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Comedic one-man performance tackles tough issues

by Paul Campbell
ATHENAEUM STAFF

Social awareness met vaudeville yesterday afternoon in the Mountainlair food court.

Educational entertainer Bill Ross was on hand to perform "Last Call ... A Sobering Look at Alcohol Abuse." The presentation was a comedic performance of juggling, balance and music along with monologues on the dangers of alcohol abuse.

Ross' one-man show is part of the many events under West Virginia University's POWER 2000 week (Providing Others With Educational Resources). The week, made possible by the combined efforts of several WVU organizations, is designed to inform students of the dangers of alcohol, drugs and sexual assault.

"It's a vaudeville show that deals with a lot of these issues, but basically it's an alcohol and sexual violence program," Ross said before his act. "It's wild stuff that keeps people interested," he said. "I do a lot of things with the juggling metaphorically. You just have to see it."

Ross began by trying unsuccessfully to balance several objects at one time, including a ladder, on his chin. As he failed, he became increasingly frustrated until giving up to sit down and begin his opening monologue.

"Ever have one of those days where everything falls down around you?" Ross asked. "Sounds like my whole college career. I started in 1981 and graduated in 1991."

Ross explained — while suspending three bowling pins in the air — that his college days were difficult due to his drinking problems.

"By the time you graduate, some of you will have more lumps than others," he said. "Hopefully, you won't be like me, an old man with his ass kicked."

While he juggled a trio of tennis racquets, Ross explained how his problems began in his early teens.

"I was a class clown — Mr. Personality. I was in trouble at home and at school and I internalized those negative feelings," Ross said. "I started smoking and drinking and everything seemed easier. With that first high, everything seemed so much better. After a while, the highs didn't seem so high anymore."

Ross explained that it was his drinking that led him to leave college after his first semester and face a drunk driving charge. Eventually, though, he discovered his problem and sought treatment.

"It's been ten years since I got clean, graduated college, got a job and realized I have a family I can appreciate," Ross said.

The entertainer also discussed the dangers of sexual assault caused by alcohol.

"Alcohol is like a social lubricant," Ross said. "I think Shakespeare said it best: 'It provokes the desire and not the ability. It causes the man to stand to and not stand to.' You do the math."

He explained that instances of sexual violence against women are increased when alcohol is present and urged men to make an effort to stop the abuse.

"It's going to take a lot of work to stop this," Ross said. "Guys, when you're with friends and start talking trash about women, the bravest guy in the room is the one that says 'This is bullsh*t.'"

In closing, Ross stated that he regrets nothing that has happened in the past 14 years of his life and that he feels lucky because things could have been much worse.

"Thank God nobody died, because there's no payback for those kinds of costs," Ross said.

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