

Local News

Companies deal with sexual harassment

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Chris Frare was not about to tolerate the way a co-worker behaved.

"There was a situation when I was working, and being a relatively assertive

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Sexual harassment concerns have unexpected consequences.

Page 7

was interested in, and not to continue."

Her, too.

The litany of high-profile sexual harassment cases fills entire pages of newspapers and the #MeToo tag has spread across social media. Two representatives and a senator announced last week they would step down in the face of harassment claims. Major Hollywood and news media figures have been accused of groping, grasping, kissing and — if the allegations are accurate — rape. Leaders of the Senate briefly considered refusing a seat to Alabama's Roy Moore if he wins a Senate election because of allegations brought against him — some of which involve a 14-year-old girl. The Senate hasn't done that since the Civil War.

Those are the serious cases. The Silence Breakers, as Time magazine named them, are the 2017 person of the year. But

What it can be

Sexual harassment can be direct, such as an exchange of sexual favors for some benefit, or it can be as simple as creating a hostile work environment. It must be unwelcome. Examples include:

- Sexual assault.
 - Unwanted pressure for sexual favors.
 - Unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering or pinching.
 - Sexual comments.
 - Personal questions about social or sexual life.
 - Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions.
 - Neck massage or other touches of an employee's clothing, hair or body.
- Sexually suggestive signals.
SOURCE: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

there are so many others.

Reports of sexual harassment at SUNY Cortland are up this semester from the past few years, college spokesman Fred Pierce said. But he said that's not because there are more incidents — it's because The Silence Breakers have given voice to victims everywhere, and training on-campus has raised awareness.

However, reports to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have been declining steadily since 2010,

to 6,758 investigations from 7,941, although the agency data don't explain whether that's because of increased vigilance by employers or a decrease in harassment, or both. While up-to-date numbers are hard to come by, confidential complaints to the EEOC and state and federal fair employment practice agencies dropped consistently between 1997 and 2011.

'I applaud them'

Frare said her experience was not traumatic, just bothersome. But she respects the women who are coming forward, who often have traumatic stories to tell.

"I applaud them, it's not an easy thing to do," she said. "Something needs to give, it just can't continue. We have to be very strong."

Sexual harassment can be far more subtle than some of the acts described recently. In fact, a touch that one person may not mind may create a hostile work environment to another.

Nicole Thomas, a human resources generalist for Cortland Regional Medical Center, says the hospital has mandatory training regarding sexual harassment, among other forms of harassment, for all new employees. And all 900 full- and part-time employees get annual refresher training.

Likewise at the college, all new employees receive mandatory training, and it's part of the freshman class curriculum, Pierce said. Speakers appear regularly on

What you need to know

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including:

- Both victims and harassers can be of either sex. In fact, 16 to 18 percent of complaints are made by men.
 - The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
 - The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, the employer's agent, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker or a non-employee.
 - The victim does not have to be the person harassed, just someone affected by the conduct.
 - Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- SOURCE: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

campus and stickers even adorn the toilet stalls with a hotline to call.

"Whoever is complaining is in the driver's seat," Pierce said. The complainant decides how to pursue the response. The Title IX coordinator or Affirmative Action officer may be brought in if the harassment involves a student.

"If someone has been in trouble more than once, or the situation is serious, the person is someone who doesn't belong at SUNY Cortland," Pierce said.

Thomas said that when a sexual ha-

arrassment is reported a addressed immediately. Response could in and forms of progress "It could result in the findings," Thomas

'Conversatio aware'

Carrie Knight of a never experienced se "I'm fortunate in because I know it said.

Pierce said he hope about sexual harass in the months to con realize that past beh OK has real victims. "Our culture is r and the conversatio ness more," Pierce s The awareness workplace.

"I was 12 when m it upon himself to se said Kaelyn Burda, t nobody believed her Much of her famil er, has stopped talki found strength comi "I didn't have to could go to my mom uncomfortable," she actually helps beca women have gone t helps knowing you"