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Peace Outside Campus

Organization promotes off-campus security

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"Peace out" was Lindsey's big sign off, said Kristen Bonistall, Lindsey Bonistall's sister and co-founder of PEACE OUTside Campus.

The organization is dedicated to promoting safe environments in off-campus college communities not only at the university, but nationwide, following Bonistall's murder a year ago.

Recently accepted as a Registered Student Organization, PEACE OUTside Campus is meant to be a symbol of Lindsey's enthusiastic, kind and free-spirited personality, but also serves as an acronym for the organization's goals: Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Certified Off-campus housing, Empowerment, Off-campus safety, University collaboration and Trusted resource.

"We were trying to think of a way to capture our goals but also a piece of Lindsey and her memory, with the Peace Out in bold," Kristen said. "Peace is an overall concept, and it's a big one."

She said the main topics of concern include precautions students can take to protect themselves and their personal property while living in an off-campus community, how they can safeguard their apartments against those who perpetuate crime and understand their leases and their rights when it comes to landlords.

Kristen said students can learn how to protect themselves by being aware of the resources available. Such resources include the local police force, campus police and taking self-defense classes that are offered on campus and in the community.

"We don't want to scare people, we want to educate people," Kristen said. "Our goal is to empower students and their families to be more proactive in safeguarding themselves against those who perpetuate crime. It's really about 'peace of mind' for those who are living off campus."

The organization was established by Bonistall's friends and family to promote safe environments in off-campus communities for college students across the country, but with the university being its first point of interest.

"This is where Lindsey's friends are and where she went to school," Kristen said. "Also, a group of students from the university who knew Lindsey and wanted to become involved approached us."

The organization's president, junior Jon Little, said it is currently trying to focus on upperclassmen who are living off campus and to improve off-campus housing in general.

"This group is a part of the foundation that Lindsey's family started, The Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation, and one of our main goals is to start up off-campus housing that is certified by the university," Little said.

Kristen said the group would also like to become involved with the parents of college students, to help them feel comfortable with their children living off campus and make them knowledgeable about the safety measures their children should take.

These efforts include verifying the locks were changed on doors before moving into an apartment, knowing who has keys to an apartment other than the landlord and just simply keeping the door locked, even if someone is home.

"I think most students don't understand that they do not live in a bubble," Kristen said. "They are living in a community where it's a town full of college kids and things happen."

There are currently 10 students involved in PEACE OUTside Campus at the university, and 19 students involved at the University of Kentucky where Lindsey's cousin attends college. Focusing mainly on universities in the Northeast, Kristen said other colleges in Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York have expressed an interest in starting a chapter of PEACE OUTside Campus.

Mark Bonistall, Lindsey's father and co-founder of the Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation said he believes the one thing that would make the organization stronger is to have more student participation.

"The PEACE OUTside Campus chapters are only as strong as its membership," he said.

Although the organization has not yet held many activities, it held a benefit with Homegrown Cafe and Caffe Gelato May 1, in which part of the proceeds went toward PEACE OUTside Campus.

Ryan German, Caffe Gelato manager, said he was approached two weeks ago to participate in the event.

"Lindsey worked for us a short period of time last year and we just thought it was important that we supported an organization that could help prevent violence in the future," he said. "I think [the benefit] went well. People came out to support PEACE OUTside Campus to our restaurant and some of the

other places that were participating. I think that organization definitely raised some money that will help in the future."

Sasha Aber, manger of Homegrown, said the restaurant participated in the event because Lindsey worked there as well.

"It was a nice thing to do," she said. "We definitely had a lot of people come in and support [the benefit]. We donated money to the foundation as well and allowed for people to make additional donations."

In another event on Friday, PEACE OUTside Campus set up a kiosk in Trabant University Center selling T-shirts and wristbands to help raise awareness about the newly established RSO.

Both Kathleen and Mark Bonistall were present to talk with students.

Throughout the day, numerous students approached the stand and were asked by members of the organization to fill out surveys accessing their knowledge of off-campus resources and how they think safety can be improved.

PEACE OUTside Campus is actively looking for students who are interested and concerned about off-campus safety and promoting cooperation with between community and university.

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