

For further information contact:
Barbara Nagle
tbnagle@comcast.net
239-395-3660
June 24, 2007

Zontians Hear about New Human Trafficking Activities
in SW Florida, Guatemala and beyond

by Karen Pati

Zontians are back at it – considering new and exciting ways to eradicate the horrific crime of human trafficking. Three experts in the field recently addressed the club. First, Zonta's Immediate Past President Nola Theiss, co-chair of the Lee County Sheriff's Human Trafficking Task Force and executive director of Human Trafficking Awareness Partnerships, Inc., spoke about current local activities. She noted that there are several cases under investigation, and related two stories in which local informed citizens were able to help others avoid the trap of human trafficking. The Sanibel case involved two visiting Russian college women; the lesson they learned, as foreign visitors, was to never relinquish their legal documents to another person.

Professor Johnny McGaha, Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), became involved in human trafficking (HT) efforts during the HT Conference Zonta co-sponsored at the University in February 2006. After that initiation, Dr. McGaha joined the Lee County Sheriff's Task Force on Human Trafficking, also initiated by our club. He began researching the issue, and co-wrote several academic papers with Nola Theiss, resulting in presentations in Greece and in England at Oxford. It was on the trip home from Oxford that he considered the fate of the estimated 27 Million people being held in bondage worldwide and thus how the university could be more involved in eradication efforts. The brainchild was the newly proposed "ESPERANZA CENTER for Human Trafficking Research, Policy, and Community Initiatives" at FGCU.

The proposal is unique since the Center would be the only one in the United States to focus solely on human trafficking. The idea has been enthusiastically received by several offices and organizations critical to the fight against human trafficking including the US Department of Justice, the Lee County and Collier County Sheriff's Task Forces, US Asst. District Attorney Doug Malloy, Lee County Commissioner Bob Janes, The Cape Coral Police Department, Lee Memorial Hospital, and the Florida Migrant Interstate Program at FGCU. These groups consider FGCU an ideal location to house this umbrella organization in order to pull together these critical and

sometimes disparate resources. The Center would be located in FGCU's College of Professional Studies and would be multi-disciplinary. The next step on the path to realization is funding.

We also had the opportunity to hear from Professor Genelle Grant, Ph.D., formerly of FGCU's Florida Migrant Interstate Program and a current member of the Lee County Sheriff's Human Trafficking Task Force. She presented information on her newest endeavor: GRACE, Guatemalan Rural Adult & Children's Education, whose goals include preventing violence and trafficking of girls and women and encouraging girls to envision educated and successful futures in their own countries.

Through her recent experiences, Dr. Grant learned of the plight of two local women, survivors of human trafficking. This ultimately resulted in "Lucia's Letter", a recording of their harrowing experiences being trafficked from Guatemala to Lee County at the ages of 12 and 15. The recording, transcribed as a 'letter home to mama', notes the horrific abuses the girls endured along the way and ends with a plea to mama not to send their younger sister but rather to keep her safe at home. The recording has been translated into several languages and dialects.

Dr. Grant has simultaneously created an educational training book to 'teach the teachers' in Guatemala. She is seeking funding to support this effort and plans to return to Guatemala to train more teachers, to distribute Lucia's Letter, and to create and distribute a discussion guide on human trafficking. These efforts will contribute to her goal of preventing trafficking while encouraging girls to envision successful futures.

The last program presented was MIRACLES IN ACTION, a non-profit founded by Penny Rambacher of Naples. MIRACLES' mission is to change the lives of the extreme poor by supporting sustainable development. One project is an innovative combination of micro-credit and human trafficking awareness. Mothers can 'earn' a sewing machine, generate income, and thus afford to send their children to school. The children then learn the risks of human trafficking and skills that will make them successful in their own countries. Penny's models require the community or individual to 'earn' the contributions they receive. An estimated \$15,000 'builds' a primary school in rural Guatemala -- you buy the land and equipment; the locals provide the labor.

Yes, these program goals sound similar and yes, they are working together. MIRACLES IN ACTION & GRACE are collaborating. Dr. Grant, Dr. McGaha & Nola Theiss are collaborating. You may also wonder why the focus on Guatemala. We have found most of the trafficking victims in SW Florida are from Guatemala. Rural Guatemalans are more likely to know of Immokalee than Orlando.

During the question period, Zonta member Ginger Parker noted similar work being performed by her cousin in Guatemala: 'recycling' computers and components and even prescription drugs. Details can be viewed at www.computersforguatemala.com.

Sanibel-Captiva Zontians were thrilled to know of all the wonderful and creative work being done to combat human trafficking, and are now considering how their efforts can best meet club members' desires. Stay tuned as we finish our 'futures' strategic plan.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva is a service organization of professional women working together to provide hands-on assistance, advocacy and funds to strengthen women's lives on the islands, in Lee County and around the world through Zonta International. Additional information about Zonta is available at www.zontasancap.com.

Photo Caption: Updating Sanibel-Captiva Zontians on anti human trafficking efforts at a recent meeting were, from left: Zonta past president Nola Theiss, founder and executive director, Human Trafficking Awareness Partnerships, Inc.; Dr. Genelle Grant, formerly of FGCU's Florida Migrant Interstate Program and a current member of Lee County Sheriff's Human Trafficking Task Force, who has established GRACE: Guatemalan Rural Adult & Children's Education; Dr. Johnny McGaHa, FGCU Justice Studies professor, and the initiator of the "ESPERANZA CENTER For Human Trafficking Research, Policy, and Community Initiatives" at FGCU; and Zontian Karen Pati, Chair of the Anti Human Trafficking Subcommittee for Zonta District 11.

#