

Cheers to Benjamin, Family Services

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(Photo: Poughkeepsie Journal)

To Gerald Benjamin, New York's pre-eminent political scientist, who was honored recently when SUNY New Paltz renamed its Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach the Benjamin Center.

Named a professor at New Paltz in 1968, Benjamin completed his bachelor's degree at St. Lawrence University and a master's and doctoral degree at Columbia University. Over the years he's taught thousands of students, published reams of research, led the SUNY Rockefeller Institute in Albany and served as chair of the political science department and dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Since 2008, he has directed the center that now bears his name. The center works to leverage the college's research and educational strengths to serve the Hudson Valley region.

He also has directly participated in government: Benjamin served on the Ulster County Legislature from 1981 to 1993 and was chairman for two years. Gov. Mario Cuomo tapped Benjamin to be research director for a panel studying possible changes to the state constitution in the '90s; Gov. Eliot Spitzer later appointed him to a commission on local government reform, and he played a pivotal role in a process that led to restructuring of Ulster County government, including the creation of an executive position. He also once entertained the idea of running for Congress.

Congratulations, Mr Benjamin.

To Family Services for organizing the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event, where many gathered recently at the All Sport Health and Fitness Outdoor Club in Fishkill to bring awareness to domestic violence.

On average, there are between 4,500 and 5,000 domestic violence incidents reported in the county annually, according to Leah Feldman, director of domestic violence at Family Services in Dutchess County. Last year, the Family Services' hotline took roughly 4,000 calls involving domestic violence, according to organization officials. They also assisted 250 victims of reported sexual assault in the same year, officials said.

Many who attended had not been personally or directly impacted by sexual assault or domestic violence, but wanted to support the cause. A small group of employees from Nest Construction Corp. in the City of Poughkeepsie decided to participate because the owner's daughter had encouraged them.

"At school, my friend has a service project and was asking around," Amanda Beverly said. "I thought it'd be good to show support."

The men who strapped on flashy stilettos or slipped into pumps certainly felt a pain walking in women's shoes — an indirect reminder of the real pain victims of domestic violence and sexual assault experience.

"It's a good cause," Poughkeepsie resident Lorryan Pickerelo said of her choosing to attend. "And it's good to see our guys in high heels."

Well done, folks.

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