This can be especially scary for girls who have not had sexual experiences. They take DNA from the victim's clothes and body and save it in a rape kit. They put the DNA into a system called the Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS. If the DNA matches with someone who committed a crime, they can figure out who the attacker was, Alexenko said.

"DNA never forgets. The mission of Natasha's Justice Project is to end the backlog of rape kits. Often they sit around in warehouses in police custody or county storage. They have not even made it to the lab for testing," Alexenko said.

The vague definition of backlog causes uncertainty, but Alexenko said she estimates there are 400,000 untested rape kits nationwide. Fifteen out of 16 rapists get away with their violent crime.

"It costs 1,000 to 1,500 dollars to test one rape kit. In a situation in Detroit, they tested 200 rape kits and found 80 matches in CODIS. In that case, they solved 2,000 crimes," Alexenko said.

According to Alexenko, rapists' crimes are not isolated to rape. They go on to commit other crimes, so eventually they will make it into CODIS and

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