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Margate's Victim Advocate Helps Raise Awareness during Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October 13, 2005, Margate FL – In 2003, and in an effort to focus attention on a very critical issue, October was named Domestic Violence Awareness month. The month now provides an opportunity to raise awareness about the resources that are available for all victims of abuse.

Victim Advocate Lori Gerber, has been in the field for 12 years and started the domestic violence program in Margate in the year 2000. While Gerber works with all types of victims, much of her time is spent on domestic violence cases. Working for the Margate Police Department, she helps victims learn their rights, provides referrals and resources, and helps explain and navigate the legal system.

At a recent local support group for victims of domestic violence the emotions ranged from sadness and anger to guilt, frustration and disbelief. The eight women and one man in the group use the weekly, 90-minute session to update Gerber on how their cases are developing. This week, they also provided their views about some of the resources they've encountered. One group member said, "Victims get no guidance unless they find someone like Lori," and another added, "each time the Margate Police Department was called to [her] house, [she] was given Lori's card."

Awareness is the key, and that's how a Victim Advocate can help. Some of the resources that are available to victims, Gerber says, include: state assistance for relocating victims, financial assistance from the office of the Attorney General, counseling, child counseling for those who witness abuse, mental health counseling, medical treatment, and a confidentiality program for those who relocate. One recent development regarding aid for victims occurred earlier this month. On October 3, 2005 the state of Florida raised the relocation assistance funds from \$500 to \$1500 for victims of domestic violence who choose to relocate.

"Offering guidance to the public, letting them know that they are not alone, that there are resources available, that they don't have to stay, and that support is available... [in addition to] being able to offer resources and training to police officers who respond to domestic violence calls," is the most rewarding part of being a Victim Advocate, says Gerber.

As the president of the Broward Victims Rights Coalition, and in conjunction with The Broward Domestic Violence Council and Women in Distress, Gerber is helping to host an annual memorial to those who in our community who have lost their lives to domestic violence. The event will take place on October 20, 2005 at the North Courtyard of the Broward County Main Library at 100 S. Andrews Ave. at 7:00 p.m. Contact Teri Speiser at 954-712-4825 for more event information.

To learn more about Gerber's domestic violence support group call 954-935-5385.

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