

## **Take Back the Night**

*Sara Grimbly, Sheridan Sun Online*

The fearless faces of the women and children who walked the dark streets of Oakville on the evening of September 14 were illuminated by candlelight. They walked together, without the accompaniment of men. Although their march had no destination, they walked with purpose.

Oakville's 16<sup>th</sup> annual *Take Back the Night* event, hosted by the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services (SAVIS) of Halton, took place at Coronation Park.

*Take Back the Night* is an international awareness-raising event that began in Germany in 1973. Every September, in many countries worldwide, women and children march to symbolically demonstrate their right to live without fear of violence in their lives.

One autumn evening every year, members of the Halton community, both men and women of all ethnicities and from all walks of life, gather to inspire positive action against sexual violence in our community.

"We have a reason to be here tonight," asserted Dr. Pamela Appelt, Canada's first Afro-Canadian female judge, Canadian Court of Citizenship, referring to recent statistics of violence against women in her address to the audience. The keynote speaker of the evening, Dr. Appelt reported that between 1994 and 2003, 630 Canadian women were murdered by their spouses.

SAVIS of Halton also reported that in 2005, there were 175 reported cases of sexual assault against women in Halton.

"Women's fears reflect an unfortunate reality. Tonight is a response to that reality," affirmed Nicole Pietsch, a counsellor at SAVIS of Halton, as she addressed the approximately 100 audience members at the event.

Participants filled the seats in Coronation Park at dusk to take in the numerous musical performances, poetry readings, and inspirational speeches.

One of the speakers of the night, Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale, shared a personal account of an attempted physical attack she evaded while walking alone through an alleyway when she was 14 years old.

"I want a world, a province, a town where no one believes that they are an easy target," Mulvale said.

SAVIS of Halton is a non-profit organization with a mandate to provide free, confidential and non-judgemental support to all survivors of sexual violence.

Trained counsellors can be reached at the organization's 24-hour crisis line at (905) 875-1555. For more information, visit [www.savisofhalton.org](http://www.savisofhalton.org).