

PLACE Arts & Leisure

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
 Delsea Regional H.S. presents this Disney fairytale March 14 through 17 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$8. For more information, call 694-0100.

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Inside, outside, all around the town

A rarity in the world of politics

Henry "Hank" Payne, who died recently after a formidable career in the public light, is believed to be the first African-American to serve on Swedesboro Council.

But Payne had a chance to make an even bigger impact. In 1969, two years after Gloucester County switched from its traditional "big board" to today's seven-member freeholder small

board, Payne was the first black to run for freeholder. Candidly, he didn't have much of a chance. Unfortunately, the county in 1969 wasn't ready for a black independent despite his impeccable

credentials. And because he ran as an independent, his name did not appear on the primary ballot.

The loss did not deter Payne in his quest to do plenty for his community in a very full life-

time. After serving on Swedesboro council in 1966, he was back on board for 21 years (1975-1999), the last 16 years as council president. He never served as his

community's mayor, but was an ardent supporter of long-time mayor Dave Azzari.

"The one thing he enjoyed more than anything was helping people," says MAJ Demetrius "Demi" H. Payne, Hank's son, who is operations officer for the 407th Civil Affairs Battalion in Minnesota and has served in Iraq. "He was a rarity among politicians because he was never in it for personal gain."

"Hank understood the community," says his good friend Charles "Mike" Homan, who, like Payne, has lived virtually his entire life in Swedesboro. "He was well liked by everyone. Hank accomplished a lot."

Born in 1925, Payne attended Old Swedesboro High School, played football and basketball for Joe Bona, and would have been in the Class of 1944 if he hadn't been drafted to serve in the U.S. Army. An infantryman, he saw combat during the two-and-a-half years he served in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater, received several campaign medals and

South Jersey native's true tale of abuse inspires powerful show Breaking the silence

By Allegra Tiver
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Lisa Regina will never forget that afternoon in early April 2005 when a New York City ambulance delivered her to the emergency room at Beth Israel Hospital, where she was treated

for injuries resulting from an attack by a violent man.

This was no random act, however, and the assailant was no stranger. The man was Regina's boyfriend, and that day she became a victim of domestic violence — the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 across the United States.

Fear has long silenced many of these victims, mostly women but sometimes men, who suffer alone, feeling alienated and embarrassed by the trauma they've experienced. But Regina is giving the victims of domestic violence a voice — a loud one.

The South Jersey native and graduate of New York University's theater department is blowing open the doors on the overwhelming health issue in her stage performance "A Write to Heal" —

scheduled for 7 p.m. Friday March 16 at Sterling High School.

"I was struggling with physical and emotional pain," said Regina, who couldn't move from bed following the assault and initially went to individual counseling three times a week. "As a writer and performer, it only made sense to use my writing as a way to articulate my pain."

Comprised of a collection of stories, poems and songs, the performance promises to educate the audience on issues surrounding domestic violence, describe why it's difficult for women to extricate themselves from their situations, raise awareness and offer resources.

"It's really enabled me to speak out, not just for myself, but for all women who really don't have a voice, who are living in fear in an abusive relationship or marriage."

The characters will be portrayed by working New York City actresses, donating their time and talent for a cause to which they are passionately committed.

"People are going to be moved by the music and lyrics, feel uncomfortable, wiggle in their seats listening to stories and laugh, because comedy is a great way to address a serious issue," said Regina, who coaches acting in New York City.

Several women who inspired the performance will be in the audience, said Regina, noting they would be impacted by the content as well as other attendees who have been victimized.

"Sometimes you are so tangled in it, you don't have the clarity."

"It's really enabled me to speak out, not just for myself, but for all women who really don't have a voice, who are living in fear in an abusive relationship or marriage."

— Lisa Regina

Regina said. "When you step back and view it from a distance, it can enable you to make a change."

Many people question why women being mistreated don't just leave. But deciding to leave a physically, emotionally or verbally abusive relationship is not that simple.

"There are many forms of manipulation," Regina explained. "Abusers use things as tools to keep a hold on or control over a partner."

Women may be made to believe they can't afford to leave, worry they don't have enough education, wonder what it would mean for their children, feel nervous about their immigration status and most of all fear for their own safety.

"When a woman does decide to leave, it's the most dangerous and

(See MESSAGE, Page B-2)



South Jersey native Lisa Regina, has turned her experience with domestic abuse into a therapeutic release in way of a very special stage performance.

Performers bring stories to life

Six New York City actresses in theater and/or film create the stage performance, as well as a singer-songwriter.

Ann Parker portrays "Beatrice," a woman caught in an emotionally abusive marriage for 22 years.

Migina Tsai reveals how immigration is used as the tool of control through her character, Seiko.

Rebecca Cherowka tells the story of "Stephanie," a suburban housewife.

Fran Capo, a well-known stand up comedian and Guinness Book World Record holder for the fastest-talking woman, utilizes her talent for humor in the role of "Allie."

Teenager Julie Praetzel brings attention to the increasing statistics of violence in teen dating as "Anna."

