

The Victim's Informer

TEXAS CRIME VICTIM CLEARINGHOUSE

VOL. 13, N.4 – DEC 08/JAN 09

New Director for the Victim Services Division

20-year victim services veteran takes helm of TDCJ division.



Little did Angie McCown know that when she became a volunteer with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) in the mid 1980's, that it would lead to a career change to Victim Services.

After three years as a CASA volunteer, she resigned her position as a marketing representative and enrolled in a Marriage and Family Therapy Program to work towards a master's degree. Upon receiving her degree, she began working as a therapist with child abuse victims and their families at the Houston Child Guidance Center. Three years later she moved to Austin to accept a position with the Austin Police Department's Victim Services Division. As Ms. McCown says, "It was at APD that I was mentored by the best, Ann Hutchison, then Director of APD-Victim Services; I owe much of my success in this field to her."

Several years later she accepted a position with the Texas Department of Public Safety and became the founding Victim Services Director, where she developed a statewide victim services program that consists of 16 victim services counselors throughout the state who provide assistance to crime victims served by the Highway Patrol as well as the Texas Rangers.

Ms. McCown served as both core and lead faculty for the Texas Academy for Victim Assistance. She is a consultant for the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) and co-authored the training manuals, *Compassion Fatigue and Response to School Violence*. Ms. McCown also is on the OVC National Victim Assistance Academy Faculty. She has served on the Texas Victim Services Association (TVSA), the American Society of Victimology, and Texas Association of Marriage and Family Therapy boards.

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TDCJ victim services

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Coryell offers VINE program

by Jon Schroeder

Killeen Daily Herald

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The statewide Victim Information and Notification Everyday program, commonly referred to as the VINE program, became available in Coryell County last week.

VINE is a 42-state service that allows crime victims to track an offender's custody status through the Internet and through phone and e-mail notifications. It is free to crime victims and to the county.

When crime victims sign up for the service, they can receive phone notifications immediately when an offender in a related crime is released or transferred.

While the service is available in all but eight states, not all counties participate in the program.

Coryell County has participated in the program before, starting in November 2006, but when Coryell County Crime Victims' Coordinator Amy Perkins came onboard with the county in February 2007, an incompatible

computer update had rendered the system inoperable. The system was restored last week – officials had been informing victims about the status of their offenders manually.

The program does not include information about federal inmates, but that information also is available online at the Bureau of Prison's Web site. Texas Department of Criminal Justice (state prison) information is not currently available through VINE, but it can also be accessed at the TDCJ Web site.

One of the main advantages of the system is that it tracks offenders. Particularly in light of the many prisoner transfers in and out of Coryell County, that's a good thing, Perkins said. Knowing where an offender is can be a "comfort factor" for victims.

Families of crime victims and of the

offenders themselves in several high-profile cases in the Central Texas area have expressed frustration at the lack of information available. But now, armed with the offender's name and number, along with more specific information

in some cases, they can learn more about a particular inmate's stay in Coryell County Jail, among others in the area.

Bell County information is in the VINE system, but Lampasas County offenders are not.

Before the implementation of the VINE system, a Coryell County Jail roster was already available online with more complete information.

The advantage of the VINE program, as opposed to the jail roster, is the roster is only updated once daily, at about 2 a.m. The VINE system updates every 15 minutes.

Victims of crime can receive information concerning offenders in a TDCJ facility toll free at 800-848-4284

McCown; *continued from front page*

Ms. McCown is a licensed marriage and family therapist and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) level II therapist. She is a consultant for Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS), assisting with National Police Week, Kid's Camp and Retreats. She has received numerous awards and honors, including the Ellen Halbert Award for Excellence in Victim

Services, the Austin Police Department Victim Services Exemplary Service to Texas Crime Victims Award, and the Texas Ranger Chief's Award.

Ms. McCown also is a member of the National Leadership Council for Crime Victim Justice and recently participated in forum to offer recommendations on crime victim issues to the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice

Programs, and U.S. Department of Justice Administration of President-elect Barack Obama.

