

## **Human Trafficking Workshop attracts diverse attendees**

Published in Island Reporter May 1, 2009

The library conference room was filled to capacity on April 16<sup>th</sup> with an audience of 50 interested citizens, members of Zonta, law enforcement representatives, and other non-profits that support and are impacted by the horrors of slavery in Lee County. During a 4-hour presentation, Nola Theiss of Zonta, the Esperanza Project at FGCU which coordinates the Lee County Human Trafficking Task Force and HTAP (Human Trafficking Awareness Partnerships ) facilitated a PowerPoint program and an audio-visual presentation of material developed by the federal government and local information exchanges. The multi-media program defined Human Trafficking as “a form of modern slavery”. It was developed by the Florida Regional Policing Institute and has been presented by Theiss sixteen times in the last 3 years throughout the State of Florida. It emphasized the depth and breadth of this challenging issue in our society and local communities.

Dr. Genelle Grant spoke about the political and historical reason for the migration of Guatemalans to Lee County and the reasons many are vulnerable to trafficking. A panel of local experts from Catholic Charities, a Victims Advocate from of the Lee County Sheriff's Office and the Executive Director of Our Mothers Home, who have worked with trafficking victims in Lee County discussed and answered questions about the involvement of their organizations in the care of these victims. In addition, the Sheriff's Officers who live or work on Sanibel and Captiva made insightful comments from their own professional experiences on the islands. Other organizations such as Florida Rural Legal Services and One Way Out, an organization which works with adult entertainment workers in Lee County were able to add to the content of the presentation. Dr. Carolyn Gray, Zonta President-elect said, “The diversity and quality of the participants were impressive in terms of people who are on the frontline in the fight against human trafficking in our area. Nola has refined and targeted the message in a very effective manner. I feel privileged to be a small part of this group which is making a tremendous impact locally, nationally and internationally.”

Many of the statistics given in the presentation and their implications were eye-opening to the informed professionals as well as the general audience:

- Estimated 600,000 to 800,000 individuals are trafficked across international borders each year.
- Estimated 15,000 to 18,000 persons trafficked annually into the U.S.
- Cases have been investigated in every state in the U.S.
- Approximately 27 million people held in slavery worldwide

- Estimated 80% of victims are female; 50% are children
- Between 1,300,00 to 2,8000,000 children are at risk of trafficking every year in the US. Some estimate that half of all missing children may be trafficking victims.
- One out of every seven children will run away from home before the age of 18. 2100 children are reported missing every day. The average age of entry into prostitution is 11-14.

Karen Pati, Co -Chair of Zonta’s Human Trafficking service project commented on the power of these statistics, “Although I’ve been a student of Human Trafficking for years now, I found the Awareness Session very informative. It always amazes me how many people I meet that are oblivious to the slavery situation in the US today. Nola provided me with some helpful new thoughts and facts that I will begin using in my ongoing quest to increase awareness.”

The Zonta Club plans to continue its work to support human trafficking awareness and the work of its partners. For additional information or to discuss a presentation at your organization or church, contact Nola Theiss at [nolatap@yahoo.com](mailto:nolatap@yahoo.com). The Zonta Club of Sanibel/Captiva is a 70-member 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



Panel of Martha Espinoza Catholic Charities, Mayra Rodriguez, LC Sherriff’s Office & Mary Lewis, Our Mother’s Home



Nola Theiss opening remarks to attendees



Genelle Grant speaking about her efforts in Guatemala