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 March 5

# JUSTICE COALITION'S VICTIMS' ADVOCATE

MARCH 2010

WWW.JUSTICECOALITION.ORG

Volume 15 • Number 11 • FREE



## Seniors vs. Crime

By Shirley Shaw

A senior homeowner answers the door one day to find a friendly, clean-cut gentleman standing there. "I was driving by your home," the caller says, "and I noticed your lawn needs to be cut. I'll be glad to help you with that."

The homeowner agrees his grass does need mowing and asks what the man would charge.

"I'll give you a special deal; you sign a contract, give me \$400 and I'll cut it all year long. I'll unload my equipment right now, do a great job you'll be very happy with and I'll come back next week and do it all over again."

The senior citizen signs the contract, hands over the money and the man proceeds to work on the yard as promised. He does a wonderful job, loads his equipment on his truck and drives off - never to be seen again.

Finally realizing he has been ripped off, the homeowner contacts police who ask if the con man did any of the work promised, or if there was a contract. Well, yes, he did. He mowed the lawn once and did a great job, so police tell him they cannot help him; it's a civil matter.

And they recommend he contact **Seniors vs Crime**.<sup>1</sup>

### Special Project of Florida's Attorney General

In 1989, the Florida Legislature ordered a task force formed to report on crime and the elderly. The AG's Task force on Crimes and the Elderly, chaired by Attorney General Bob Butterworth, found that seniors were being targeted for scams, were being subjected to high-pressure tactics by salespersons, and were being deceived by false advertising at an alarming frequency.

To determine just how prevalent were scams and deceptive practices towards seniors, Butterworth and his staff contacted Sheriffs, Chiefs of Police, and Area Agencies on Aging to ask for help in locating seniors who would be willing to participate in a formal survey.

"Senior Spotters" selected for the study were asked to log door-to-door sales

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## Search for My Missing Son Michael Davis disappeared in June 2007

By Jim Davis

I can't count the times I've stopped momentarily to look at a missing person flyer posted in a conspicuous place. Each time I felt bad for the family and hoped or prayed the missing person would be found unharmed. With the exception of a few cases that received continuous press coverage, I soon forgot about the missing person and the family I had prayed for.

We've all heard heartwarming stories where after years of searching, a missing loved one is reunited with his family and friends. The sad fact is many missing loved ones are never found despite prayers, hope and continued efforts to find them. It was hard for me to imagine the worry and trauma such families endure and

the faith they must have to keep hoping and continuing their searches, sometimes for years.

I didn't realize the desperation that faced such families as they frantically reached out for support to search for their vanished loved ones. Neither did I realize the hope and comfort that loving friends and a supportive community bring during such a traumatic time.

When my son, Austin, disappeared in June 2007, I immediately became aware of the emotional trauma associated with a missing person case. I soon learned many families in our community face the daunting task of searching for a missing loved one. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office investigates around 3000 missing person cases annually. Although the greater majority of these cases are



Michael Davis

solved in a short period of time by JSO's Missing Person Unit, many cases like Austin's remain open for years.

Now I will never look at a missing person flyer the same way. I have understanding, deep compassion and sorrow for those who are facing the horror of a missing son, daughter or

MISSING... CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

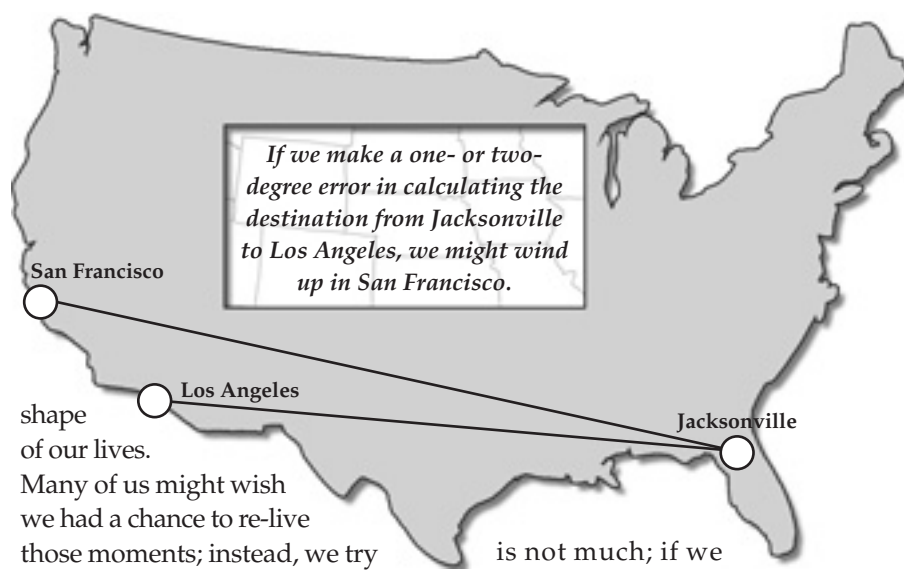
## Small choices - huge consequences

By Shirley Shaw

Occasionally, JC Dir. Ann Dugger and Asst. Dir. Judith Chapple are asked to speak at the Impact House Juvenile Residential Facility (a substance abuse program for teen males) or other such facilities on the First Coast. The message they most often present to these young offenders is how important the choices are that they make every day. These teens may easily choose a path that could land them in prison for the rest of their lives or, worse, result in an early death.

Judith still grieves today because of a decision her lovely, talented young daughter made two years ago that cost her life. Kelli had met an interesting young man online and wanted to meet him. Despite the urging of family members to meet in a public venue, she opted to visit him at his apartment, just to meet him, not a big deal. But an unknown assailant killed her and the young man that night. Such a tragic consequence of that simple decision - and one Judith talks about over and over to young people.

As we get older, it is usually easy to see that what we thought was an insignificant decision when we were young had a profound effect on the



shape of our lives. Many of us might wish we had a chance to re-live those moments; instead, we try to impress on our children or other youngsters how vital it is to make wise choices.

I like to visualize the far-reaching effects of decisions by comparing them to a simple angle. At the center of a circle with all 360 degrees delineated, the space between radii is indistinguishable, but the farther these radii (sides of the angle) project, the wider the distance becomes.

Say, for example, we want to fly from Jacksonville to Los Angeles, so we calculate the coordinates, program the cockpit computer and take off. Somehow, though, we make a one- or two-degree error and instead of landing at LAX, we end up at San Diego or San Francisco. One degree

is not much; if we travel 100 yards from takeoff in Jacksonville, we'll miss the mark by only a few feet - basically a long stride. But 3,000 miles away is a totally different story.

### Habits

We make many small decisions every day, often without giving any thought to long-range consequences. What about the decision to smoke the first cigarette? Maybe from peer pressure or curiosity, despite warnings from parents or knowing the statistics about death from lung cancer or emphysema, the young person lights up. He coughs and chokes as the harmful substance goes

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