

PROFILES IN PARADISE

A life dedicated to prevailing over domestic violence



Last year The Shelter for Abused Women & Children answered 2,488 calls on its 24-hour crisis line, provided more than 33,000 hours of counseling and developed more than 28,000 safety plans for those in crisis. Executive Director Linda Oberhaus tells the story of one domestic violence victim:

It was 2 a.m. Jennifer awoke to Jay's demand that she make him a sandwich. When she told him she was tired, he pulled her off the bed by her legs, climbed on top of her and began punching her in the face and arms. Nearby in his crib, their 3-month-old son awoke to the screams and began to cry. Jennifer struggled free, grabbed the baby and ran outside.

A neighbor heard her cries for help and ran out to see what was happening. Jay grabbed Jennifer by the hair and pulled her back into the house. He threw her on the couch and told her if she ever ran from him again, he would kill her. To drive the point home, he grabbed their cat by the neck and cut the terrified pet with a kitchen knife.

Jay had Jennifer pinned against the wall when sheriff's deputies arrived. They arrested him and told Jennifer about The Shelter for Abused Women & Children. She arrived hours later with her baby, her cat and a bag of clothes.

At the shelter, Jennifer received counseling and legal assistance. A judge granted her

a 10-year injunction for protection. She and her son began to heal. Today she is piecing her life back together.

Although the names have been changed here, Jennifer's story is true. She is one of thousands of survivors served by The Shelter since it began in 1989. She is among the one in four American women who suffer physical violence at the hands of spouses, intimate partners or family members during her lifetime. That's more women than are affected by breast cancer, ovarian cancer and lung cancer combined.

The Shelter is leading the Collier County community to prevent, protect and prevail over domestic violence through advocacy, empowerment and social change.

I've had the privilege of serving as emcee of the "Shelter from the Storm" luncheon for the last five years. In the process, I've learned to admire and respect the dedication and hard work of Ms. Oberhaus and her staff.

The youngest of nine children, Linda and her twin brother were born outside Boston and raised in Tampa. When she was in elementary school, she delivered newspapers in the neighborhood, earning \$1 a day. "I would purchase milk one day, cereal or bread the next," she says. "I considered it earning my keep."

In middle school she became involved in a work study program that allowed her to earn enough money for school clothes, personal care items, class pictures, etc. She considers herself fortunate to have been consistently employed ever since — including working two jobs for a period of time so she could go to college.

She earned both her undergraduate and



Talking points with Linda Oberhaus



Mentor: My grandmother.

What your mother was always right about: It's more important to be pretty on the inside.

As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? A movie star.

High school job: I worked at Burger King and I loved it.

What would you be doing if you weren't doing this? I think I'd be a life coach.

Guilty pleasure: The Food Channel.

Most recent vacation destination: Asheville, N.C.

One thing on your bucket list: To visit New Zealand, which was named one of the happiest places in the world.

Skill or talent you wish you had: The ability to sing.

Advice for kids: If you can dream it, you can do it.

Best thing about kids: They're like little sponges.

What makes you laugh: The "Dear Kitten" videos. They're priceless.

Last book you read: "The Weight of a Father's Shadow" by Shelly Stayer.

Something you'll never understand: Why human beings exploit one another.

Pet peeve: People who are dishonest or lack integrity.

Something people might be surprised to find out about you: I previously received a conditional appointment as a Special Agent for the FBI.

What are you most proud of? My children. They are my biggest accomplishment.

Something the Paradise Coast really needs: I think the Paradise Coast is pretty close to perfect.