A native Texan, Ms. McCown has a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Texas and a masters degree in psychology from the University of Houston, Clear Lake. She replaces Raven Kazen, who retired in May.

Crime victims remembered with 'Tree of Angels'

By Matthew Jackson, Staff Reporter

The Huntsville Item

Reprinted with permission; article appeared on December 1, 2008

More than 100 people packed into the conference room at the Texas Prison Museum Monday night to commemorate the 13th annual Walker County Tree of Angels, an annual holiday monument to victims of violent crime in the county.

The event was hosted by Walker County Judge Danny Pierce and Walker County District Attorney David Weeks, and was attended by the families of more than a dozen victims of violent crime, as well as law enforcement personnel from every agency active in Walker County, including the Walker County Sheriff's Department, the Huntsville Police De-

partment, the Huntsville Fire Department and the Texas Rangers.

In a corner of the room, flanked by two small Christmas trees, were photos of each of the victims—people of all ages, all walks of life—each with its own small candle waiting to be lit by someone close to them.

The evening began with a welcome and proclamation by Pierce, who brought with him the regards of the Walker County Commissioner's Court. Pierce then introduced young Ally White, who performed the inspirational song "Our Hope Endures"; an expression of hope amid darkness. White's

voice penetrated the quiet energy of the room, setting an emotional tone that would carry through the rest of the ceremony.

After an invocation by Pastor David Valentine, Weeks addressed the crowd. "I don't know that it ever gets easier," he said. "But tonight, I'm greatly appreciative of your attendance here in support of all those who have suffered so much pain."

Angie McCown, victim services director for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, then gave a keynote address in which she offered inspira-

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Advocate gives voice to violent crime victims

by Sandra Cason, Staff Writer

Marshal News Messenger

Reprinted with permission; article appeared on March 16, 2008

"Violent crime leaves victims, families, friends and the community in a state of turmoil," says Carolyn Allen.

In her role as victims' advocate for Harrison County District Attorney's Office, Ms. Allen has firsthand knowledge of the impact.

She also knows there is no way "to heal the damage that violent crime causes in the lives it touches."

There is much that can be done to ease the financial blow, however. And Ms. Allen has been doing just that since District Attorney Joe Black began the

advocacy plan in 2003.

"Joe became familiar with the program when he worked in Smith County," Ms. Allen explained. "He is very much in favor of it, so when he was elected to office here, he asked me to become involved."

In the year before the program was implemented, Harrison County paid out \$64,991 to crime victims. With Ms. Allen on board, the amount

rose to \$117,443 in 2003, increased to \$151,454 in 2004 and went up to \$258,823 for 2005.

In 2006 — the last year for which figures are available — payments reached \$368,276.

And, Ms. Allen explained, that figure is almost equal to the \$368,992 paid into the fund for Harrison County.

"None of this is taxpayer money," she explained. Funds come from fees and penalties assessed offenders.

Ms. Allen said President Ronald Reagan first focused attention on the

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Advocate; *continued from page 3*

topic of victims' rights. "He literally put their needs and concerns on the American agenda, and he did so at a time when it was a very unpopular subject. He established clearly and convincingly that victims' rights are human rights that affect us all." In 1981, Reagan established the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime.

The study that followed made it clear "victims were treated badly by the criminal justice system," she said. "They didn't know what was going on in the courts and there wasn't anyone who thought they had a right to know.

"The Task Force conducted a review of national, state, and local policies and programs affecting victims of crime," she said. It found the system was not operating fairly, that it was re-victimizing the victim, and that dramatic changes were required.

The group made 68 recommendations in areas of executive and legislative action at the federal and state levels and proposed action for criminal justice system agencies, including police, prosecutors, the judiciary and parole boards. The Office for Victims of Crime was established in 1983 within the U.S. Department of Justice.

A year later, the Victims of Crime Act established services in law enforcement, prosecutions, courts, community corrections and institutional corrections agencies and the juvenile justice system, Ms. Allen said.

The Texas Legislature passed the Crime Victim's Compensation Act in 1979, with funds initially administered

by Texas Industrial Accident Board, but in 1991, the legislature moved administrative authority for the fund to the Office of the Attorney General.

