

Porn star and pastor debate at UWO

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- Reporter: Lindsay Veremis

OSHKOSH - A pornography star and a pastor may seem an unlikely duo. But the combination drew a sold-out crowd at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh on Wednesday night. As they have done at other venues, the two shared the stage to address a controversial topic with an unconventional approach. More than 1,000 students and faculty attended.

"Most people haven't heard that this is destructive, that this can hurt you," Craig Gross, founder of Fireproof Ministries and XXXchurch.com, said. "I hope they think twice before they go looking online and finding this stuff."

Gross has spent eight years traveling to campuses like Oshkosh warning of the dangers of pornography - addiction, dysfunctional relationships and exploitation. Adult film star Ron Jeremy has made his living from it.

"When you say porn is fantasy, so what? It's junk entertainment," Jeremy said. "It's for people over 18 years of age. By the time you're 18 you can fight and bleed on the battlefield and die for your country. I think you can choose what porn you want to watch."

Billed as The Pornography Debate, the event was part of the college's Speakers Series. Series committee members say they bring in a number of speakers, like Gross and Jeremy, to inform, educate and entertain. Those who saw the talk say the Wednesday event covered all three.

"Obviously the celebrity name brought in a lot of people and made that draw here, but I think that debate is something students wanted to hear," organizer David Rathsack said.

Some students said the internet has made pornography a constant presence and an issue they want to learn more about.

"Not so much when you're younger, but once you get a little bit older, into the higher teens the internet and porn it's always around," freshman Emily Gill said.

Gross says that's why he started XXXchurch.com, a Web site that talks about the addictive nature of pornography and the false expectations it creates.

"A real relationship takes work, with two people that are involved that have emotions and feelings," he said.

Jeremy says pornography is just business, but among the crowd in Oshkosh it remains a controversial one.

The event was a paid appearance. Pastor Gross will also be speaking solo at the Green Bay Community Church on Saturday. The talk will be from 6:30 to 8:00pm.

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