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Demonstrators take back the night

Women march in protest against sexual assault

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Gauntlet News

Hundreds of Calgarians gathered on Friday, Sept. 20, at Connaught Park for Take Back The Night, an annual rally to protest violence against women.

The rally began with speakers and performers. Afterwards, women marched through the streets unescorted by men to dramatize their right to walk alone safely.

“The most symbolic thing we do during the event is march through the streets,” said event organizer Christina Pyne. “Women take to the streets to symbolize their power to walk alone at night without being afraid.”

Conservative Calgary Centre MP Joan Crockatt and Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse educator Joe Campbell spoke at the event.

“Studies have been done as recently as this year that show that safe streets is still the number one issue for many Calgarians. And it’s that way across the country,” Crockatt said.

Campbell said he saw violence against women as part of a larger problem with society and was critical of how sexual assault is discussed.

“Within our culture [people are] always quick to jump to what women did wrong,” Campbell said. “We need to start paying more attention to the people who are choosing to commit these crimes.”

Sept. 20 marked the 31st Take Back The Night event held in Calgary, with the first held in 1982. The event has come a long way since then. Wary of a political fallout, organizers of the first Take Back The Night Calgary decided against getting parking and traffic permits, leading to several arrests for “stunting” — the term used for the traffic violations.

Downtown business owner Nick Doikas said the rally is good for the downtown core, as it is often the site of sexual assaults.

“Having an anti-rape rally held in the Beltline area of Calgary, I can understand the breadth and scope as to why they have chosen the location that they have,” Doikas said. “Having worked in the area for almost four years, I personally see the dangers that present themselves at night.”

The first ever Take Back The Night event was held in Philadelphia in 1975 after Susan Alexander Speeth was stabbed while walking home. Since then, Take Back The Night has been a grassroots movement in hundreds of cities around the world. It has expanded to protest against many types of violence against women, including sexual assault and domestic abuse.

Boys and Girls Club trauma therapist Susan Brant has attended Take Back The Night rallies for the past several years. She said the need for an organized women’s movement is greater than ever.

“As someone who went through the original women’s movement, we need to have this rally,” Brant said. “The notion of women having equal opportunity, equal presence and equal voice is still one that is challenged by the predominant patriarchal culture that we find ourselves in.”

The event finished with a “speak out” where participants shared their experiences with gender-based violence.