



PURPLE TIE EVENT

'Pass it on': Purple Tie Event in Fleming raises money to combat domestic violence



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FLEMING | Guests decked out in varying amounts of purple walked past street lights wrapped in purple Christmas lights Friday as about 100 people gathered inside the Springside Inn's ballroom.

The mood permeating the Purple Tie Event was happy — with community members, law enforcement personnel, advocates and politicians chatting while snacking on hors

d'oeuvres and sipping cocktails.

The need driving the Friday fundraiser, however, was anything but light.

The Purple Tie Event was organized by the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Domestic Violence Intervention Program — a nonprofit organization that battles Cayuga County's high rate of domestic violence and advocates for victims.

Sarah Barnard, director of the Domestic Violence Intervention Program, said the event was organized help raise money for her agency and raise awareness about domestic violence. And considering the Purple Tie Event's high turnout, she considered the evening a success.

"We couldn't be happier," Barnard said. "We get a lot of support, and it's evident tonight."

A few feet away from the snacking guests, two Cayuga-Onondaga Board of Cooperative Educational Services cosmetology students put purple hair extensions in attendees' hair.

As she securing a lilac strand into one woman's mane, Mariah Bederka, 17, said the event gave her a chance to practice her skills while helping shed light on domestic violence.

"I think a lot of people are going through it, but no one speaks," Bederka, of Cato, said. "So we're going to raise money to help."

After guests had time to tuck into their dinners, Cayuga County Sheriff David Gould stepped onto the stage to share a few words before the start of the silent auction.

In light of the county's high rate of domestic violence assaults and homicides, Gould encouraged attendees to help spread awareness about domestic violence. He then issued a special challenge to the county's men.

"Men cause 95 to 97 percent of domestic violence incidents," Gould said. "We as men have got to stand up and stop this."

The sheriff then handed the microphone over to two Auburn families who personally know the sorrow domestic violence can wreak.

John Socci, joined by his wife, Tina, spoke first, discussing the kindness shown by the community after their daughter, Katie Socci, was fatally strangled by her ex-boyfriend in 2011.

After thanking advocates and law enforcement for fighting domestic violence, Socci encouraged attendees to spread awareness across Cayuga County.

"You're not the ones that need to be lectured on the problem of domestic violence," he said. "The only thing that we ask of you is: make the people who don't know about it, make them aware of it. Pass it on."

Colleen "Kelly" Bell spoke next, sharing a taste of what families who lose loved ones to domestic violence experience. Bell's daughter, Bridget Bell, was fatally stabbed by her ex-boyfriend in 2011.

"It's a tough situation. John and Tina's and my situation are very much the same," she said. "We're both raising children."

And with her loss in mind, Bell issued the crowd one piece of advice: if you see something, say something.

"We need to force our neighbors — when they hear something, say something," she said. "You hear it, stop it."