

GUEST COMMENTARY

Educate yourself during National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

BY LINDA OBERHAUS, CEO

The Shelter for Abused Women & Children

Stephanie (name changed to protect her identity) was a smart, middle-class college student with a bright future when Paul, her boyfriend of two months, suggested she try out for a swimsuit photoshoot, telling her she had plenty of potential and the money was good.

He dropped her off at a hotel to meet with the photographer, but instead of a swimsuit shoot, the photographer ordered Stephanie to remove her clothing. When she refused, he said she could not leave until she did everything she was told. After taking compromising photos of her, the photographer raped Stephanie. When Paul returned, Stephanie tearfully told him what had happened to her. Instead of consoling her, he slapped her, called her a whore and said the photos would be posted online and sent to her family if she didn't do whatever she was told. Even as he sold her for sex, it was difficult for Stephanie to comprehend that Paul had never been a boyfriend, but a sex trafficker who had meticulously groomed her for financial profit.

The story above happened here in Naples, and it happens every day throughout Florida, the United States, and the world. Like Stephanie, anyone can be targeted, but most victims are chosen by their trafficker based on vulnerabilities such as loneliness, homelessness, substance abuse, or mental health issues. Once caught in their trafficker's web, victims are exploited through a myriad of bodily threats, intimidation, and coercion.

Today, Florida ranks third in the nation for calls to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, preceded by California and Texas. In 2021, (the most current statistics available) over 85



OBERHAUS

percent of Florida's calls to the hotline pertained to sex trafficking. Although the venue of most reports was not specified, the top three were motels/hotels, illicit spas, and private residences. In 2020, strip clubs and

street-based solicitation fell to the bottom of the list, as the pandemic shifted trafficking from the streets to online venues, strengthening it by making it more difficult to detect. Even in the midst of a global pandemic that suppressed commercial activity across industries, human trafficking continued to thrive.

During January's National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, The Shelter for Abused Women & Children urges all residents to educate themselves and their children on the signs of this horrific crime and ways to protect themselves. We know that public awareness is working, as calls to the Trafficking Hotline have increased 45% since 2016.

The Shelter is proud to be Collier County's official service provider for human trafficking victims, offering specific, long-term therapeutic care at our Shelly Stayer Shelter in Immokalee as well as prevention education in Collier County schools. To educate yourself on human trafficking or schedule an awareness presentation, call 239-775-3862 or go to naplesshelter.org/trafficking.

If you or someone you know has been impacted by domestic violence or human trafficking, call The Shelter's Crisis Hotline at 239-775-1101 or go online to naplesshelter.org ■

Collier Senior Center's free Cardiac Series to explore high cholesterol & ASCVD

Collier Senior Center-Golden Gate resumes its free Cardiac Series with ARHI (Advanced Research for Health Improvement, LLC) at 1 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 30, with High Cholesterol & the Risk for ASCVD (atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease)

Taking place at 4898 Coronado Parkway, Naples, the presentation is free and open to all older adults in Collier County. Guests will join Dr. Leandro Perez to learn more about high cholesterol and atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD), the plaque buildup that restricts blood flow in the arteries and may cause heart, brain and limb difficulties.

Dr. Perez holds board certifications as an interventional cardiologist, endovascular specialist, as well as in nuclear cardiology, adult comprehensive echocardiography, endovascular medicine

and vascular interpretation. He is also a Fellow of The American College of Cardiology and The Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions.

Registration is not required. Held quarterly, the Cardiac Series will feature ARHI-affiliated medical professionals sharing life-saving information about heart health with the community. Future dates and times will be announced on Collier Senior Center's Facebook page at @CollierSeniorCenter and through the media.

Collier Senior Center-Golden Gate is open Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., providing an array of free services for seniors, caregivers, and those in-need throughout Collier County. To learn more about Collier Senior Center-Golden Gate, call 239-252-4541, or visit CollierSeniorCenter.org. ■



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Arts Preview is the insider's guide to the highlights of the season's best performing and fine arts events.

DEADLINES/DATES
Publication Date: Naples/Bonita Springs: **FEB. 8, 2024**
Space/Creative: **JAN. 24, 2024 by NOON** Camera Ready Ads: **FEB. 1, 2024 by NOON**
Contact your Account Executive today!

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