

November 14, 2008
Spirals marches against rape
Neal Ross | Sonoma Valley Sun

With candles and song, nearly 200 people last night sought to bring light to the dark place in Boyes Hot Springs where a woman was raped last week.

“Feel how powerful our collective voice is ... in changing this place where so much pain has happened,” Teresa Rousseau, director of the Earth Dance Circle healing center on Highway 12, told the crowd as they gathered in the 300 block of Vallejo Avenue.

A neighbor watched from an enclosed patio as the group chanted, “I am sending you light to heal you, to hold you – I am sending you light to hold you in love.” Individual voices occasionally rose above the soft harmonies, calling out “compassion,” “togetherness,” “perseverance,” “we won’t take it,” with a member of the crowd translating each statement into Spanish.

The march, which began just after 5 p.m. at Barking Dog Roasters on Highway 12, was a response to the Nov. 6 sexual assault of a 28-year-old woman. The woman was walking by herself around 9 p.m. when a man wearing a mask and wielding an eight-inch kitchen knife pulled her off the road and into the brush, according to Det. Sgt. Dave Thompson of the county’s Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Unit.

The suspect is described as having a stocky build with wide shoulders and a deep voice. He spoke English without a discernable accent and was wearing a dark-colored, hooded sweatshirt, blue denim jeans and a “Mike Myers”-style mask from the movie “Halloween.”

Thompson said Tuesday that detectives have been conducting witness interviews and checking local surveillance systems. He asked anyone with information about the case to call the Sheriff’s Department at 707.565.2650.

Dmitra Smith, who lives across the street from the crime scene, sent an email Monday to everyone she knew and “it just started circulating” – and drew 20 people that night to Barking Dog for a planning session.

“I know in that situation you probably feel like you’re alone and no one cares,” Smith said last night before the march. “And so I really wanted to say no – there’s people here and we care, and we’re not going to let this happen in our community. If [the woman] knows what we’re doing, I hope that at least it might give some measure of feeling supported – that she’s not alone.”

Fliers calling for a march were circulated around the neighborhood in English and Spanish – the latter, Smith said, thanks to Vineyard Workers Services – and people began gathering outside Barking Dog shortly before 5 p.m. to light candles and make posterboard signs bearing such slogans as “Real men don’t rape – stop the violence” and “What part of no don’t you understand?”

The crowd was an eclectic mix of young and old, wealthy and working-class, Anglo and Latino. Ellen LaBruce, executive director of the La Luz Center in Boyes Hot Springs, said her organization was “trying to make a statement on the safety of all women – not just the ones who are registered to vote.”

“We can come forward and make a statement and be part of the procession, where some women who are among our clients might not feel that they can be outspoken about things like this.”

LaBruce said. “Many women here, myself included, have been victims of abuse and assault in the past, and so all of us have something we can draw from in order to empathize with her.”

At 5:15 p.m, as stars began winking overhead, the candlelit assembly streamed south down the east side of Highway 12 singing “In the darkness, we walk with light.” The line of marchers stretched from the Barking Dog to Calle del Monte, where the marchers turned east, after drawing waves and one or two honks from northbound Highway 12 commuters. Smith and the Rev. Tim Boeve walked in front, bearing a large banner that said “We stand together to stop violence in our community – in the darkness we walk with light.”

After pausing for about 15 minutes at the crime scene, the marchers continued north and west on Vallejo Avenue. They stood at the corner of Vallejo Avenue and Highway 12 for a few minutes, then returned to the Barking Dog lot for a final circle and song.

Smith again thanked everyone – “If we can do this, what else can we do?” – and suggested that they take their candles home.

“Put it in your window,” she said. “And keep it burning.”