

There's always hope



From the Director

by Ann Dugger

It's springtime, and while we Floridians might not experience the same sense of exhilaration as our neighbors to the north who are emerging from months of unrelenting cold and snow, there is still a feeling of newness, of...well, hope in the air.

Maybe it's because we see azaleas bursting with color, or dogwood and redbud trees in bloom, or maybe because it's Easter – a time of renewal, of resurrection, of new life.

There is a lot written about this topic. Many Bible verses contain admonitions to hope; poets and other philosophers talk about it. In his *Essay on Man*, Alexander Pope wrote that "hope springs eternal in the human breast."

I found many interesting quotes on this subject, but I especially liked one by Jean Kerr that pretty well sums it all up: "Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn't permanent."

On days when we at the Justice Coalition get a call from a grieving mother whose son was senselessly murdered, or from a

frantic family about a loved one who seems to have disappeared into thin air, or from a woman afraid of a stalker, we often hear the sound of hopelessness in their voices. What can WE do, our small group of workers, to alleviate some of the suffering, or provide answers to the agonizing questions, or offer comfort to those in despair?

Winston Churchill said, "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." So we look for the opportunity in every situation to lessen some of the pain and frustration these victims are experiencing.

We listen to their heartbreaking stories and assure them we will be with them every step of the way, whatever that may entail. We assess their needs and implement an appropriate plan of action, put them in touch with counselors and/or support groups, if necessary, and act as liaison between them and prosecutors, law enforcement and the media. We accompany them to court proceedings, help them write impact statements, and so many other things.

One encouragement in recent years is the increased awareness of victims' needs. In her article on page 1, Janie Simpson recounts the milestones before and after the Victims' Bill of Rights was enacted

in 1984.

Recent legislation further empowers victims in their quest for justice. In 2006 a bill was passed that gave prosecutors the last statement to jurors before they deliberate the defendant's fate. Last-minute lobbying by the Justice Coalition ensured this bill was passed.

Governor Charlie Crist recently visited Jacksonville and asked the Justice Coalition to participate in his press conference as he pushed for the Anti-Murder Act which will require that violent felons who violate probation be jailed until a judge decides whether they should be sent back to prison. Current law allows some to post bail while awaiting trial.

Representative Dick Kravitz has sponsored a bill that will require life sentences for certain second or subsequent offenders, adds offenses to dangerous sexual felony offender law, requires mandatory minimum life sentences for certain offenders and provides enhanced penalties for certain sexual offenses and mandatory minimum sentences.

We still have a long way to go, such as enacting tighter laws to help keep sexual predators and other violent offenders off the streets – but every step is encouraging, a new ray of hope for victims.

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Angela if the police have caught him yet.

Detective Mark Romano regretfully acknowledges there is little to go on in his attempt to find her killer. "There is no witness, very little evidence, except we know it was a homicide," he says. "But someone knows what happened, who committed this violent crime, and they need to come forward with this information. The family needs to see justice served in this case."

Angela couldn't hold back the tears as she talked about her sister, but she is grateful that at least they know what happened to her. "There are so many families with missing loved ones who continually wonder what happened to them; at least we could put her to rest."

If you know anything about this murder, please call Det. Romano at 630-2172.



Inspirational Thought

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. The secret word is resurrection. He is not here, for He is risen, and He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Matthew 28:1-6

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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