

Amesbury: A day to wear white / Ribbons symbolize stand against domestic violence

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Red was a popular color to wear yesterday. And so was white.

Valentine's Day marked the first year that Massachusetts has taken part in an international campaign to draw attention to the problem of domestic violence and to urge people to take a stand against it. Locally, more than 2,000 people joined the cause.

Gov. Deval Patrick and state officials all wore ribbons during a ceremony to mark Massachusetts' participation in "White Ribbon Day." Locally, the small pins could also been seen on the lapels and shirts of many, from town officials to students to businesspeople.

Mayor Thatcher Kezer sported one, and so did the tellers at the local banks. Employees at the local courts pinned one to their outfits and so did teachers.

"Everyone over here has got them on," Amesbury Detective Robert Wile said.

Wile coordinated the regional effort to join in "White Ribbon Day," a program sponsored by Jane Doe Inc., an organization that formed in 1991. The campaign urges "men of good heart" to put on a ribbon to show their stance against domestic violence and abuse of women. Women are also urged to wear the ribbon to demonstrate their support for the cause.

At Amesbury High School, teachers Tom Horn and Maggie Furlong spearheaded the effort to have all students and faculty wear a white ribbon. Amesbury Academy students made their own ribbons and dropped them off at local businesses and Town Hall, asking employees to hand the ribbons out to customers.

Wearing his own ribbon as he bought coffee at J. Buck's Espresso & Wine Bar, Ryan McGee, 17, a student at the Amesbury Academy of Strategic Learning, said he wore one to show support for the work of the Amesbury Police Department and that he's against domestic violence

"Everyone that's come in has asked about them," said J. Buck's employee Rachel Pare, 22.

Also on display at the coffee shop was a sign with the "white ribbon pledge" — that by wearing the ribbon, users show their vow never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

After reading more about it, Pare said, customers took a ribbon to wear.

Tellers at the Provident Bank shared a similar story. A display inside the front lobby had a pile of ribbons at the start of the day, and by early afternoon about 15 to 20 customers had taken one. Others also made donations to the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center.



*Debra Provost, left, and Diana Roix of Greenery Designs rush to prepare flowers for Valentine's Day delivery and pickup, but still took time to hand out white ribbons to customers of the shop.
Bryan Eaton/Staff photo*

Kelly Dunn, associate director at the Geiger Center in Amesbury, said the organization has been "overwhelmed" with calls asking about the White Ribbon Day and asking to get involved. Calls ranged from churches asking for ribbon supplies to hand out to parishioners to local banks, she said.

"There's been a warm response," she said. Dunn said she believes the state plans to make the campaign an annual event, and that across Massachusetts there has been a big response. Domestic violence homicides in Massachusetts have dramatically risen since last year, Dunn noted.

Wile, who monitors domestic violence cases in Amesbury, asked each of the police departments involved in the High Risk Team to participate. Every staff member at seven area departments — Newburyport, Amesbury, Salisbury, Rowley, West Newbury, Newbury and Merrimac — agreed to wear a ribbon yesterday.

Sgt. Patty Fisher of the Newbury police said the program was met with 100 percent enthusiasm by every officer and dispatcher at that department.

"Any time that, especially in a small town, we can show the community that we do comprehensive investigations on domestic violence, regardless of gender of the perpetrator or victim, we'll take the opportunity to show the community we're on board with that campaign," Fisher said.

Fisher said the majority of the domestic violence calls that Newbury police receive come from within a house, rather than a neighbor complaining of noise — something that suggests domestic violence is going unreported and may be more prevalent than realized.

"White Ribbon Day really struck a chord," Fisher said. "It's another opportunity to send the message to those not reporting it that we are on board with thorough investigations and prosecution. Police departments used to just have one domestic violence officer. Now we like to think of it that every responding officer is a domestic violence officer...Everybody on every shift is trained and aware of the services that are available."

Wile ordered 2,000 ribbons, many of which were grabbed from in store displays. Students at Amesbury Academy made many more to distribute.

"I've seen a lot of them on," Wile said. "It will only get bigger from here."

He plans to coordinate next year's campaign with more volunteers, he said, and expand it to include local restaurants and more businesses. He envisions a local ceremony next year that would resemble the ceremony at the State House.

Feedback has been positive, Wile said. "(People say) 'it's about time there's been something like this; it should be more than one day.'"

At Amesbury High School, English teacher Patty Hoyt said she strongly urged her students to take part in the day.

Seniors also discussed the topic of domestic violence in her literature class yesterday, using two novels, "Death of a Salesman" and "The Great Gatsby," each which has an incident of domestic violence in it.

A volunteer at the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, Hoyt said the issue of domestic violence must be confronted and discussed.

"Awareness is definitely the first step," she said.