

Trafficking...

Continued from page 1

newspapers.

Retired FDLE officer Douglas Rehman recalls a case he worked on several years ago in Jacksonville. A respected teacher adopted a young boy from another country, ostensibly to provide him an education, a better future than he would otherwise have. Instead, he enslaved the boy to appease his repulsive sexual appetite, and his pedophile friends soon followed suit.

Who knows how many such victims walk our streets, attend our schools, reside among us – while living in fear of their abusers, stripped of their identity and dignity, afraid they or their families will be harmed or killed, that they'll be deported or incarcerated?

Recent stories in the news

In February, ABC's *Prime Time*¹ featured a story about 15-year old "Debbie" from Phoenix who was "the last person most of us would expect to be forced into the seamy world of sex trafficking."

Unbelievably, police say she was kidnapped from her own driveway, with her mother just inside the house. Thus began a 40-day ordeal of terror which began with her being gang-raped, then forced into prostitution and being confined in a

small dog crate for several days until her body was completely numb.

Debbie was finally rescued when police pursued tips she was being held in a Phoenix apartment and eventually found her tied up in a drawer under a bed. She was taken to a safe house for children and reunited with her family a few hours later.

"Our nation has made this commitment: Anyone who targets a child for harm will be a primary target of law enforcement. That's our commitment."

- President George W. Bush,
October 23, 2002.

Prime Time also related the story of "Miya," a 19-year old working in a Phoenix mall approached by a couple who enticed her to go with them by promising a lucrative modeling career. Instead, her captors took her to California, posted her picture on a website for an escort service and forced her into prostitution.

When she managed to escape, she didn't even know where she was until she flagged down a truck driver who told her she was in Union City, Calif. She called her relieved mother, who phoned police and they found her, finally freeing her from her captors' reach.

Both girls were threatened and brutally abused – and too scared to leave. Miya said, "I was really far away from home and didn't know where to go." Ernie Allen, the director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, said that's not uncommon for victims lured into the sex trade.

He says many of the kids are seduced, thinking they're going to have economic opportunities, that they'll be in show business. Then they find themselves in a situation where they have no control – they're slaves.

Does it happen in Florida?

A press release on Oct. 25, 2005, from the U. S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida,² announced: "**Man sentenced to 40 years in prison in Pensacola for interstate prostitution ring with minors.** Wayne Robert Banks, 29, aka "Day Money," of Toledo, Ohio, was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison for his role in an interstate prostitution ring

which trafficked in girls as young as 13 years old."

This case was investigated thanks to an alert Escambia County deputy who witnessed a juvenile talking with a potential customer. His inquiry led to the apprehension of Banks and the "hopeful conclusion to a sordid chapter in the lives of many young women who were used by Banks to sell themselves in support of his lavish lifestyle."

Although the *Prime Time* feature focused on Phoenix, according to a report by Fox30 News³ on Feb. 21, Jacksonville is not without similar problems. "The Center for the Advancement of Human Rights says **Florida has one of the highest rates of human trafficking in the country.**"

Fox related the story of "Anna" from Jacksonville who was just 12 when she was locked up, beaten and sold for sex. She says it was hard to break free, because she was constantly watched and always on the move. "I couldn't keep taking all of the beatings forever," she says. "They were going to have to kill me sooner or later." Anna is one of the lucky ones who managed to escape her captors in Atlanta.

According to the Fox report, the FBI has a civil liberties squad in Jacksonville investigating such cases as Anna's. Special Agent Jeffrey Wescott says *where* traffickers get their victims may surprise you. "These kids are from the suburbs and middle-class America," he says. "Sometimes it's a kid with low self esteem who may be enticed by someone who wants to befriend him/her."

An FBI website article, *Of Human Bondage*,⁴ states, "The victims include some of the most vulnerable in society: abused (or rebellious) children who've run away from home, women with few job skills, immigrants who fear deportation or retaliation against their families overseas if they speak up. They are trapped in lives of misery, often beaten, starved and forced to work as prostitutes or to take grueling jobs with little or no pay. For them, there is little hope of escape."

"Tentacles of a monstrous octopus"

Sexual exploitation is only one part of the trafficking industry – domestic servitude, chattel slavery⁵ and slave labor make up the rest. "Though trafficking victims commonly are without U.S. citizenship, the definition of who is a victim ranges broadly, according to experts," writes Anne Marie Apollo in *Naples News*.⁶

"They may be a girl forced

into the sex trade, a waitress, maid or man working in the fields as a day laborer. They are South American, Asian, African and Eastern European. Occasionally, they are American. More often, though, **this country is a destination, a marketplace.**"

In February, Florida Gulf Coast University in Ft. Myers hosted a conference for human trafficking experts. More than 200 law enforcement officers, lawyers, social workers, teachers and concerned citizens listened to representatives from the FBI, Justice Department, Immigration and other organizations speak about this rapidly growing, worldwide phenomenon.

"Trafficking by and large starts elsewhere," said Alexander Franco, a professor at San Diego State University who addressed the conference. "We're dealing with the tips of the tentacles of

Human trafficking is modern day slavery. Anyone engaged in this activity should be vigorously prosecuted.

- Senator Bill McCollum, candidate for Florida Attorney General

a monstrous octopus, but the octopus is not here."

He showed pictures (from countries such as Mexico, Cambodia and Thailand) of decrepit hotels where young victims slept, makeshift beds in the fields where they served farm workers, stacks of child porn CDs, young girls put to work on nighttime streets offering themselves for \$75 as their pimps watched nearby.

Franco says the **majority of human slavery taking place worldwide is not sexual in nature, but in America that is its most common form.** Traffickers deal in men harvesting cocoa beans or Florida's tomato or citrus crops, or children weaving rugs. Such slaves – an estimated 27 million worldwide – generate \$12 billion in profits for the traffickers each year.

Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking (FCAHT)

There are people who don't believe human trafficking exists, but Anna Rodriguez is one who knows very well the terrible effect this criminal industry has on our country, our own state. Having extensive experience in law enforcement and assistance in prosecutions, Rodriguez created FCAHT to help victims leave their trafficked condition

Trafficking... Continued on page 6

The Voice of
Jacksonville
Law Enforcement

Since 1950

Dedicated to the advancement of the law enforcement profession through education, communication and an informed program of legislation.

**Fraternal Order of Police
Jacksonville Consolidated Lodge 5-30
5530 Beach Boulevard Jacksonville, Florida
www.fop530.com (904) 398-7010**

Nelson D. Cuba, President