

VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY

422 South Court Street

P.O. Box 4449

Montgomery, Alabama 36103

VOCAL NEWSLETTER

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A NOTE FROM STATE DIRECTOR, JANETTE GRANTHAM

Things have been popping at State Headquarters. There have been meetings with Council of State Government (CSG) regarding Reinvestment Justice Initiative (RJI) in Alabama. The Alabama Prison Reform Task Force has been introduced, and I am honored to represent victims. I take this representation very seriously, for the future of Alabama prisons is riding on the results of this reform. The reform of our prisons is an important issue for victims, and I am glad Governor Bentley and Senator Cam Ward saw the need for a victim representative on the Task Force. Solutions for prison reform and overcrowding will not solve all the issues with our prisons, but it is a step in the right direction. One way or the other, there will be a change in Alabama prisons. The question is – will Alabama make the changes or will the federal government take over and make the changes? Speaking of Alabama prisons, Miriam and I attended Issues and Ales sponsored by WBHM in Birmingham. We thought “ales” was an acronym, but we found out it was a form of beer. Regardless of our knowledge of alcoholic beverages, we did know why we were there. We wanted to show our support to Senator Ward, Kim Thomas and Cynthia Dillard. During the question and answer session, our table sent up several questions to be answered. Believe it or not, all our questions must have gotten lost, since not even one of our questions were chosen to be answered. It was obvious, as least to me, that the format and discussions were slanted. The knowledge I came away with was (1) individuals are going to prisons who do not deserve to be in prison, (2) inmates are being kept in prison way too long and should be released earlier, and (3) inmates deserve more than a bus ticket and \$10.00 when they are released. So I guess all was not lost.

In May, VOCAL attended a Memorial Service for police officers who died in the line of duty. It was a very touching ceremony as all these brave men and women were remembered by the Montgomery Police Department. I had the honor of speaking at a memorial service sponsored by Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS). Law Enforcement Officers who gave their lives protecting and serving the citizens of Alabama, along with family members, were honored.

The Victim Notification Implementation Task Force has been working diligently to implement the Alabama Crime Victim Automated Notification System (CAN). The projected launch date will be in September time frame. See Page 5 of this newsletter and look for more information regarding CAN in our next newsletter.

VOCAL has been busy getting the word out about the 2015 Charity Golf Tournament. The golf tournament is our only fund raiser, and sponsorships are extremely important. All funds received from the golf tournament go directly to providing services to Alabama crime victims. We need your help. Please consider being a golf sponsor, making a donation, and/or playing a round of golf for a good cause. We also need donations of door prizes and promotional items for the goody bags. Every dollar makes a difference. Your generosity is much appreciated. The tournament will be Thursday, September 25th, at Quail Walk Golf Course in Wetumpka. Lunch will be catered by Capital City Oyster Bar.

CHAPTER NEWS

CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER

A hearing was held for Jon Staggs in Judge Reeves' courtroom on May 27. Staggs is charged with the murders of 19-year-old Simeon Gilmore, 22-year-old Joshua Smith, and 22-year-old Casey Cumberland on September 9, 2012. Several motions were made by defense attorney, Herbie Brewer. Motions which allowed the defense access to the results of certain tests from the Department of Forensic Sciences and examination of physical evidence in the defendant's vehicle were granted. However, the defendant will not be allowed to leave the Shelby County Jail to go to the scene of the murders with his attorney. Judge Reeves stated that the defense attorney can take video of the scene and view with Staggs while he remains in custody. The trial is set to take place beginning on October 6, 2014. Chapter members have supported the families of these victims during a number of hearings and will continue to do so during the trial. We appreciate the support the families have received from the Shelby County District Attorney's office.

Chapter members attended a parole hearing on June 17 to protest parole for Carl Rupert Smith. Smith is serving two life sentences for the murders of his ex-wife, Jean Smith Ware, and her husband, Hugh Marlin Ware in 1982. He also has a 99-year sentence for escape, all of which run consecutively. Smith was denied parole for five years. It is so sad to see the devastating effects of a parole hearing on the family members of homicide victims. We think each time that we can be strong and not let the hearing affect us so much, but the pain always returns.

Rio's Bar and Grill in Helena hosted a crawfish boil fundraiser on May 17. We appreciate so much the efforts of Chuck and Crystal Hamrick, owners of Rio's, and all of the volunteers who assisted with this fundraiser. Our VOCAL chapter and SafeHouse of Shelby County received generous donations, and we enjoyed great food and fellowship.

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, August 9, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana.

