

The Shelter honors Sheriff's Office detective

PILARSKI NAMED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

By Kaydee Tuff
Citizen Contributor

Women know they have Xiomara Pilarski on their side. As a detective with the Collier County Sheriff's Office, the 14-year veteran makes sure domestic violence victims are safe and see justice.

The Shelter for Abused Women & Children recently honored Pilarski as its Law Enforcement Officer of the Year during the Shelter from the Storm Luncheon, on March 26, at the Naples Beach Hotel.

A 14-year veteran of the Collier County Sheriff's Office (CCSO), Pilarski serves in the Domestic Violence Section and is a member of Collier County's Intimate Violence Enhanced Services Team (InVEST). Implemented by Florida Department of Law Enforcement in 2006 to reduce and prevent intimate partner homicides, the program was expanded to Collier County in 2009. The Collier team includes The Shelter, CCSO, Naples Police Department, Marco Police Department, State Attorney's Office and the Department of Children & Families.

As an InVEST detective, Pilarski reviews crime reports on a daily basis, identifying incidents of intimate partner violence with high lethality. The reports are shared with Shelter staff, who contact the victims to provide them with information on services available to them. As a detective, Pilarski investigates the abuser's criminal history, monitors the abuser and works to hold them accountable.

"It's vital that victims know law enforcement is on their side," said The Shelter's InVEST Advocate Berta Garcia. "Det. Pilarski commits herself every day to being a community partner who provides safety and justice for victims and their families. Her kind and compassion-

ate demeanor creates an atmosphere of safety for victims when they are often in their darkest moments."

Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk praised Pilarski for her energy and dedication, describing her efforts as "unparalleled."

"The relationship between the Domestic Violence Section and The Shelter enhances outreach to all victims of domestic violence and enriches the public's confidence that we strive to end domestic violence in our community," he said.

The success of Collier's InVEST program is clear. According to FDLE statistics, the number of domestic violence homicides dropped from an all-time high of 10 in 2009, to three in 2013. Cases of domestic violence in Collier County also dropped from 1,784 in 2009 to 1,427 in 2013, the lowest number since 1995. The crime rate for domestic violence is also at an all-time low, nearly half that of 1995.

Shelter Executive Director Linda Oberhaus credits the drop to increased community outreach and education as well as collaboration with other agencies to identify and address domestic violence.

"These statistics are encouraging and only made possible through strong partnerships with dedicated law enforcement representatives such as Det. Pilarski," Oberhaus said.

The Shelter, Collier County's only certified domestic violence center, is leading the community to prevent, protect and prevail over domestic violence through advocacy, empowerment and social change. Since 1989, the nonprofit organization has served more than 68,000 children, women, men and their pets.

For more information on The Shelter, go to naplesshelter.org.



CHRIS BRADSHAW/SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN

The Shelter for Abused Women & Children recently honored Collier County Sheriff's Det. Xiomara Pilarski as Law Enforcement Officer of the Year during the Shelter from the Storm Luncheon, March 26, at the Naples Beach Hotel.

BEING ABLE TO REFER THESE new residents to our organization, where they will get access to the support and resources they need, is providing a level of service that can really make a difference in the family's transition to a new home."

— Teresa Stohs

Disco Night

REALTORS HOST DANCE PARTY TO BENEFIT SPECIAL RESIDENTS

By Mollie Page
Citizen Contributor

She bowls a 148 average, loves to take cooking classes and will pitch during the last baseball game for her league's season. But what Nicole Coratti wants more than anything is to use her skills at a well-paying job.

"I have a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Central Florida," said the 35-year-old Coratti. "And the college loans to prove it."

Coratti's zeal for life and optimism are hard to miss. She is a high-functioning young woman whose intellect is sharp. Remove the wheelchair and cerebral palsy and Coratti just wants to work where she can help people. Her degree qualifies her for many opportunities, but the disorder does create limits. Her voice-activated typing program broke recently so today she worries that she may not be able to finish her newsletter assignments.

As a client of the Foundation for the Developmentally Disabled, Coratti enjoys the socialization opportunities as much as she enjoys contributing to the organization's outreach efforts. She loves writing for its newsletter and helping other clients when asked.

"I have bills," said Coratti, whose income comes mostly from Social Security. "When I had to retrofit my apartment with grab bars, I had to pay for it myself. When my cat needs food, I have to pay for it myself. If I want to wear a baseball uniform or take more life skills classes, I have to pay for it myself."

The foundation serves more than 220 adults with disabilities living in Southwest Florida. And while many have family that help with transportation and living costs, others like Coratti strive to be more independent.

"The foundation needs more housing options," said Coratti. "That's why events like the Disco Night are so important."



ANDREW OCCHIPINTI/SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN

Teresa Stohs, executive director of the Foundation for the Developmentally Disabled, center, hit the floor with Foundation clients and dance winners Mark Riccio and Ruby Diaz.



NABOR member Coco Waldemayer with dance partner Nick Koempel, owner of Nik Dance, got the dance party going with a dance performance.

Amid the sounds of Donna Summer and some wild disco-inspired dance moves, clients from the Foundation and members of the Naples Area Board of Realtors (NABOR) joined forces on a recent Friday night to raise funds and awareness for the work being done by the 32-year old foundation.

"We are so excited NABOR chose to partner with us because their members are on the front-line of the community," said Teresa Stohs, executive director of the Foundation for the Developmentally Disabled, who was also spotted on the dance floor during the Disco Night fundraiser.

"When people move to Naples with a disabled family member or child, often it's the Realtor who is the first to interact with them," she said. "Being able to refer these new residents to our organization, where they will get access to the support and resources they need, is providing a level of service that can really make a difference in the family's transition to a new home."

"The Community Involvement Committee's goal is to connect NABOR's 5,000 members with area residents by presenting annual events that are fun, benefit the community and raise the community's consciousness about NABOR as a "good neighbor," said Mario Valle, committee chair. "Events like Disco Night and our eighth annual Family Fun Day in April are not only fun to attend, but also provide NABOR with the opportunity to support local charities and increase awareness of their services and needs."

The Disco Night event included a dance performance by NABOR member and dancing diva Coco Waldemayer and her dance instructor Nick Koempel, owner of Nik Dance followed by a full dance party, libations, silent auction and dance attire contest.

The disco event raised more than \$3,600 in three hours for the foundation. On Friday, April 17, starting at 6 p.m., a benefit concert will be hosted by the Trust For The Advancement of Responsible Artists (TARA) featuring The Dave Signor Project at Alto Jazz Kitchen in Naples. Proceeds will benefit the Foundation for the Developmentally Disabled. Reservations are \$150 per attendee and can be made by calling 239-919-0408.

For more information on the foundation, go to fddswfl.org. And mark your calendar to attend NABOR's Annual Family Fun Day on April 25 at 1455 Pine Ridge Road.