Pamela Gray exposes the frightening life of "Zahara," a woman married to an abusive drug dealer.

Alyssa Brancaccio is an emerging new artist who has been compared to Natalie Merchant. The board member of "A Write to Heal" wrote two songs for the performance in response to violence.

The Lawnside-based gospel choir "The Voices of Mt. Pisgah" will also be performing, as a display of the unity necessary to overcome domestic violence.

N.J. looks to help victims

Domestic violence does not occur at a regular frequency, but when viewed as a ratio of its occurrence to a fixed-time ratio, one act of domestic violence is committed in New Jersey every 6 minutes and 56 seconds.

There were 75,651 domestic violence offenses — 33,674 assaults and 30,603 harassment — reported in the State of New Jersey in 2005, according to the state's uniform crime report.

Overall, females were the victims in 77 percent of all the reported offenses, and alcohol and/or drugs were involved in 29 percent — alcohol alone accounting for 25 percent.

The same period in Gloucester County had 3,188 total reported domestic violence offenses and 1,152 arrests, while Camden County had 6,652 domestic violence offenses and 2,386 arrests.

NJ Domestic Violence Hotline — a 24-hour hotline for people needing immediate assistance for domestic occurrences. (800) 572-SAFE (7233).

If you go

"A Write to Heal" by Lisa Regina, a stage performance to raise awareness on domestic violence will take place Friday, March 16 at 7 p.m. at Sterling High School, at 501 S. Warwick Rd. in Somerdale.

Admission is \$10 and tickets are available by calling (646) 514-2820 or at the door. For more information, visit www.awritetoheal.com.

NJ Coalition for Battered Women — a non-profit organization whose members include statewide lead agencies serving victims of domestic violence. (609) 584-8107 or www.njcbw.org

Genesis Counseling Centers — based in Collingswood and Mt. Laurel, the group is launching the "STOP-DV" program to better serve the community and clients. It includes both training opportunities and individual/group mental wellness therapy for domestic violence victims. 234-2121 or www.genesis-centers.org.

Message: Play gives abused woman a voice

(Continued from Page B-1) frightening time. It's crippling because of the violence they're already experienced."

Such intense feelings flowed out of Regina when she began stream-of-consciousness writing as part of counseling. As she added to it, the words began to take shape as a larger sort of spoken-word creation.

Her protest poem was met with awe during group counseling sessions, where women were so moved they expressed their own desire to communicate their feelings on paper. Regina was inspired to start the non-profit domestic violence organization "A Write to Heal."

Each week, nearly a dozen women come together in New York City to write, share stories and give and receive support. It also serves as a resource to guide women toward health and legal services.

The group's Web site presents an alternate venue for women to express themselves safely and anonymously. Still in therapy, Regina noted the creative healing program enhances, not replaces, professional treatment.

"Meeting these women and



Staff photo by Tim Hawk

South Jersey native Lisa Regina, right, claps along with the Voices of Mt. Pisgah choir, during a rehearsal for "A Write to Heal." Regina is the writer, director and performer in the play — a collection of short stories, poems and music emerging from the true writings of domestic violence survivors.

hearing their stories, it has raised awareness for me personally," Regina said. "I started to see faces reflective of the great numbers, the diversity of women of different ethnicities, social and economic status."

For Regina, the tremendous response both the group and performance have received represents an evolution of collective traumatic experiences into a powerful opportunity to educate the masses.

Various groups, including the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women, have not only shown support but expressed interest in integrating writing into their programs.

The show's July debut, two

Center Stage Theater in midtown Manhattan, sold out and received standing ovations.

"It was the first time I stood up and spoke out," Regina said. "It was difficult, but empowering."

Filomena's Restaurant on Almonesson Road in Deptford is inviting mayors from Camden and Gloucester County to an awareness-building dinner (donated by the establishment) at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 15. Mayors can R.S.V.P. at (646) 514-2820.

Genesis Counseling Centers, based in Collingswood and Mt. Laurel, is holding a support session after the performance on March 16 to address any issues the audi-

ence may have as well as provide resources for area residents.

"That's why I'm bringing it home — to my family, my friends, my community — because this happened to me," Regina said. "Mayors, principals and social workers need to know people are struggling on a daily basis."

Still going through the legal matters surrounding her own experience, Regina is working toward a domestic violence certification and is committed to spreading the word and changing the world.

"Change can only come if we start to speak out," Regina said. "You can't put a blanket over it. It's here and it's real."

Athletics: Group marks 50 years

(Continued from Page B-1) Valley residents" who would combine efforts to organize the A.A.

Although he wasn't a charter member, commissioner emeritus Margie recalls the first A.A. committee meeting

"Mr. Goodie" Massington and Eugene J. McCaffrey Sr.

U.S. Marine Margie, who was commissioner for 30 years and highly respected midget baseball coach for 30, will be one of the toastmasters at the reunion events.

roles and continued the tradition of a small cadre of early volunteers/pioneers."

Margie wrote the mission statement for the A.A. It read, in part:

"Our programs thrive best when we insist upon good