

Sunday, October 2nd, 2011

Archives:  Go

Classifieds:  Go

# DAILY TRIBUNE



Home News Sports Opinion Obituaries Classifieds Archive Special Sections Photo Gallery

Mount Pleasant, Texas 75456

Last Published On: Sunday, October 02, 2011

### Services

- RSS Feeds
- Contact Us
- About Us
- Place an Ad
- Subscribe
- Download Tiger Wallpaper



### Resources

- Guestbook
- Special Sections
- Food & Recipes
- Automotive
- Education & Careers
- Family Matters
- Money
- Weddings & Style
- Features



Subscribe To the Daily Tribune



Letters To The Editor

Click Here To Send A Letter To The Editor

### Submission Policy

Letters should be limited to 300 words. Letters must be signed by the author and include a

*Did you know Just a Dollar has a HUGE gift warehouse?* All items priced as marked to save you \$\$\$  
**JUST A \$1.00**  
 2302 S. Jefferson . Mt. Pleasant Behind Pizza Hut  
**Name Brand Gifts • Christian Books • Picture Frames • Wedding Accessories • & More!**

### News

Print this story | Email this story | [+] Text Size [-]

## Human Trafficking fight comes to Titus County

By MARCIA DAVIS-SEALE - Tribune Features Editor  
Saturday, October 1, 2011 3:46 PM CDT

She used a crowbar as her ticket out of the home prison.

The woman and her three children had been held hostage for several years in a rural northeast Texas home less than an hour from Titus County - victims of human trafficking.

Horrendous starvation, torment, terrorization, rape, molestation; exploitation; kidnapped, blackmailed, prostituted, shackled in slave labor - it's both horrible... and here.

Those who stand unknowingly on the frontlines to fight human trafficking include members of the faith-based communities, social service providers, healthcare workers, law enforcement officers, neighborhood residents, service providers that come in to homes and make service calls to farms and agricultural operations, and private citizens that frequent restaurants and other establishments that use domestic help.

ADVERTISEMENT

### SAFE-T joins the fight

Carol Gresham, Executive Director of the local-based social service agency, SAFE-T (Shelter Agencies for Families in East Texas, Inc.) told the Tribune that sex and labor trafficking does not just happen in other countries. "In America, there are both foreign- and domestic-born victims; in Texas, and even in Titus County."

Gresham said that, now, with SAFE-T's recent receipt of a \$28,600 government grant, the agency is joining the forces of agencies and individuals across the country bent on curbing human trafficking by educating the public to understand, recognize and report it.

Last week, SAFE-T hosted training for law enforcement, social service and community agency representatives from across several counties, taught by Mosaic Family Services, the agency that selected SAFE-T as a partner in this fight and a recipient of the grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking program.

Mosaic's Human Trafficking Outreach Program Coordinator, Laura DeMoss, told the Tribune, "We chose SAFE-T as a partner because they are such a great organization, and because of their location. They do wonderful work. They have really great programs reaching out to a lot of people in creative ways."

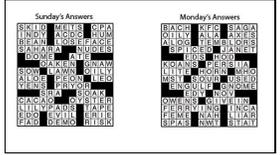
DeMoss said Mosaic, based in Dallas and serving 26 counties, is partnering with six other agencies including SAFE-T to build public awareness about human trafficking.

"It's the invisible crime," she said. "Trafficking is something we know is out there. We are hearing stories coming from all over, but it's hard to recognize, hard to prosecute and hard to prove. There are sex trafficking victims and labor trafficking victims. Sexual trafficking gets media attention. That's

### Today's Weather

**70°F**  
more...

### Puzzles



More of this comic click here

### Obituaries

Bolden

Swafford

Arnold

Bolton

Carr

**Do you feel tired all the time?**

**Click here to see if the TRMC Sleep Center can help you!**



telephone number to confirm identity and clarify details. The Daily Tribune reserves the right to reject any and all letters, edit letters for style, grammar, spelling and content, and limit the number of letters from authors (generally once a month) or on a given subject. Letters to the editor are a free service of the Daily Tribune. We believe a healthy dialogue on issues that concern you is necessary in a democracy whether we agree with the positions taken by the writers or not. We encourage your participation. You may mail letters to P.O. Box 1177, Mount Pleasant, TX 75456. Fax them to (903) 572-6026.

when a person - man, woman or child - is forced to work in commercial sex and prostitution. And there's labor trafficking - less recognized domestic servitude. These victims can be forced to work in restaurants, agricultural industries, hotels/motels, factories...as, basically, modern-day slaves...

