

Berryville walk Saturday to aid Laurel Center

By VAL VAN METER

The Winchester Star

BERRYVILLE — Neither rain, nor more rain, nor even more rain will stop the eighth annual Walk for Women, set for 9 a.m. Saturday at Chet Hobert Park in Berryville.

The event is sponsored by The Laurel Center, which offers a safe haven for victims of domestic violence and supports them to find a new life.

Cindy Marzullo, the center's director of development, said participants will turn out in rain boots, ponchos and umbrellas — if the weather calls for it — to take to the two-mile walking trail at the park in support of the shelter and to raise awareness of the issue of domestic violence.

The Winchester area could see as much as two inches of rain through Sunday night, with the heaviest precipitation occurring Friday into Saturday, according to a city press release on Thursday.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Marzullo noted, stating that one in every four women in the United States will be a victim of domestic violence at some time in her life.

That statistic holds true in this area, she added.

That is one reason for the walk, said Laurel Center board member Joyce Stabile.

"We've got to get the awareness out that there is help," she said.

"We shelter between 150 and 170 victims of domestic violence a year," Marzullo said.

The center, however, aids many more than it can bring in under its roof.

"We help them work up a safety plan," Marzullo said of those who can't be placed at the current shelter — an older two-story building that can only handle 14 residents.

However, she added, the center will try to find other accommodations for victims, perhaps with a friend or relative or with another shelter outside the area.

"We will try to find them a safe place to stay."

The walk will raise funds for the daily operation of the center, Marzullo said.

After Jan. 1, the center expects to launch a \$2 million campaign to complete and furnish its new building on North Cameron Street, which will be able to shelter 40 people and also allow room for staff.

But shelter is only a small part of the center's mission, according to board member Michelle LaPorte.

A clinical social worker, LaPorte counsels victims of domestic violence in her Winchester practice.

And she can speak from personal experience, as she suffered through a domestic abuse situation 24 years ago.

While physical abuse can be obvious, mental and verbal abuse is much more difficult to detect, LaPorte said, and it takes "a lot of support and a lot of time" to overcome.

The center offers counseling, advice and referrals for other needed services.

“ It is sad,” said Marzullo, to hear some of the stories victims of domestic violence can tell. It is also very gratifying to be part of the “success stories,” of those who get psychological help, get out of the abusive situation, find a job and move on with their lives.

Producing more success stories is the reason for Saturday’s Walk for Women.

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and fees are \$ 25 for individuals, \$125 for a team of up to six walkers, and \$10 for children age 6 to 12.

To preregister, contact The Laurel Center at 540-667-6160.

— Contact Val Van Meter at vvanmeter@winchesterstar.com



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Good dog, good cause

Katie Moffit walks her dog, Tucker, as they take part in The Laurel Center's eighth annual Walk to End Domestic Violence on Saturday morning in Chet Hobert Park in Berryville. Despite the rain, about 50 people participated. Proceeds from the event will benefit The Laurel Center in Winchester, which helps victims of domestic violence. A fundraising tally from the walk was not immediately available.