

Porn Debate Tour plays to packed house at ETSU

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JOHNSON CITY — Debates go on all the time at East Tennessee State University, but they probably don't pack the house.

Wednesday night at ETSU's D.P. Culp University Center a debate on the pros and cons of pornography was held as famed porn actor Ron Jeremy and anti-pornography preacher Craig Gross brought their national Porn Debate Tour to Johnson City.

By the time the debate started around 7:15 p.m., there were 1,004 in attendance. Some left before the end of the debate and were immediately replaced by others standing in line at the door.

David Stratton, automotive major at Northeast State Technical Community College, arrived early.

He said he wanted "to figure out what people thought about pornography in today's society. I find it funny, there's more important stuff in today's society we need to focus on."

The debate began with Gross and Jeremy both getting 12 minutes to present their arguments. Most of the dialogue was laced with slang terms that are not permitted for print in this newspaper.

However, Gross did say that pornography created an unrealistic impression in people's minds of what to expect.

"Pornography is fantasy," Gross said. "It's not real."

Jeremy countered with arguments about how pornography helps create ideas by being available to consenting adults who are engaging in consensual activities.

After their 12 minutes, the audience was allowed to ask questions of Gross and Jeremy. At the end, both men were available to talk and sign autographs.

Olivia Karavatakis, a student at ETSU and staff worker for Buctainment, a campus organization that sponsored the Porn Debate, said the turnout was great.

"I think the event turned out really well," she said. "I think it's really good they decided to come. It pumps up East Tennessee State."

The topic of the debate may have been a little controversial for some, but the point was to get people thinking.

“I’m hoping it’ll encourage students to ask questions,” said Karavatakis, adding that she already had the pro/con debate about pornography with fellow students in an argument and debate class.

“So it’ll be interesting to hear it come from a porn star and a preacher,” she said.

Steve Sherman, ETSU student and president of Buctainment, said the debate served two purposes.

“I’m excited about it,” he said. “We’re having a really good turnout. I think also it’ll be educational, and it’ll be entertaining.”

Sherman thought the event would let people know what Buctainment is and prompt them to attend future events. He was not worried about negative feedback.

“There’s been a few complaints from various places about the topic, but people don’t have to come if they don’t want to,” he said.

Public health major Jared Greene said he attended “because Ron Jeremy is basically a legend and, you know, you hear a lot about him. ”

Jeremy has two bachelor’s degrees, a master’s degree and has spoken around the world. He also has starred in 1,800 adult films.

Gross began XXXchurch.com, a Web site dedicated to informing people on the dangers of pornography and offering a way out for those in the industry who feel trapped.

Tiffany Ysidron, a psychology major, didn’t know what to expect Wednesday night but wanted to get some insight into the subject, saying she attended “just basically for the debate. Just to see both sides.”

She said Jeremy was a figure who people have varying opinions on, so the debate should be interesting because it promotes what ETSU and college is all about.

“It’s really interesting. One thing they teach you at ETSU is critical thinking and critical reasoning,” she said, adding that the debate offered her a chance to test both of those skills.

Shea Higney, an environmental health major, said he thought ETSU did good in getting Jeremy to show up at the school.

“I think it’s great,” he said. “It’s really cool that we got someone of Ron Jeremy’s celebrity caliber to come here.”

The debate did offer several laughs from the audience, but Higney was taking it seriously.

“I’m hoping people take it seriously, but, of course, the subject matter does limit itself to the human imagination,” he said.