"This fund is dedicated to ensuring that victims of violent crime are provided financial assistance for crime-related expenses that cannot be reimbursed by insurance or other sources," Ms. Allen said. "It is the payer of last resort after health insurance and burial policies have been exhausted. The majority of the revenue comes directly from convicted offenders in the form of court costs, fees and fines. Early on, the balance in the fund increased," and as a result, "the legislature expanded benefits offered to crime victims and increased the maximum award amounts on claims."

Any United States resident is eligible, as long as the crime is reported to law enforcement and an application for assistance is made within three years. Victims of crime who suffer physical or emotional harm or death are eligible, as are dependents of the victim, immediate family, or members of the household who are related by blood or marriage. The maximum paid is \$50,000 and victims who suffer total and permanent disability may qualify for an additional \$75,000, Ms. Allen said.

Funds may be used for medical expenses, counseling, one-time relocation assistance for a victim of family violence or sexual assault, loss of support, loss of wages, travel, funeral and burial expenses, child care and crime scene clean-up.

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Tree of Angels; continued from page 3

tion from her own experiences as both a counselor to victims and as someone who has suffered the loss of a loved one.

“As long as I’ve been doing this, I don’t know if I’ve ever found the right words to say,” she said. “When I was six years old, my Mom’s little sister, my aunt, was killed by a drunk driver, and I remember being six and attempting to celebrate the Christmas season that first year after she was killed. So I know how difficult it can be to celebrate when a person you love is not here with you.”

McCown then related a story of an experience she had with a six year old whose father, a police officer, was killed in the line of duty.

“We would ask the kids to draw pictures of how they saw their parents in heaven,” she said. “And we would get pictures of Dad sitting in an easy chair watching football on a cloud, or of Mom baking cookies, but once this one child came to me and said: ‘Miss Angie, I don’t know if I should share my picture.’ So I said: ‘Whatever you do is ok with me. Let me see it.’ And he showed me the picture and he explained: ‘This is my house and this is a picture of my Dad coming home that night. That’s the picture I wanted to draw, because I don’t want to think about him in heaven. I want to think about him the way I wish it would have happened.’ So over the next few days we talked to him about heaven and about angels and by the end of the week he could think about his father in heaven. So I hope that by being a part of this, you can find

some peace like that.”

McCown then read a short piece on the nature of angels, and gave her thoughts on the presence of angels around the families gathered in the room.

“I believe tonight you are in the presence of many angels,” she said, pointing to the law enforcement officers standing around the walls. “I know that you have suffered significant loss and significant pain, but I know that there are people around you who would give anything they could to take that away.”

When McCown’s speech concluded, Weeks began announcing one by one the names of the “angels” represented on the table of photos and candles.

For each photo there was a procession, for each life a candle lit, as family members walked to the table, often accompanied by a law enforcement officer. While one lit a candle, the other hung a small angel on the tree in honor of their loved ones.

The room was silent as each candle sparked to life. Some wept, some prayed while others merely sat in silent reverence.

Following the lighting of the candles, a memorial slideshow was introduced in which each of the victims was seen, accompanied by the Brooks & Dunn hit “I Believe,” a song about finding peace in the loss of a loved one.

After the last photo faded, five words appeared on the screen that brought still more tears: “We Will Never Forget You.”

After every candle was lit, Weeks again rose to the podium for an emo-

tional moment of his own.

“We wanted to make a special presentation tonight, to someone who knows all of these stories,” he said, indicating the candlelit photos on the table. “He’s been with the DA’s office for 25 years, and he’s done so much for this community that no one knows. His name is Jay Griffin, and he’s our chief investigator at the DA’s office.”

Weeks then introduced Huntsville Chief of Police Jean Sanders to speak about Griffin.

“Jay has always treated everyone with respect and a graciousness that’s hard to explain,” she said. “Jay Griffin is the consummate humanitarian. He will give, assist, and mentor without instruction, and for that I am glad to call him my friend.”

