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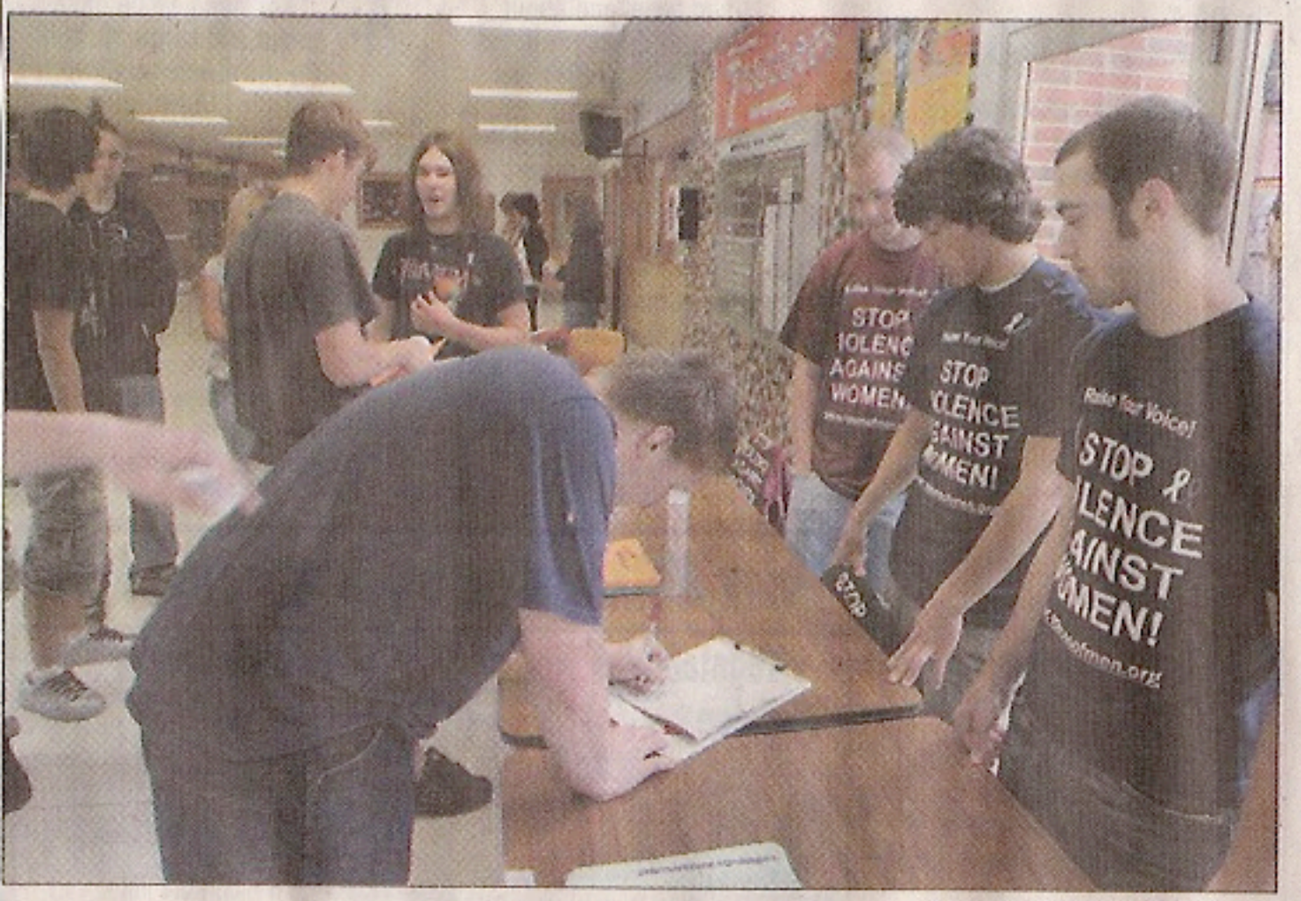
Teen group hopes to curb violence, starting in high school



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Whitehall High School student Bobby McDonald signs up to become a member of RAVE (Railroaders Against Violence Everywhere) after an anti-violence presentation Thursday morning at the school. The group was started at the beginning of the school year with five students, four of whom are graduating next month.

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opportunity for RAVE to both reveal its message and recruit new members for the group, which would otherwise disintegrate when four of its founding members graduate this June.

"We all know most men don't rape. So where are the voices of these men?" Atherton-Zeman asked the students at the beginning of the performance. "Most times, the voices of men, we tend to stay kind of quiet. If you're part of a group that is committing violence, it is your responsibility to speak up."

Throughout the presentation, images portraying the effects of domestic violence flashed across the screen of the darkened auditorium. One showed a terrified child huddled in a stairway, as his father beat his mother.

The statistics were equally startling. Every 12 seconds in the United States, a man abuses a woman. Every 2 minutes, a man rapes a woman.

But the stories that hit closest to home were those of men controlling their girlfriends by calling them incessantly, sending them hundreds of text messages and criticizing them for the way they act, dress, or look.

"I don't think there's that much actual violence in our high school," said Kelsey Carey, after the show. "But definitely, walking through the halls, you can see that there's a lot of unhealthy relationships."

Such relationships, which begin in high school, are precursors to more blatant violence, said Atherton-Zeman, who spent years working in rape crisis centers and battered women's shelters before becoming an educator.

"I think people tend to link dating violence with other forms of teen violence," he said. "And I think it's really different. It's less physical, more control. I'm dating you; I get to tell you what clothes you can and cannot wear. I get to call you fat and stupid and lazy and crazy.

"From what I hear from survivors of abuse, that kind of psychological control absolutely is a precursor to physical violence."

Judging by the number of men who stood up to recite a pledge at the conclusion of the performance — nearly all rose to their feet — RAVE's message was well-received.

Together, they promised, "I pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about men's violence against women. I choose to respect, listen to, seek equality with every person I date, and every person I know."

RAVE's founding members said they were encouraged by the 30 signatures of students who signed up to join the group this week.