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# VICTIMS' ADVOCATE

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## J.S.O. NEWS



Sheriff John Rutherford, assisted by two officers, is shot with a TASER.

### Sheriff demonstrates TASER use

On January 18, Sheriff John Rutherford demonstrated to the media and other observers that use of TASERs is a safe, effective method to subdue persons resisting arrest. "I am not a reckless person," he said. "I wouldn't have had this done to me twice in the past two days if I didn't know it was safe."

Two officers held the sheriff's arms as he fell to the ground, grimacing in pain. He arose immediately and responded, "Of course, it's painful!" when questioned. "It's supposed to be."

TASERs will be part of all patrol officers' gear, as well as that of School Resource Officers and those in the Corrections departments. The TASER will NOT be used on individuals under the following conditions:

- Person appears frail due to age (young or old) or physical infirmity;
- Women known to be pregnant;
- Individual holding a small child;
- Individual in control of motor vehicle/vessel;
- Individual in danger of falling from elevated position which could result in injury or death;
- Individual near a pool or body of water where a drowning hazard exists;
- Individual in or near flammable liquids or fumes which could be ignited.

#### Other JSO news:

In January, the Community Service Officers completed their field training and were assigned to Zones 3 and 4 substations. These officers will function entirely on their own, assisting officers on the street. They can't carry guns or TASERs, detain suspects, **Taser**, page 15

## "I never knew she was being abused" Anguished mother mourns murdered daughter

by Shirley Shaw

She never saw the bruises. Had no idea her daughter was being physically abused – until it was too late to help. Only after Laura Messina was brutally murdered, shot to death in her own home by her ex-husband, did she learn the full extent of her precious daughter's miserable existence.

Eve Simpson, a special needs teacher at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, was delighted when her young daughter started working there. For 22 years they saw each other almost daily, so Eve cannot understand why she didn't see the signs of abuse. But Laura hid them from everyone except the guidance counselor at the school.

Like most victims of domestic violence, she didn't want friends and family members to know what was happening. Her son, James, witnessed the abuse, but did not tell anyone, and it was he, at age 21, who found his mother's bullet-riddled body lying in a pool of blood.

A generous, warm-hearted girl, Laura always loved to help people and wanted to work in some field of medicine. At graduation from St. Augustine High School she was



Laura Messina

awarded a medical scholarship which she used to attend radiology technology classes at St. Luke's Hospital in Jacksonville.

#### Life-changing events

During this time, two events occurred which changed her career path and would have far-reaching consequences. First, she fell asleep on her way home one night and wrecked her car. Although she suffered only minor injuries, apparently the 17-year old was unnerved by the experience. Then her boyfriend was killed in a car wreck in Jacksonville.

Laura dropped out of radiology classes and, at age 18, started working at FSDB as a residential dorm teacher

for teenage girls. Already familiar with sign language because of her mother's long tenure at the school, she quickly became proficient in signing and was in demand as an interpreter. She frequently interpreted for a school guidance counselor who had lost both sight and hearing.

After her boyfriend was killed, Laura started dating his brother, Jimmy Robinson, against Eve's wishes and advice. Jimmy was a school dropout, had no job, ran with a wild group of kids and was well on his way to becoming an alcoholic. Eve believes that, because of Laura's love for his brother, she wanted to stay in the family, believing she could help Jimmy change his lifestyle.

When Laura became pregnant (both young people were 19), they got married. From then on, the young mother would work two or three jobs to support her family, while her husband spent much of his time in jail or in prison for accumulated DUI citations and other offenses.

#### Enough is enough

Finally, after 22 years, Laura had enough. She wrote to her husband while he was still incarcerated telling him that, after he was released, if he got

Laura Messina Story, page 4

## Betty Griffin House – St. Augustine's shelter for women

by Shirley Shaw



Beth Hughes, Executive Director, Betty Griffin House

Northeast Florida is indeed fortunate to have excellent shelters for victims of domestic violence:

- Hubbard House, which serves Duval and Baker County
  - Micah's Place, Nassau County
  - Quigley House, Clay County
  - Betty Griffin House, St. John's County
- Beth Hughes, Executive Director of Betty Griffin House, is excited about the new

facilities being built in St. Augustine – a much larger emergency shelter, and two apartment buildings for transitional housing. "St. John's County is projected to double in population within the next 10 years," she said. "It's already grown 30 percent in the eight years I've been here."

Incorporated in 1990, St. Augustine's refuge for battered women was Hubbard House in Jacksonville. Then in 1994 Betty Griffin's family donated her house to the shelter when she died. It was used as a down

Betty Griffin House, page 5