Griffin then accepted his award, a plaque in the shape of the state of Texas, with a few humble words of thanks.

“I just thought I was going to be here to light the tree,” he said. “My family is not here tonight, but I do want to say something to my extended family: all the great law enforcement people in this county who make this system work. I appreciate you all and thank you so much.”

Weeks then concluded the ceremony by decorating the tree, reminding all in attendance that the ceremony was not about grief, but about hope.

“Each of these ornaments and each of these candles is a story of lives unfulfilled, of promises broken,” he said.

“But they are a story too of redemption and triumph over all the evil that the world throws at us.”



SALSA is Hot in Laredo!!

by **Linda A. Brandmiller,**

Director of Immigration Services



Catholic Charities of San Antonio recently received expansion money through the Texas Access to Justice Foundation to address the underserved undocumented population of Laredo and South Texas. SALSA (San Antonio Laredo Legal Services Advocacy) Partnership, targets expanded outreach, education and immigration legal services for victims of crime and domestic violence in far South Texas including the colonia areas outside of Laredo where poverty runs rampant and affordable legal services are virtually non-existent. This is concerted advocacy collaboration with local and other South Texas providers in order to maximize their support and provide the desperately needed immigration legal services for this isolated, disenfranchised population. SALSA Partners include St. Mary's School of Law Center for Legal and Social Justice, Mercy Ministries of Laredo and the staff of Casa de Misericordia, the Webb County District Attorney's Office, Webb County Sheriff's Department, Texas A&M International University, Gateway Community Health Center and the Laredo Health Department.

Casa de Misericordia, which is part of Mercy Ministries of Laredo, serves as the local "home" for the partnership, providing office space for confidential meetings during Friday and Saturday clinics and support staff, who greet cli-

ents, assist with Spanish interpretation when necessary and provide information about the clinic throughout the month. Their hospitality also includes providing complimentary coffee and snacks for volunteer attorneys and law students as well as office support such as the copy machine and computer access. Casa de Misericordia, is the local shelter serving domestic violence victims in the area and functions as the main referral stream into the clinic. Along with the Webb County DA and Sheriff's Departments, potential domestic violence and crime victims without status are referred to the SALSA clinic for intake, screening and possible acceptance into the program. Because these agencies are so attuned to the special needs of this vulnerable population, they are able to assist the victim at several levels and facilitate their acceptance into the clinic by helping them document the events and prepare evidence of the crime and/or abuse.

Immigrant women and children are the forgotten victims of domestic violence/crime. Challenges faced by immigrant victims of domestic violence are especially relevant in South Texas

SALSA Partnership targets

expanded outreach, education and immigration legal services for victims of crime and domestic violence in far South Texas including the colonia areas outside of Laredo where poverty runs rampant and affordable legal services are virtually non-existent.

where a substantial portion of the population is foreign born, geographically isolated and speak a foreign language. Domestic violence is a complex issue and cultural influences can create barriers which

prevent immigrant victims of domestic violence from reaching out for help. The three key barriers are limited information, societal pressure and fear of authorities. There is no reliable source for current statistics on the number of battered immigrants in South Texas. However, in the U.S., immigrant women are more likely to become victims of domestic violence than U.S. citizens. Because many come from cultures where domestic violence is accepted, immigrant batterers and their victims believe that the penalties of our country's legal system do not apply to them. Abusers use their battered partner's immigration status as a way to control them. Consequently, battered immigrant women feel trapped because of language barriers, social isolation, and lack of finances. Due to legal or practical impediments to obtaining public assistance and employment, battered immigrants believe they cannot afford the financial cost of leaving their vio-



lent spouses. In addition, distrust in the legal system from experiences in their native countries and fear of deportation contributes to why battered immigrant women remain in their abusive relationships rather than seek out help.

Coordinated by a part-time attorney, SALSA holds monthly clinics in Laredo with volunteer attorneys, law students and other trained volunteers doing intakes on victims of domestic abuse and violent crimes. To date, nearly 200 women have been screened and assessed for possible legal remedies as victims of serious crime and domestic violence, with over 60 accepted as clients, many with applications pending.

