

Feb 15, 2008

White Ribbon Day a matter of the heart

Mayor urges pledge to stand against violence

WORCESTER— Red is the traditional color for Valentine's Day, but this year white was the color of choice at City Hall.

At a gathering in the mayor's office, Feb. 14 was proclaimed White Ribbon Day, in recognition of the statewide project of the Men's Initiative for Jane Doe Inc. and efforts to speak out about violence against women, sexual assault and domestic violence.

"On Valentine's Day, I like to use the holiday as a point of reference for other events and more serious issues for the city," Mayor Konstantina B. Lukes said.

"Gathered here are people who are working every day to end violence against women," Mrs. Lukes said. "I invite everyone to take the pledge, wear a ribbon and do your part to end violence."

According to the Web site www.janedoe.org, the White Ribbon campaign was founded and launched in Canada in 1991, two years after 14 women students at the Montréal's Ecole Polytechnique were killed and 13 other students wounded by a lone gunman. According to organizers, White Ribbon Day is a worldwide campaign in 47 countries.

"Valentine's Day is recognized as a day of love and respect for our love partner, rather than one of abuse and violence," said Ginger L. Navickas, director of the Daybreak program of the YMCA of Central Massachusetts.

District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr. said the day was an opportunity for men to come together and see each other as a force.

"In our job, we've seen twice as much violence and domestic abuse in 2007 as we did in 2006," the district attorney said. "We need to do more to educate and take a stand to say this ends now."

"Much like the district attorney, the probation and family court see a lot of violence," said Stephen G. Abraham, register of Worcester Probate and Family Court. "Every day should be White Ribbon Day. Not just on Valentine's Day, but every day forward."

Evan Graber, a clinical outpatient coordinator at YOU Inc. and co-chairman of Males Advocating Change, spoke to the group at City Hall after attending a ceremony at the Statehouse in Boston earlier in the day.

"I took the pledge for my wife and three daughters and to make this a safer world for all children," Mr. Graber said. "It is not manly to be intimidating. We have to understand that masculinity is not synonymous with violence. This is not just a woman's issue. It is as important as the scores on your golf card."

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