

Action, Demanded

ANNUAL 'WEAR ORANGE' EVENT IN SPRINGFIELD RECOGNIZED SURVIVORS OF AND LIVES TAKEN BY GUN VIOLENCE

By Brianna Murschel

Sounds of the flowing Willamette River splashed in the background as a sea of orange flooded Island Park in Springfield. The community joined Moms Demand Action on June 3 wearing shirts stating “Wear Orange” and “We Can End Gun Violence.”

The 100 or so participants wore orange, the color hunters wear to avoid getting shot, in honor of the more than 40,000 Americans killed by guns each year.

It was a conversation in a Facebook group about reducing gun violence the day after the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in 2012 that sparked the largest grassroots movement in the country. Now known as Moms Demand Action, and with a chapter in every state, the organization has gained over 10 million supporters and has partnered with Everytown, the country's largest gun prevention organization.

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof murdered nine African Americans while they bowed their heads to pray in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. This woke up Diane Peterson, a group leader of Moms Demand Action in Oregon, and she sprang into action.

She was “shocked at the violence and hate of that event,” Peterson says. “This problem was not going to go away, and, in fact, was getting worse. And that we needed to do something about it. And ‘we’ included me.”

In her hometown of Moneta, Virginia, two journalists were killed on live television in August 2015. “It was at this point that I realized the violence was not going to stop without our collective action,” Peterson says. “I wrote my first letter to my senators, and I joined Moms Demand Action in Eugene. Action was my antidote to despair.”

The sun shone upon 600 orange flags representing 600 lives in the U.S. lost to mass shootings in 2022 as the breeze wove between each remembered life. Peterson orchestrated the local “Wear Orange” event, with speakers standing before the community spreading awareness and personal experiences impacted by gun violence.

“We are the NRA’s worst nightmare,” Peterson told the crowd.

The gathering started with a land acknowledgment expressing a “shared space for everyone” in Lane County. Julie Lambert, a community member and emcee, then explained what “Wear Orange” stands for.

June 2 is National Gun Violence Awareness Day. “Wear Orange” events took place throughout the country around that day. Lambert told of how Hadiya Pendleton was shot and killed at the age of 15 a week after marching in President Barack Obama’s second inaugural parade. Pendleton’s friends commemorated her life by wearing the color orange.

Speakers included Oregon state Sen. James Manning, Eugene City Councilor Matt Keating, Lane County Commissioner Laurie Trieger, NAACP Eugene Springfield branch President Miles Pendleton, Everytown Network spokesperson McKay Sohlberg and Pacific Northwest Families Circle representative Barbara Kenny. A few others, including Springfield City Councilor Kori Rodley and mental health advocate and National Alliance

on Mental Illness Lane County Board President Daniel Isaacson, who lost a friend to a police shooting, stood up and discussed gun violence prevention.

Rodley said her “blood was boiling” and “brain was screaming” when her kindergarten child told her about the active shooter drill they were practicing. Since the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, 380 school shootings have occurred and more than 352,000 students have experienced gun violence at school.

Police violence is one aspect of gun violence. Kenny lost her child, Stacy Kenny, on March 31, 2019, when Springfield police shot and killed Stacy after failing to de-escalate the situation. Kenny stood among friends, family and community members to tell her story and to represent other families who have experienced police injustice.

“For everyone that dies, they leave a family behind,” Kenny said.

Kenny and her family tabled for the Pacific Northwest Family Circle organization.

Behind the table, pictures of those lost from police violence hung on a poster. Barbara Kenny and her daughter, Kim Kenny, marked the names of the victims in hearts with different colored chalk on the sidewalk.

Other groups included Church Women United of Lane County, Community Rights Lane County, Transponder, SAfER (Springfield Alliance for Equity and Respect), Everytown Survivor Network, hope & safety alliance, SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) and Cascade Health.

Anne Wright works with Cascade Health and was a student at Umpqua Community College during the 2015 shooting. “People moved on so quickly,” but it’s still current, and gun violence is a part of our health and well-being, she says.

May marked the 25th anniversary of the Thurston High School mass shooting in Springfield, which was commemorated at the June 3 event. News articles about the shooting were plastered on a poster with the date labeled above it and a table filled with more stories. The “Wear Orange” event also provided an

Oregon Gun Violence Victims and Survivors Wall of Remembrance where participants could write an action they demand as well as honor victims and survivors. Someone wrote, “I demand gun safety legislation,” and another wrote, “I want my kids to be safe at school.” Others wrote about why they wear orange and who they are memorializing.

Singer and songwriter John Shipe serenaded the crowd with the country song “Broken Halos” and his own song, “Thoughts and Prayers.” Someone had reached out to him to sing this song for Moms Demand Action because it describes gun violence trauma taken to the limit. He picked his guitar. The crowd settled down as Shipe started to sing, “Send me your thoughts. Send me your prayers.” For about four minutes, all attention was set on him. A few shed tears and others held their loved ones close.

“We wanted this to be a community-wide event across Eugene and Springfield and surrounding areas, and we wanted diverse participation,” Peterson says. “Seeing the way this whole community came together to make this event happen has been really uplifting, energizing, inspiring, and it gives me that feeling of hope.” ■

To join the next Moms Demand Action member meet-up, text EVENTS to 64433; volunteer to support elections, legislation, event planning and more by texting COMMIT to 64433; download the app “Demand Action,” and learn more about gun violence and solutions at EverytownResearch.org.

**‘For everyone that dies,
they leave a family behind.’**

—BARBARA KENNY,

MOTHER OF STACY KENNY WHO WAS SHOT
AND KILLED BY SPRINGFIELD POLICE IN 2019

