



Murder victim's family joins teens in stand against violence

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MOSS POINT, MS (WLOX) - They marched down main street carrying a banner with the words "stop the violence" written boldly across it. The second annual Moss Point walk against violence drew a smaller crowd than last year's, but just as much passion for peace within their city's limits.



"I wanted to involve my community, especially teenagers to come out and say this doesn't represent us as a generation," said organizer Daniel Roberts. "And we wanted to come out and battle this head on."

The march started last year after several Moss Point teenagers were accused of killing Michael David Porter, when he asked for directions to a football game. Roberts brought the walk into its second year as part of his senior project.

"The murder happened within a mile from my home, so I wanted to do something," Roberts said. "It was, you know, I feel unsafe to go outside, and it was something that really affected me dearly."

The students involved have the blessing of Porter's widow Linda and mother Beverly, who didn't expect Michael's murder to spur such a strong movement for change in Moss Point.

"It's painful always, you know, to remember," said Linda Porter, who was in the car with her husband when he was shot at a Moss Point gas station in October of 2008. "But it feels warm and good that the community reaches out, and that incident was not representative of the feelings and the attitude of the people. The people really are good caring people, and people who want to make it a better place."

Porter said the students' outpouring of support surprised her from the beginning.

"I was just totally amazed and impressed," Porter said. "I mean it was just such, not only a surprise but a pleasant surprise."

Beverly Porter, Michael's mother attended the walk for the first time this year. She said she believes the students have a big impact on their community.

"If anything good came out of his death this did, and hopefully it will save other lives," Beverly Porter said.

Moss Point Superintendent Kim Staley said he's proud the students have taken ownership of the issue of violence in their community.

"As you know there was a tragic incident that started this," Staley said. "I'm very proud of the children taking on this responsibility and letting everybody know that we have good citizens and good children in our community."

Staley said he wants the event to occur annually for years to come, and he's glad the students' enthusiasm for the cause has endured over the past year.

"It shows that the future is bright," Staley said. "You have young people that are willing to take on the issues and take on responsibility, and that they're accountable for it."

In addition to the walk, the students raised more than \$600 for the Gulf Coast Women's Center for Nonviolence. Adults said they're impressed by the students' strong stance against violent crime.

"You have, as teenagers and students said 'this is enough,'" Cindy Ward of the Center said to the crowd. "And you're saying, 'Stop!' And you're taking a stand against violence. Violence is epidemic in our community, and I'm so proud."

Last year's proceeds went to Linda Porter. She announced Saturday she donated the money to a homeless shelter for teenage boys in her hometown of Hattiesburg.

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