

Domestic Violence Awareness

By Jose Jesus Zaragoza

BELLE GLADE - Destiny By Choice, Inc. Family and Community Services held their second annual Domestic Violence Luncheon at the Drawbridge Caf last week. Taking advantage of Domestic Awareness Month, the event was just one of the many that were held throughout the Glades for the purpose of shedding light on the issue this month.

"The importance of this is to really raise awareness of a way of life," said Pastor J.R. Thicklin, Executive Director of Destiny By Choice, Inc. "We hope people become informed and engaged in education empowerment."

A well-attended luncheon attracted a cross-breed of the community and from several governmental agencies on Wednesday. Several speakers addressed the audience and talked about the severity of the problem.

Many of the speakers specifically addressed the effect domestic violence has on the children whose parents live through it. They cited the fact that children who have lived with the problem have an increased chance of becoming victims themselves or mimic the negative messages the violence carries.

"What affects the parents affects the children," said Val Carter, with Redlands Christian Migrant Association. "They are sometimes referred to as the silent victims. Too often this impact follows them through their lives."

One of the speakers, Chief Albert Dowdell with the South Bay Police Department, said the problem is a rampant one and extends to many families. He experienced the problem first-hand as a child and recalled how, in one specific situation, he wished there were more he could have done. His father hit his mother and sent them to a relative's house while it happened. "I was not able to even console her," he said.

As part of the awareness month, all three cities presented proclamations recognizing the problem. Vigils were held in South Bay, Pahokee and South Bay. Workshops were also organized at each of the three cities. All activities were sponsored by Destiny By Choice.

But October is not the only month in which Destiny By Choice takes part in helping to put an end to domestic violence. According to Pastor Thicklin, the organization continually offers programs, such as training and seminars, on the subject and is now branching out to provide these services to employers as well.

Pastor Thicklin asks the community to become more involved in helping to end the sharp problem of domestic violence. According to him, domestic violence is one of the most rampant problems facing residents.

"All the communities should have a zero tolerance for this," he said.

Lecia Gray-Knighton, Executive Director/Consultant of Lights of Life, Inc., brought the problem into perspective during the luncheon. "A woman is abused every 15 seconds," she said. "Think of the women who have been abused while we enjoyed our lunch. It's a sobering thought."