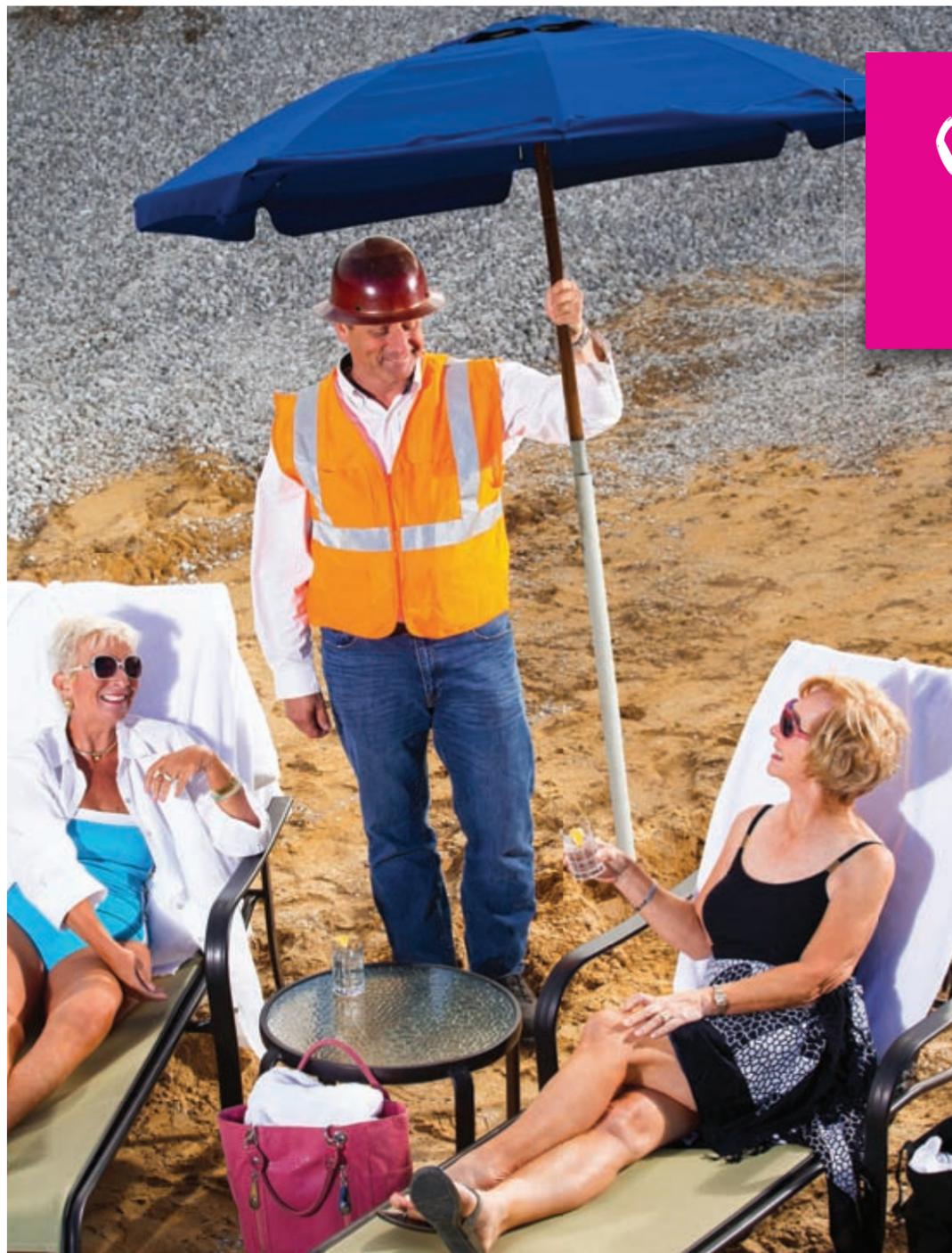
graduate degrees in social work at the University of South Florida. Since then, she has attended the Eckerd College Leadership Development Institute as well as executive education programs at Harvard.

While in college, she volunteered for the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay as a sexual assault crisis counselor. She also volunteered for a juvenile detention center for girls. "I have always had a passion for work that supported the advancement of women and girls," she says. Prior to her current position, she was the executive director

of a certified domestic violence center in Tampa.

Her son Christopher completed six years of military service, graduated from the National Aviation Academy and lives in Spring Hill with his wife and son. Daughter Brooke is a sophomore majoring in biology at Florida Gulf Coast University and hoping to attend medical school.

If you or someone you know is the victim of domestic violence, call The Shelter's 24-hour hotline at 775-1101. ■



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