

RISING

## Dancing, local women protest sexual violence

'The Napa Rising' part of national movement on Valentine's Day



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For millions of women, the dark flip side of romance can metastasize into physical abuse or sexual assault. But on Valentine's Day, more than 75 women gathered in Napa to join others across in the U.S. in a show of defiance toward abusers and solidarity with victims — a show driven by their light feet.

Outside the former Copia building on First Street, the dancers power-stepped their way through The

Napa Rising, one of a series of nationwide events held Thursday afternoon for the One Billion Rising observance.

"This is a day of love and appreciation of women, to show women you honor them and care about them, and it's a perfect day to make this statement," said Tracy Lamb, executive director of Napa Emergency Women's Services, the nonprofit that organized the flash mob-style pageant.

"Are we ready? One million rising!" DJ Lipton, the Napa dance's coordinator, shouted to the female crowd facing her. Clad in black leggings and red or pink shirts — the three colors of the campaign — the women slide-stepped on the asphalt, raised their arms, and occasionally whooped with energy as a loudspeaker played "Break the Chain," the dance beat-infused anthem written by Tena Clark for One Billion Rising.

In its physicality and exuberance, the dance exhibition was the perfect way for abuse survivors to express their freedom, said Aria Desjardins, one of the participants.

"I knew I had to be here, being a woman and knowing that violence (against women) is a real thing happening every day, every second of the day," said Desjardins, 27, a Napa native and Vallejo resident who received shelter with the help of NEWS two years ago while leaving a boyfriend she described as emotionally abusive.

"It's our bodies, and we can take them back; you can make a big statement with dance," said Desjardins, now a singer and songwriter. "I'm an artist so I love it."

One Billion Rising is an outgrowth of V-Day, a worldwide observance held each Feb. 14 since 1999 to raise awareness of the abuse suffered by women and girls. More than 5,800 volunteer groups organize activities including teach-ins, performances of Eve Ensler's play "The Vagina Monologues," documentary screenings and fundraisers for women's protective groups.

This year, organizers created One Billion Rising as a parallel event to encourage abuse survivors, and their friends and relatives, to use dance as an expression of fearlessness in the face of their tormentors. NEWS' participation won the support of Lipton, a Zumba dance instructor at Synergy Medical Fitness Center in Napa, who agreed to choreograph and direct the Napanes taking part on Thursday.

"The thing about this is that one in three women around the world have been raped or abused in some way," she said after the exhibition. "I've experienced some of that, and I lot of people I know also have."

Besides the joy of dancing and the mission of fighting violence, gatherings like The Napa Rising may be most valuable for assuring abused women they aren't alone, the NEWS director said.

"It's a way to get together as women and express ourselves in a way that's uplifting and brings us together, a way of showing we're in this together," Lamb said.

## **Information**

### **One Billion Rising**

[onebillionrising.org](http://onebillionrising.org)

### **Napa Emergency Women's Services**

255-6397, [napanews.org](http://napanews.org)