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Student's dad wants to make UD safer

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NEWARK - Mark Bonistall wants to make sure that no other parent goes through what he did.

His daughter, University of Delaware sophomore Lindsey M. Bonistall, was killed last May when she was raped and strangled at 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.

Now the slain student's father is turning his grief into action through PEACE OUTside CAMPUS, The Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation, which he established to help make college campuses safer nationwide.

And he's starting at the University of Delaware.

"The trauma began here and ... this will be a good starting point," he said.

Bonistall drove from White Plains, N.Y., to speak about the foundation during the first Newark Town & Gown Committee meeting of the semester. The committee, composed of city and UD officials - as well as a student, landlord, renter and resident - addresses issues affecting the campus and the community.

Also in the aftermath of Bonistall's slaying, Newark City Council on Monday will vote on a new Secure Apartment Program that would allocate \$25,000 in community development money to help rental-apartment owners install upgraded locks, sliding glass door bars, peepholes, auto-locking entrance doors, security lighting and other safety measures. If approved, landlords could start applying for the money Dec. 1.

Council also will vote on an ordinance to require the safety measures in all new apartments.

"It takes 10 seconds to break open a sliding glass door, I had no idea, even when it's locked," Mark Bonistall said.

He met with a group of landlords before the meeting to talk about a proposal for the foundation and police to assess off-campus housing units every 60 days to make sure they're complying with the safety measures.

In return, the university would keep a list of certified off-campus housing facilities on its Web site.

The program could start in a few weeks.

"Public safety and the foundation will conduct an initial visit and follow-up assessment with the police department," Bonistall said. "Then we'll grant recertification."

Apartments take measures

At Towne Court, where Bonistall was killed, and Park Place apartments, new security bars have been placed on the windows and sliding glass doors, a chain lock has been added to the apartment doors, and exterior lighting has been upgraded. But the main doors to the apartment buildings remain unlocked.

"It's a start," said Bruce Harvey, president of the Newark Landlord Association. "If the landlords buy into it, I don't see why it couldn't expand or grow" to include all off-campus housing.

Hal Prettyman, a Town & Gown Committee member and landlord who rents several single-family homes near campus to students, said he thinks Bonistall's ideas about making off-campus housing safer were well received.

"From a landlord standpoint, we're always concerned about safety," Prettyman said. "We're going to back and review our stuff. [After the killing], we got telephone calls from parents to upgrade our lighting and locks."

Empowering students

Bonistall urged the Town & Gown Committee to establish focus groups of students and community members to identify the particular needs of tenants. He also suggested joint "community watches" of students and residents to enhance security within neighborhoods.

"Lindsey's friends are here, and that's a foot in the door," Bonistall said. "We want to open their [students'] minds."

The PEACE OUTside CAMPUS foundation will focus on educational programs on and off college campuses.

The foundation's mission is to empower students and their families to be more proactive in safeguarding themselves.

"We recognize what happened was very tragic and a random act of violence," Bonistall said. "The safety and security here is not in question, but how to take it to the next level."

"Lindsey did not live in fear," he added. "She was invincible. That's how college students are. They don't always make the greatest decisions based on that invincibility."

While enrollment is up at colleges nationwide, there is a dearth in on-campus housing, Bonistall said, so more students are moving off-campus.

"We want to make sure it's secure for them," he said.

"We appreciate what you're doing," Deborah Hoff, assistant university secretary and committee member, told Bonistall. "To take a tragedy and have such a positive outcome ... we'd honor Lindsey to be a part of it."

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ON THE WEB

A Web site in memory of Lindsey Bonistall can be found at www.rememberlindsey.com.

[rememberlindsey.com](http://www.rememberlindsey.com).

A Web site soon will be constructed for PEACE OUTsideCampus.

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