MT CHEAHA CHAPTER

Mt Cheaha VOCAL is growing, having added to our ranks two officers: Crystal Davis as Recording Secretary and Tristen Loyd as Corresponding Secretary. Tristen brought in her talented sister, Trisha Anderson, to write our own newsletter/meeting letter as a bonus. Before Crystal was recruited to be an officer, she and her husband Russ Davis rode their motorcycle to Montgomery for the National Crime Victims' Rights Week Candlelight Vigil. Their efforts were rewarded by DA Doug Valeska's generous and much-needed donation to our chapter. What a saint!

Speaking of kindnesses, our very own Calhoun County DA Brian McVeigh has agreed to keep paying for the new first-year VOCAL memberships, then it will be up to them to renew after that. This is a huge help for victims and VOCAL and we can't thank him enough.

Another kindness to note: I would like to thank Denny Kimbrel for his support in sharing his chapter's information by sending us two huge "care packages". I've been visiting other chapter site/facebook pages to glean information about operating a successful chapter and hope to make contact with presidents to learn VOCAL inside and out. We are at www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL.

Who knew this year of getting the Mt Cheaha Chapter VOCAL up and running would be so hectic! But the potential for healing an underserved devastated portion of our community is out there waiting to be discovered by volunteers ready to take on the challenge. Visit www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL or call 256-238-1077 (Tristen) to find out when the next meeting is or leave a message.

Victims of Crime and Leniency (VOCAL) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization which was established in 1982. VOCAL is an advocacy group for victims' rights consisting of concerned citizens, victims of crime and their families, law enforcement officers, attorneys, and others interested in reducing crime and improving the plight of its victims.

State Chapter

Director: Janette Grantham
Physical Address: 422 S. Court Street
 Montgomery, Alabama
Phone: 334-262-7197
Toll Free: 800-239-3219
Fax: 334-834-5645
Website: www.vocalonline.org
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 4449
 Montgomery, Alabama 36103

Central Alabama Chapter (formerly Shelby County)

Owens House, Columbiana
 2nd Saturdays in February, April, June,
 August, October, December; 2 p.m.
President: Mitzie Wheat
Phone: 205-668-0636
Email: mwheat@bellsouth.net
Mailing Address: 35124 Hwy. 31
 Calera, Alabama 35040

East Alabama Chapter

President: Diane Walden
Email: vsodianewalden@yahoo.com
Mailing Address: P. O. Box 31
 Lafayette, AL 36862

Gulf Coast Chapter

Baldwin County Annex
 22251 Palmer Street, Robertsdale
 2nd Thursday, 6 p.m.
President: Tracey Wilson Goens
Phone: 251-533-6832
Email: t.goens@mchsi.com
Mailing Address: 30379 Maury Court
 Spanish Fort, Alabama 36527

Jefferson County Chapter

2200 8th Avenue North, Birmingham
 Sheriff's Dept. Training Rm., 2nd Floor
 1st Thursday, 6 p.m.
President: Carol Melton
Phone: 205-841-1465
Email: carolmeltonb@bellsouth.net
Mailing Address: 4162 51st Ave. N
 Birmingham, Alabama 35217

Mt Cheaha Chapter

25 West 11th Street, Bottom Floor
Every other month, second Monday,
5:30 p.m.

President: Milly Baker

Phone: 256-231-4527

Email: wildflowers4@hotmail.com
www.facebook.com/MtCheahaVOCAL

North Central Alabama Chapter

Coordinator: Teresa Lindsey

Phone: 205-466-5777

Email: dlindsay@hopper.net

Text cell: 256-738-2258

Mailing Address: 132 Mt. Carmel Rd.
Altoona, Alabama 35952

River Region Chapter

Domino's Pizza, 5338 Atlanta Hwy.
Montgomery (across from Faulkner U)
2nd Mondays, 5:30 p.m.

President: Darlene Hutchinson Biehl

Phone: 334-450-5851

Email: DFWeditor@aol.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 240624
Montgomery, Alabama 36124

Shoals Chapter

Open Door Fellowship
640 Co. Rd. 323, Florence
2nd Tuesday monthly, 6:30 p.m.

President: Denny Kimbrel

Phone: 256-757-1354

Email: bamafnatk@aol.com

Mailing Address: 442 County Rd. 111
Killen, Alabama 35645

Southeast Chapter

Wiregrass Angel House
105 North Bell, Dothan, Alabama
3rd Tuesday monthly, 6 p.m.

President: Beckie Schuler

Phone: 334-791-3969

Email: becca82380@live.com

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 354
Pinckard, Alabama 36371

The *VOCAL Newsletter* is published bi-monthly in January, March, May, July, September, and November by Victims of Crime and Leniency. Annual membership dues include subscription. Send news items to Editor Mitzie Wheat at mwheat@bellsouth.net.

