

# The Hour

## National Vigil Calls Attention to Drug Abuse

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February 21, 2006

NORWALK — Norwalk resident Ginger Katz has been a leader in the crusade against drug abuse since her son, Ian, died of a drug overdose in 1996. Since that time, she has devoted her life to getting her message across to young people about the dangers of drug use, and to parents about the warning signs and the idea that "it can happen to anyone."

But her latest project, the Vigil for Lost Promise, is both the most challenging and the largest in scale. It has also been the longest in development. Katz, as is her habit, has taken this idea and made it a reality. On June 8, at the Drug Enforcement Agency, or DEA, headquarters in Arlington, Va., the Vigil for Lost Promise: Remembering Those Who Have Died from Drugs will take place.

"After Ian's death, I envisioned a national vigil," said Katz. "I wanted to shine a light in memory of my son, Ian and others who have been killed by drugs.... It is my wish that we all share in this event and break down the denial of drug use in America."

The vigil is a national event that aims to bring people together to call attention to the extent and nature of the American drug problem. In attendance will be families and friends of those who have died from using drugs, as well as people involved in drug prevention, treatment and education, clergy, legislators, educators and others concerned about drugs. Also in attendance will be eight families who have personally suffered the loss of a loved one and who have joined together to plan a remembrance on the Memorial Wall, established for parents, siblings and friends to post a photo and brief story. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. The last day to register is May 1.

Those not able to attend the vigil are invited to e-mail a photo and story for inclusion in the Memorial Wall to [vigilforlostpromise@gmail.com](mailto:vigilforlostpromise@gmail.com) The wall will become part of the DEA's traveling exhibit, Target America: Opening Eyes to the Damage Drugs Cause.

Katz said the idea for the vigil was born while attending the DEA's national meeting in August, made up of about 60 people from various anti-drug organizations as well as about 40 chiefs of police.

"The organizations were there to share information with chiefs of police and to talk about how we, as organizations working in prevention, see it out there. That morning, they asked me to speak," said Katz.

"I told everyone how when Ian died, I sat in his room and looked around and wondered how this could happen to us. Through research, I realized I was not alone, that all children are at risk and that we have to build awareness. That was really what the meeting was about. We wanted to find a way to build awareness."

In that moment, Katz realized that more was needed to build the awareness she and others sought. "I realized what we were doing that day was actually preaching to the choir, and that what we all wanted was something that would bring attention to the damage that drugs do to an American family."

What she envisioned was a national vigil, in which people would carry a candle in memory of lost loved ones. She presented her idea to Karen Tandy, administrator of the DEA, and to her surprise, a month later, Katz received a call from the DEA saying it was prepared to organize the vigil and had come up with funding and staff, but needed her organizational skills to spread the word.

Katz is currently doing just that through her Web site and by sending out "save the date " cards. So far, she has received a number of positive responses.

"This is exactly what so many parents have wanted," said one parent who plans to attend.

"I can see the momentum building," said Katz. "The important thing is that we get the media to come out and help us shine the light on this, so we can break down the denial that exists with substance abuse." For more information about the Vigil for Lost Promise, visit <http://www.vigilforlostpromise.com> The Web site contains details about the event, as well as a registration form.

For more information on the Courage To Speak Foundation, Inc., visit <http://www.couragetospeak.org> or call (877) 431-3295