"We all need to be aware, it's not just happening in the massage parlor, but in the restaurant where we are eating. It happens across industries."

According to DeMoss, "Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are trafficked each year in the world and in the U.S., and the American public needs much greater awareness."

She said that human trafficking reports can be made to the National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-3737-888.

Gresham said the grant funds and partnership with Mosaic Family Services "will provide SAFE-T with the tools needed to identify agencies, civic groups, churches, and businesses and provide them with information to identify trafficked victims....In the past," she said, "SAFE-T has provided services to trafficked victims, without being aware they were trafficking victims at the time we were helping them.

"The trafficked men, women and children," she said, "do not consider themselves victims, but instead feel an obligation to the trafficker for helping them. Help could be in the form of wages, food, a place to live - for which there are strings attached. The trafficker always benefits, not the victim."

Gresham said public education remains a critical factor in human trafficking because "there are so many public misconceptions." She said the Rescue and Restore program has funds available for trafficking victims. "We just have to let community members know how to access this help.

Identifying victims will not be an easy task. We are not here to expose smuggling, kidnapping, prostitution or drug rings, or to assist with the prosecution of crimes related to trafficking. SAFE-T's purpose is to work with victims who may decide to report this crime to law enforcement which could eventually lead to prosecution of individuals. But helping victims is not conditional on their reporting these crimes.

Reports in Mount Pleasant

"I knew that there was a problem in Mount Pleasant," Gresham said, "since clients had told us about trafficked young girls who were being brought here for various uses. I still don't know the extent of the problem, but since learning more about human trafficking, I suspect that we have just touched the surface. Getting victims to understand their rights and to self-identify will not be an easy task. It will take all of our community to become informed on this topic to be able to help those who can't help themselves."

Gresham said the woman that SAFE-T had worked with, who had pried her way to freedom with the crowbar, "had been kept hostage, with her three children, for several years, and was unable to talk to anyone outside of the home except to apply for food stamps and WIC [government assistance] for the kids. The family who was trafficking her used the monthly checks for their own benefit.

"One day when they left, she took a crowbar and pried open the door that housed the only telephone in the house. She dialed 911, and our advocates along with law enforcement transported her to the shelter and then contacted family in another state where she now resides."

Initially, even SAFE-T officials didn't recognize this for what it was - a case of human trafficking. "When it dawned on us that she was a victim of human trafficking, she had already left the shelter and the state.

"Trafficking is just like slavery," Gresham said. "It is different from human smuggling, which is used just to evade U.S. immigration laws. Trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, etc. for labor or services through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of involuntary servitude, etc. Men, women and children can be trafficked, and can come from another country, but can also be kidnap victims or run-away youth born in the U.S., who end up in slavery situations."

DeMoss said, statistics that exist on trafficking paint a common victim portrait as someone under 35, and physically able to do hard labor. She said, "often times, economic situations make them more viable targets. There's really no typical traffic victim. They are men, women and children, foreign and domestic-born."

"Because Texas is so close to the border, this state gets a lot of trafficking. We see a lot of major highways going through Texas, making the rural areas no less susceptible. So far, we're seeing from the rural areas a lot of agricultural labor exploitation that could be questionable."

Signs to look for

DeMoss listed signs of trafficking to watch for: "if a person is working and not getting paid, seems under any kind of threat, or their family is being threatened with violence, deportation, etc.;...if someone doesn't feel free to leave his or her work; sleeps and eats in the same place; if someone else holds their documents; if there are physical barriers to them leaving - for instance a factory with a barbed wire fence with the wire turned and facing inward; if there seems excessive security...things like that. These are things everyone in the community can look for...like, if someone can't talk to you or is always being accompanied by someone who seems very controlling; if there are signs of physical abuse; if someone is obviously in bondage under obligation to pay a debt they can never repay...."



