

"Justice For Daisy" Rally Held In Maryville

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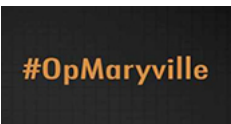
"Justice For Daisy" Rally Held In Maryville

News

Posted by : Randy

Posted on : 2013/10/23 9:40:00

(NewsPressNow.com). A movement seeking justice for a teen girl has found its symbol: dozens of daisies raised up toward the sky.



A late-arriving crowd of more than 200 people rallied Tuesday in support of Daisy Coleman outside the Nodaway County Courthouse.

Daisy allegedly suffered a sexual assault from an older classmate, Matthew Barnett, after he gave her alcohol at a party in January 2012. She was 14 at the time. Nodaway County Prosecutor Robert Rice dropped the charges against Mr. Barnett in March 2012 when he claimed Daisy and her mother, Melinda Barnett, stopped cooperating with the investigation.

The case gained international attention last week following a report in The Kansas City Star.

Courtney Cole, a women's rights activist from Excelsior Springs, Mo., began to plan a rally asking Daisy's case to be reopened shortly after she learned of the story. More than 2,000 people indicated via Facebook that they planned to attend the event, held the day after a special prosecutor, Jean Peters Baker of Jackson County, was appointed to review the case. Ms. Cole said the new prosecutor gave many people what they were asking for, which may have led to the smaller-than-expected crowd.

"If it did (affect the crowd), that's OK," Ms. Cole said. "I'm looking at everything that has occurred in the last week as a success."

Local residents made a point to wear clothing from the city's university and high school to show a clear picture of Maryville's support for the Coleman family.

Mary Riley, who lived near the Colemans before they left town, said she was happy to see a new prosecutor looking into the case. She said she felt charges should have been filed, regardless of whether evidence existed to determine if the sex was or was not consensual.

"Nobody asked to be raped, and at 14 years old, nobody is capable of making that decision (to consent to sex)," Ms. Riley said.

Ms. Riley also challenged the notion that the community forced the Coleman family to leave town, with their home burning with no determined cause after they moved.

"We don't run our people off," Ms. Riley said. "We try to help everyone."

The spirit of helping was apparent two hours before the rally, as Ms. Cole and Nodaway County Sheriff Darren White talked about how to accommodate the crowd. The county provided portable restrooms and a podium for convenience, while Ms. Cole offered to stay as long as needed after the event to pick up any trash left behind.

Law enforcement officers from across the region including some in street clothes walked

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among the crowd to make sure the situation remained under control. All traffic was closed on the town square starting at 1 p.m., and all trash cans were removed from the area so they could not be thrown or used as a place to hide a weapon or bomb. There was not a single instance of violence, shouting, or any indication of anger throughout the event.

“The presence of law enforcement is not to intimidate people,” Mr. White said. “It’s to make sure everyone has a safe environment to make their voices heard. That’s the great thing about where we live; that you can do something like this.”