

National Victims' Rights Week: "Strength in Unity"



From the Director

by Ann Dugger

The week of April 24 – 29 is dedicated to promoting victims' rights and services and educating the public about the devastating impact of crime on victims, neighborhoods, schools and our nation as a whole.

The theme of the 2006 National Crime Victims' Rights Week—Victims' Rights: Strength in Unity—pays tribute to crime victims, who, for many decades, have joined together in mutual support and advocacy to promote victims'

rights and services. It also recognizes the ongoing efforts of countless victim service providers, justice professionals, and volunteers who selflessly dedicate their lives to helping victims of crime.

While great strides have been made in raising awareness about this issue, as Mayor John Peyton has said, there is still much to be done. "As long as crime exists, there will be victims of crime."

Glen Mitchell, VAAC Chair, whose son was murdered 12 years ago, reminds us that we are not immune and that violent crime can strike any person, any place, any time. "It is not just something that happens to somebody else," he says.

The Mayor's Victim Assistance Advisory Council (VAAC) has been working for almost 20 years to ensure Jacksonville's victims of crime are protected from further harm and provided with the support they need. This 27-member panel is comprised of community members with varied backgrounds in areas such as victim services, mental health, criminal justice and education.

In support of victims' rights, the VAAC is charged with monitoring the performance quality of the justice system, evaluating public policy, advocating legislation and enhancing public awareness. In its campaign to increase public awareness about victims' rights, the VAAC will take part

in National Victims' Rights Week 2006. (See the week's schedule of events on page 10.)

On Monday at noon, a press conference at Hemming Plaza will kick off the week's activities, and I encourage you to join us for this event. Thursday noon is the awards luncheon at the Radisson; please call Gwen Rhodes at 630-6300 for more information if you would like to attend.

By hosting this annual event and other programs throughout the year, the Council continues to help victims of crime and support victim service programs. It has had a powerful effect on changing laws, policies and attitudes locally to promote victims' rights and contributes greatly to the social and cultural

fabric of our city. Work the council does on behalf of Jacksonville's victims and their families plays an important part in their recovery and is a vital resource for our citizens.

While Jacksonville has come a long way toward improving response to the needs of victims, it still has room to grow. I thank God for helping us help others, and I encourage you to participate in the National Victims' Rights Week activities.

(Editor's note: The public is invited to sit in on VAAC meetings to learn more about this group and its function. For more information, contact Gwen Rhodes, Community Activities Coordinator at Victim Services, 630-6300.)

Inspirational Thought

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.

- Isaiah 40:31

THE SECRET WORD

G A M E

Hidden in the text of the Victims' Advocate is the **SECRET WORD** for the month of **April**. The rules are simple:

1. Find the word.
2. Telephone the Justice Coalition office 783-6312.
3. The first person who telephones the correct Secret Word wins a Gift Certificate to Sonny's Real Pit Barbeque Restaurant.
4. You can only win once in a twelve month period.

SO START SEARCHING!

Exclusions: no persons employed by the Justice Coalition, Sonny's, nor their families are eligible.

Faith Corner

The Faith Community holds the key to true Restorative Justice for all mankind. Many churches and businesses support this concept. The Justice Coalition wishes to thank the following for their support in our quest for this goal of compassion and understanding:

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