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- NEWS
- FEATURES ▾
- ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT ▾
- SPORTS
- OPINION ▾
- DIGITAL ISSUES
- ABOUT ▾
- ADVERTISING

## Newtown: Examining Loss Through a New Lens

🕒 March 9, 2017 👤 Chris Sumano 📁 Features 💬 0



Photo courtesy of newpaltz.edu.

*Newtown* is a chilling documentary that examines the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, changing the small Connecticut town forever after the events of Dec. 14, 2012.

On Tuesday, March 7, the James H. Ottaway Sr. Professorship in Journalism and the Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz (IDMH) hosted a screening of Kim A. Snyder’s film, followed by a panel discussion.

“In some ways it is sad that in our fast paced and accelerating world

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even the most significant and powerful events quickly move off of the headlines,” said SUNY New Paltz President Donald P. Christian before the screening. “This film and our panel this evening aim to keep this chapter, and its aftermath, in our conscience.”

Panelists for the discussion included Spring ‘17 Ottaway Visiting Professor Rob Cox, founder of the IDMH and Professor Emeritus James Halpern and Emergency Room Physician Dr. William Begg. David Wheeler, whose son was slain during the massacre, was a member of the panel as well.

Wheeler said Snyder did well to respect and capture the emotions of the town in her film. He hopes that audiences will understand that Newtown could have just as easily been any other town in America.

“I think the biggest impact, for any community that sees a film like this, is the need to understand that Sandy Hook is not a special place,” Wheeler said. “It could be any town. It could be their community. In fact, it continues to be any community and it will continue until we are able to change the direction that our society is moving in.”

Cox, a journalist and resident of Newtown at the time of the massacre, highlighted the importance of community in the aftermath of the event. The juxtaposition of his career in the media and his place in the community emphasized his need to separate himself from his career.

“I realized pretty quickly after the shooting that I couldn’t really just be a journalist there,” Cox said. “I couldn’t report the news. I was a member of the community, I had a role to play.”

Cox filled that role by helping to found Sandy Hook Promise, an organization whose mission is to prevent gun violence through activism and legislation.

“It’s had an amazing impact,” Cox said. “I’m no longer involved with Sandy Hook Promise. It is, as it was intended, now run by family members.”

Snyder’s film brings these families to the forefront of the audience’s

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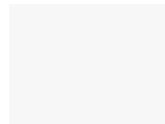
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attention and examines loss through the lens of survivors and three families who lost children in the massacre. The film shows the human element that news media did not necessarily capture.

“The idea that there are roughly 100 people who now know my son means a great deal to me,” Wheeler said in reference to attendees. “Regardless of anything else we may talk about tonight, I want to thank you for that. Thank you for having the courage to come and see this, because now you’ve heard his silly voice, his stupid jokes and seen his manic energy.”

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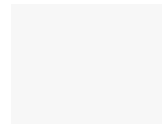
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