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UD, Newark addressing safety issues

Security guidelines to be issued to city landlords

MICHELE BESSO

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By MICHELE BESSO The News Journal

NEWARK - Newark and University of Delaware police said they are working to improve safety and security on campus and off campus. But at a Wednesday night UD meeting, students and the parents of slain university sophomore Lindsey M. Bonistall said more needs to be done.

Mark Bonistall and his wife, Kathleen, drove from White Plains, N.Y., to attend a conversation about safety and security sponsored by the city's Town & Gown Committee. The committee, composed of city and UD officials and other community members, addresses issues affecting the campus and the community.

More than 50 people attended the meeting. The purpose was to learn about the city's highest safety priorities and come up with new ways to address concerns.

"Unfortunately, we've had some serious crimes over the past year, including break-ins [burglaries, home invasions] and a very serious homicide," said Town & Gown Chairman Ron Smith.

Lindsey Bonistall was killed in May when she was raped and strangled in her Towne Court apartment before it was set on fire. Her attacker got into her home by breaking in through a locked sliding-glass door. James E. Cooke Jr. was arrested and charged with her rape and murder.

Setting safety standards

Mark Bonistall said in the next 30 days he plans to issue a list of safety standards for landlords. The university will keep a list of those certified off-campus housing facilities on its Web site.

James Flatley, chief and director of UD's Public Safety Department, said after Bonistall's death, "we knew we had a responsibility to on- and off-campus students to alleviate concerns."

The department expanded its student escort program to include off-campus areas, and recently hired student police cadets to patrol during busy times. As a result, the number of escorts rose from 3,943 during fiscal 2005 to 6,320 between July 1 and February 2, Flatley said.

The department lists crimes on its Web site and those interested can sign up for instant notification by e-mail if they complete a form at www.udel.edu. More than 800 people have signed up for the alerts.

After the Town & Gown Committee posted a safety survey online this month, most respondents said they felt fairly secure on campus, Smith said.

Katie Johnson, who lived on the same floor with Bonistall freshman year, said she still lives in fear. "Mostly freshmen responded to that survey and they are not impacted by the homicide like off-campus students that went through the tragedy. The survey is skewed in that regard," Johnson said.

Contact Michele Besso at 324-2386

or mbesso@delawareonline.com.

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