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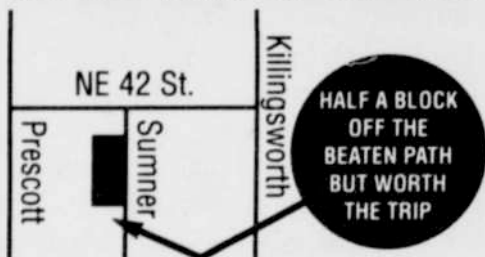
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CULTURE

Takin' it to the streets

PSU Women's Resource Center takes back the night

BY KELLY WALLACE

Every two minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted," according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. "In 2001, there were 249,000 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault. One out of every six American women have been victims of rape in their lifetime."

Those statistics suck, and the Women's Resource Center at Portland State University plans to help combat them with Take Back the Night, a rally and march May 8 in the South Park Blocks. The organization's mission is to "speak out about violence against women in our community, specifically sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking."

The event will begin with a march through downtown, culminating at Smith Memorial Center with speakers, Portland spoken word/hip hop performance duo Womb Dialectic, and dyke musician and lesbian spoken word artist Evalyn Parry.

Held in communities nationwide, Take Back the Night began as a way for women to combat sexual violence. The marches originated in England, with the first U.S. rally held in San Francisco in 1978.

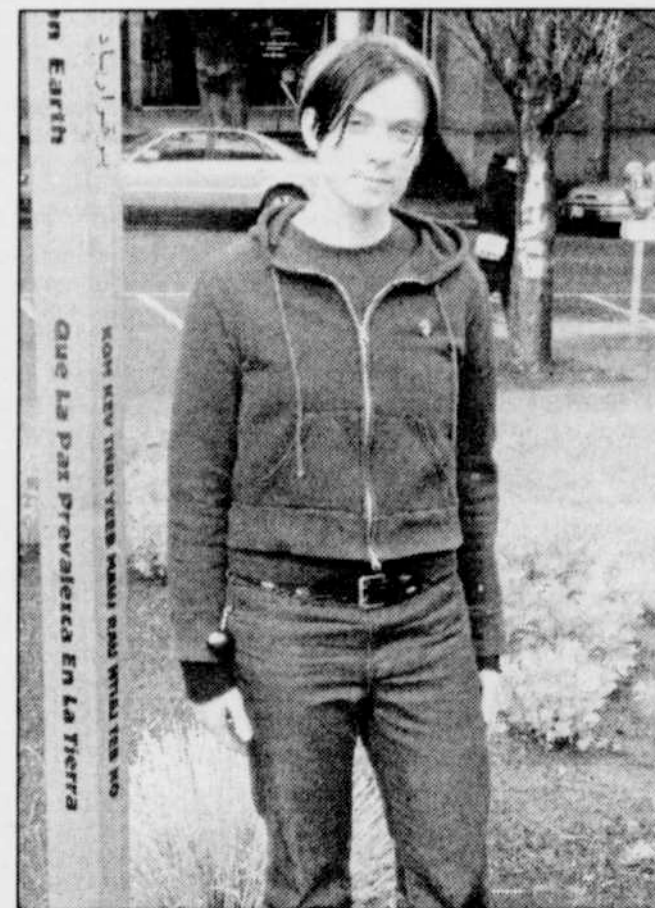
About 200 people participated in last year's event, according to Women's Resource Center student intern and event coordinator Page Morrison. "We hope to double that this year, but it's pretty unpredictable."

PSU students are generally the primary attendees, but the event is open to the public. Several community organizations—including the Middle Eastern Women's Resource and Empowerment Center, the Portland Women's Crisis Line, Portland Community College and the President's Commission on the Status of Women—also will be participating.

A junior sociology major, Morrison has been volunteering at the resource center for two years. She attended last year's Take Back the Night and decided to take on organizing it this year.

After hearing Womb Dialectic perform live a few months ago and listening to Parry on CD, she decided she'd like to invite them to perform. "Music and spoken word can be important parts of activism...I think the people we selected are really powerful," says Morrison, who is a lesbian.

Parry uses spoken word as a forum to speak out about queer and women's issues. The Canadian came out 10 years ago in high school and says "every new occasion of 'outing' myself still



Page Morrison encourages women to Take Back the Night

seems to come with this rush of indignation and adrenaline and excitement."

Morrison believes Take Back the Night attendees will get a lot out of the performances. "People can relate to them because they have a universal message that isn't necessarily aimed at activists," she notes.

Speakers for the event will talk about local and national sexual assault and domestic violence legislation for the "Safe Kit." Morrison says a bill that will soon be introduced to the Oregon Legislature, if passed, would create a fund through the attorney general's office to pay for rape kits. Currently, law enforcement pays for the kits. The funds would not be created from taxes but from fines collected.

Morrison's ultimate goal for Take Back the Night is for supporters to take away more of an awareness of sexual assault and domestic violence issues. **jm**

TAKE BACK THE NIGHT starts with a rally and march at 7:30 p.m. May 8 in the South Park Blocks between Southwest Park and Ninth avenues.

KELLY WALLACE is a Portland free-lance writer.

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