

*The Casket*  
*Sept 16/15*

## SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

# StFX making issue high priority

EMILY HILTZ

✉ [emilyhiltz@thecasket.ca](mailto:emilyhiltz@thecasket.ca)

Last week, the largest first-year class ever – close to 1,300 students – moved into StFX and Antigonish.

Their orientation week included the usual events: X-Games, Jell-O slide, water balloon fight, talent show and society fair, but, this year one new event stood out.

On Sept. 7, a presentation on sexualized violence was held for first-year students.

Hosted by StFX and the student union, the presentation and panel discussion included RCMP constable Morgan MacPherson, student conduct co-ordinator Megan Turner; health, counseling and accessible learning director Margaret McKinnon and sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) program coordinator Heather Blackburn.

Presentations from the panel focused on the services they provide to StFX students, where to find them and how to access them.

Head of student services Bob Hale and student union vice president Hannah Stordy also posed questions for discussion to students, including what is consent and what is sexual violence.

"The answers they came back with were amazing," Hale said.

"We had a small amount of time for questions and answers afterwards and good questions [were asked] from the students. They were really engaged in the whole evening and wanted more, you could tell some of them really wanted more out of this."

While the presentation was held in the evening and a few days into orientation week, Hale said there was a good turn-

**SEE SEXUALIZED ON A7**

# Sexualized

## CONTINUED FROM A1

out for the event, estimating approximately 600 to 700 first-year students were in attendance.

"We were really happy for the first time around," Hale said.

The idea to hold an event on sexualized violence during orientation week emerged through the preventing violence against women committee and the president's colloquium on sexualized violence last winter.

An orientation week event was further encouraged in April during a documentary screening of the *Hunting Ground* and panel discussion at StFX.

"Being at the presentation of the *Hunting Ground* back in April, it became quite relevant there that we haven't been doing anything," Hale said, noting that's when he spoke up and guaranteed an event would happen during welcome week this year.

Along with holding the presentation for first-year students annually, Hale said in the future, they would also like to

offer the presentation to second, third and fourth-year students.

"I don't see why we wouldn't have it for returning students, it doesn't hurt to drive the message home again," Hale said.

"New things come up and there's new technologies and new policies and it's a subject that's not one and done for me. It's something we're going to address every year."

Blackburn said it's important to make sure they are doing



**As I said to them, I wish we weren't here talking about this, but we are and we're going to meet it head on.**

**BOB HALE**



everything they can to change the culture at StFX.

"Not that the culture at StFX is any different than any other university, but we wanted to really show that StFX is totally

engaged in having conversations about sexual violence," Blackburn said.

The SANE nurse agreed first-year students were engaged in the discussion and appeared ready to have the conversation.

"It sets a really great precedent that if we're having these conversations in the first week of school and we're committing to having ongoing conversations around sexual violence and consent, and for support for those that are subjected to sexualized violence, then we can do something to change this culture, this sexually aggressive and sexually violent culture we're all living in," Blackburn said.

Along with the welcome week event, StFX has been working on a new policy dealing with sexualized violence since December of last year through the Sexual Violence Policy Implementation Committee.

Hale said while they're still working on the new policy the plan is to have it finished within the next month to six weeks.

The university is also launching an easily accessible web page that will be "one click" from the student union home page for students seeking

resources and information on sexualized violence and what to do if they're impacted by sexual violence on campus.

Hale recognized the leadership of StFX president Kent MacDonald for helping get the presentation during orientation week off the ground.



**[To continue] all of the ways in which StFX is trying to be responsive without losing sight that prevention is the ultimate goal.**

**HEATHER BLACKBURN**



He also gave many thanks to the student union for making the sexualized violence presentation part of orientation week.

"They were on board from the very beginning," he said.

"To take a night of their busy week is huge. It's a step in the right direction."

"As I said to them, I wish we weren't here talking about this but we are and we're going to meet it head on," he added.

While StFX is making great efforts in addressing sexualized violence prevention Blackburn said she hopes the conversation continues.

"I think for me personally, StFX has made lots of great inroads, they've really committed, they have leadership that are passionate about this issue, but it does take a community of support to make a change for victims of sexual violence," Blackburn said.

She added her hope for the future is to continue having these conversations, to find opportunity to make them ongoing and to ensure faculty, staff and administration receive training on sexual violence.

"[To continue] all of the ways in which StFX is trying to be responsive without losing sight that prevention is the ultimate goal," she said.