STOCKWATCH logo with a blue arrow pointing up. Includes text: Enter symbol, Get Quote, Symbol lookup, NYSE, NASD, S&P



Table of market indices: Nyse ETF (63.17, -0.3328, -0.52%), Nasdaq (2415.40, -65.36, -2.63%), S&P 500 (1131.42, -28.98, -2.50%), Russell 2K (644.16, -18.64, -2.812%), 10Yr Bond (1.924, -0.033, -1.69%)

Active Markets Last Updated: 4:40PM CDT 09/30/2011 Sponsored Link

4 Signs of Heart Attack

These 4 Things happen right before a heart attack. Know these signs. www.newsmax.com

Enter symbol, Get Quote, Symbol lookup



Table of market indices: Nyse ETF (63.17, -0.3328, -0.52%), Nasdaq (2415.40, -65.36, -2.63%), S&P 500 (1131.42, -28.98, -2.50%), Russell 2K (644.16, -18.64, -2.812%), 10Yr Bond (1.924, -0.033, -1.69%)

Active Markets Last Updated: 4:40PM CDT 09/30/2011

Robyn Rivtha

Questions to ask, DeMoss said, include: "Are you being paid? Have you been threatened? Where do you eat and sleep? Can you leave your job if you want to?"

Gresham said, "SAFE-T is receiving training from Mosaic in order to make presentations to our community agencies, and we are hoping those people will then understand trafficking and be able to identify victims. We will train basically anyone who will listen; as a variety of people in Dallas have identified victims, from the UPS delivery man to a pest control service man who saw a woman sleeping in the staircase of the home where she worked as a maid. He came back and gave her his card and asked if she needed help, and then referred her to Mosaic."

Gresham said another case in Texas was reported by a food service van driver who repeatedly delivered food ordered for 20 people to the same location. But a resident in that delivery neighborhood told him they thought 80 people lived there. He did the math and reported the situation. Officials found that 60 of those residents were being held as slave laborers, and being starved as they worked themselves to death.

Rescue and Restore spokesmen, in their public awareness campaign, tell citizens to "look beyond the surface to identify victims." They say that "fear - not shackles - bind most of the victims, through threats to their safety and the safety of their families."

The Rescue and Restore awareness campaign reveals that human trafficking victims can surface in the most unexpected circumstances, and poses the example of the *Zambian Boys Choir*, which entertained faith-based audiences across the country.

One of the boys, interviewed on an awareness DVD being distributed as a part of the Rescue and Restore campaign, tells of being kidnapped from Zambia, lured by the promise that he would be provided room and board, an education and freedom here in America. But, instead, he was held in unsanitary, overcrowded conditions with the other choir members, underfed and unable to leave the choir. The innocent, sad faces of the youngest choir boy victims of human trafficking drew compassionate hearts to respond with substantial donations to the choir that went to the traffickers, not the boys.

Trafficking rescue officials say it was pastors and church members in Texas, who made the report that broke open this trafficking case, revealed the crime and eventually set the choir members free.

That sense by private citizens that something was amiss made all the difference. The agencies in the Rescue and Restore partnership say they're counting on other citizens to pick up on circumstances amiss, report their suspicions, and help set these victims free.

For more information, persons can call SAFE-T at (903) 575-9003

[Return to Previous Page](#)

**Comment Blog** - Note: All Comments Subject To Approval

Name:

Email:

Comments:

Image Verification: (Case sensitive) 

**More Headlines**

**[Paint the Town Pink campaign kicks off Monday](#)**

**[Bail Bond Board meets on Monday](#)**

**[Human Trafficking fight comes to Titus County](#)**

**[It's Like This](#)**

**[County ponders expanding installment payment availability for taxpayers](#)**

[EMDR Therapy](#)  
Overcome depression, worry & fear! Serving Calabasas & Santa Monica.  
[therapists.psycholo..](#)  
AdChoices ▶