The three overriding goals for SALSA are-

1) To educate South Texas communities and in particular those victims of crime/domestic violence about what their legal options are and to facilitate their access to legal services and support entities,

2) To expand immigration legal services for victims of crime/domestic violence in the isolated areas of South Texas, and

3) To serve as a “Life Lab” for the ongoing training of local service providers as well as to facilitate the expansion of this project at the local level and ultimately replicate it in other communities.

These are just a few of the examples of clients that Catholic Charities is cur-

rently assisting through the SALSA Partnership:

Silvia is a U-Visa candidate after her 13 year-old son was shot and killed by a neighborhood store owner. The son stopped by a store on his way to a cousin’s home when the owner told the son to kneel on the floor. The store owner beat the child first, then shot him with a shotgun. The owner then told some other children to drag the body home. A murder trial is pending.

Maria is a potential VAWA client who was verbally, physically, and sexually abused. Her US Citizen spouse has been very controlling, going to the extreme of moving the family out to a remote ranch where they were left without access to transportation or food. Maria’s spouse would then often leave her and the children alone for days.

Angelica is a potential U-Visa candidate after being stabbed, beaten by a steel bar, and kicked in the back of the neck with steel-toed boots by her husband. The brutality is documented in newspaper articles. A family violence protective order was granted for Angelica’s safety. Angelica is the mother of two children, ages 13 and 14, with the eldest being a United States citizen.

Sarita is the mother of two US citizen children and a VAWA candidate. She currently resides at the Casa de Misericordia domestic violence shelter after five years of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her abu-

sive USC spouse. Sarita is particularly hurt by the fact that her 4 year-old son now repeats many of the insults hurled at her by the abusive spouse. After her husband’s arrest in June for domestic violence, Sarita learned that he’d had a history of abuse against his former wife. Criminal charges and an application for a Protective Order are pending against her abusive husband.

Through the next phase of the “Life Lab” module, Catholic Charities hopes that this project will ultimately provide a national model and encourage the creation of other partnerships to impact this significant demographic of the Spanish-speaking, low income, isolated victim of crime and domestic violence. We thank all of our partners without whom this exciting and very important program would not be possible. For more information on this creative partnership, contact Linda Brandmiller at lbrandmiller@ccaosa.org.

¹See Anderson, A License to Abuse: The Impact of Conditional Status on Female Immigrants, 102 Yale L.J. 1401, April 1993.

²See Orloff, et al., With No Place to Turn: Improving Advocacy for Battered Immigrant Women, Family Law Quarterly, vol. 29, no. 2, 313, Summer 1995.

³See Orloff, Leslye and Rachael Little, Somewhere to Turn: Making Domestic Violence Services Accessible to Battered Immigrant Women, Ayuda Inc., 1999.

⁴See Jang, Caught in a Web: Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence, National Clearinghouse, 1994.



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DATES OF INTEREST

*March 1-6, 2009
 March 2009 National Victim Assistance Academy
 American Airlines Training & Conference Center
 Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas Area
<https://www.ovcttac.gov/nvaa/index.cfm>*

*March 8 - 12, 2009
 TAASA Annual Conference
 Austin Airport Hilton Hotel, Austin, TX
<http://www.taasa.org/>*

*May 13 - 15, 2009
 2nd. National Conference on Restorative Justice
 University of Texas at San Antonio
 501 W. Durango Blvd.
 San Antonio, TX
<http://www.restorativejusticenow.org/>*

SPOTLIGHT on Victim Services Division



RECENT PROMOTIONS AND NEW HIRES AT VICTIM SERVICES

Please welcome to Victim Services newly hired Administrative Assistant II, Kimberly Blackett. She began working in the Notification Section December 8th. She replaces Libby Hamilton who was promoted to Administrative Assistant III. Libby is now assigned to the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse but also will support the Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue and Victim Impact Panel Programs.

Also promoted were Tammy Stockton to Program Specialist I in Notification/VINE and Mike Jones, who now is the Program Coordinator for the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse.