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Celebrate Centennial

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Former NHL star to speak out at Mount Royal

Mum's the word. Better left unsaid. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

Those who've been sexually assaulted or work with survivors of assault all agree society isn't talking enough about sexual abuse.

A series of professional workshops and a public forum being held at Mount Royal University on June 9 is intended to help change that.

Former National Hockey League star [Theoren Fleury](#) will be a guest speaker at the event, called [Speaking Out on Sexual Violence](#), along with Katie Feifer and Janet Goldblatt of [The Voices and Faces Project](#).

"Everyone wants to sweep this sort of thing under the rug," says Fleury, who recently went public about being victimized at the age of 13 by former junior hockey coach and convicted pedophile Graham James. 13.

Fleury revealed his demons when he released a tell-all autobiography, *Playing With Fire*, in Oct. 2009. "People talk about AIDS and the swine flu and this, that and the other but sexual abuse and pedophilia are the biggest epidemics on the planet."

Speaking Out on Sexual Violence is presented by the Mount Royal Forensic Research Network and other community partners. A series of workshops will be held during the day where professionals working with sexual assault victims can explore collaborative strategies to improve resources for victims.

In the evening, survivors of sexual assault will share their stories and put a human face on the issue at a public forum starting at 7 p.m. (see sidebar for information on registration).

Fleury hopes his story can make a difference

When Fleury recalls his experience, he says his dreams of playing hockey quickly turned to nightmare.

A number of factors prevented Fleury from telling his story prior to now, but the 42-year-old is excited about the opportunity to advocate for tougher punishment for perpetrators and better support services for survivors.

"I've always felt, even before hockey, that I was born to make a difference in the world. To do something big and this is it," says Fleury.

Since the book launch, Fleury has advocated tirelessly for improved government regulations to prosecute and detain perpetrators, and for increased services to support survivors.

As he got older, Fleury spiralled downhill emotionally, although to the public he appeared to be on top of the world, winning Stanley Cups, goal scoring championships and an Olympic gold medal.

The Voices and Face Project to present at Speaking out on Sexual Violence forum

The Voices and Faces Project is an American-based documentary initiative dedicated to connecting the public with the plight of survivors of sexual assault. Organizers hope the use of survivor voices and faces will motivate society to take action against sexual violence.

The Voices and Faces Project research director Katie Feifer intends to use that philosophy when she presents during the public forum at Speaking Out on Sexual Violence on June 9.

He figures he blew most of his estimated \$50 million in NHL earnings on alcohol, drugs and gambling addictions, which helped ease his anxiety and dulled the pain of the memories.

When he comes to Mount Royal, Fleury hopes people will take away the positive outcome of his story — he has a fantastic relationship with his current wife, Jennifer, he has become a successful businessman, and he has found peace.

Speaking Out On Sexual Violence could become a turning point

Cathy Carter-Snell, the co-ordinator of Mount Royal's Forensic Studies Program and associate professor in Forensic Studies and Advanced Studies in Critical Care Nursing, says this forum is a landmark for Calgary and hopes the political and law enforcement community will use it as a building block moving forward.

"We have participants coming from as far away as Africa to take part and observe how the issue of sexual violence is being handled here," says



From the rink to the gutter to advocate, former Flame Theoren Fleury hopes to inspire when he speaks at Mount Royal.

"The value here is raising awareness the problem exists, and putting a human face on the problem. Statistics are very dry and easy to ignore, but when you listen to someone like Theoren Fleury or myself, or you look at the photos of someone who could be just like you and your friends and relatives, it goes a long way towards fostering empathy in people and a desire to do something about the problem."

The public forum begins at 7 p.m. in the Ross Glen Hall in the Roderick Mah Centre for Continuous Learning. Admission is free but [pre-registration](#) is recommended.

might only fly in once every three months, and small town situations where a police officer or nurse may also be a friend of the perpetrator.

"And then there's cultural and gender barriers. In some cultures it's simply not spoken of and, if it is, the victim becomes a pariah. She's looked down on as if it were her fault."

And then there's what happens when the victim is male. Carter-Snell says only 10 per cent of victims report their assault to the police. Due to cultural stigmas and misunderstandings, that number is even lower for men.

Fleury says one of the major reasons people hold back is they get re-victimized again and again through the reporting and prosecution process.

"It's a huge step in the right direction to have a high profile person such as Fleury come and talk about what he's been through," says Carter-Snell.

"To have him speak at the conference will certainly help put a spotlight on the struggles victims deal with."

— **Steven Noble**, June 3, 2010

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