RIVER REGION CHAPTER

Our chapter has changed its meeting day/time and our location. We now gather on the second Mondays of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Domino's Pizza at 5338 Atlanta Hwy. (in Montgomery, across from Faulkner University). We are hoping this location will be convenient to those in Elmore, Autauga and Montgomery counties, and that a weeknight might fit schedules better.

Domino's has a private room that they have made available to us, and attendees are welcome to place an order and dine during the meeting, or just join us. In June, we had a GREAT speaker! Tony Garrett, a retired Montgomery police officer and one of the founders of our local CrimeStoppers program, gave us an insightful overview of the operations and success of CrimeStoppers. Founded in 1997, Tony now serves as the organization's Community Development Coordinator & Crime Prevention Specialist. Reaching many surrounding counties, the agency had a banner year in 2013, receiving nearly 900 tips and helping to solve numerous crimes. CrimeStoppers is having a significant impact in public schools too, teaching students about conflict resolution, and a mentoring program is also in the works – in hopes of reducing crime. Our chapter meetings are not only a source of special fellowship and support, but also valuable information! If you live near Montgomery, we hope you'll join us on August 11, September 8, or another "second Monday."

Our chapter was recently instrumental in helping a family travel from Texas to Prattville for the sentencing of the offender found guilty of killing Lamarcus Ramsey. Chapter president Darlene Hutchinson Biehl accompanied the family to the sentencing hearing. We treasure the relationships we have developed with local prosecutors and law enforcement and really appreciate the work they are doing! And in Montgomery, after a guilty plea, Terrell Pierce was recently sentenced to 30 years in prison; he is the last of the 3 defendants to be sentenced for murdering Rochelle Williams' son, Travis, in 2011.

Because of our close proximity to the Capital City, our members have taken an interest in the Prison Task Force that was recently created to address overcrowding and sentencing issues. Some of us hope to be in attendance at these meetings to assure victims' concerns are not overlooked. And many of us remain involved in the implementation of the new Parole Notification System that is expected to launch this fall. Watch for more information on that.

Our chapter meetings continue to be a good cross-section of victims who have suffered awful tragedies just recently or two decades ago, each supporting one another and offering encouragement and being effective advocates for each other. Remember, our next meetings are Mondays, August 11 and September 8, at 5:30 p.m. at the Domino's on Atlanta Highway. We hope you'll join us!

**State VOCAL will attend parole
and pardon hearings to protest for you.
If your organization needs a speaker,
call State VOCAL at 334-262-7197.**

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Has time had it's perfect work in you? Have you been thinking upon whatsoever is pure, whatsoever is lovely or whatsoever is good? Well, do so if you haven't. When it's quiet and still and when during your busy day the world seems to stand still ... when thoughts, emotions, feelings and memories of your loved one resurface as swiftly as a desert sand storm flinging sand across the desert, so does the presence of our loved one's rush upon our consciousness and instantly our entire being is consumed with pain, tears, happiness and sadness. Our feelings blind us as if the loss occurred yesterday. Instantly we become impaired, unable to think or function for that brief moment the shock returns, lasting for hours it seems.

Nothing escapes our memory no, nothing ... nothing at all. The human brain does a funny thing when it's overwhelmed with grief trauma. The brain suppresses and represses incidents or experiences like the violent death of a loved one. In suppressing we consciously push thoughts out of our mind or choose to think of something else in place of a painful thought, like eating or changing the subject matter. On the other hand, in repression we limit or control our thoughts by stopping ourselves from thinking about a person or thing to keep from feeling the hurt and pain. So, where do the thoughts go? I'm glad you asked, our suppressed and repressed thoughts go to our subconscious mind which is like a storage bin for all of our life's experiences, situations, beliefs and so on until we need it again.

Oftentimes during grieving we go through stages of anger, denial, depression and ultimately acceptance depending on how we handle hurts and pains. Isolation and depression can develop during these stages of grieving. Beware!!! Isolation can be dangerous to both our mental and spiritual health. Isolation is when loneliness settles in and doesn't want to leave. Isolation is an uninvited guest who must go!!! We must take action to remove isolation from our lives through talking to a trusted friend or licensed counselor, taking 30 minute walks in a safe area, joining an exercise class, reading a book, playing a crossword puzzle or even indulging in spiritual strengthening by way of watching Christian television programs or participating in activities at a local church. These options or choices trigger the brain to redirect or recharge and reboot and produce new brain cells through a process called Neurogenesis - thus, helping you work through the negative emotions associated with grieving. The new brain cells give us new-found hope and do not put you in a chemically induced state, which isn't healthy or productive for healthy grieving. Until next time, take some time to heal properly so you can live another day to celebrate the life of your loved one.

LaTonya C. Speights, Counselor

MEMBERSHIP FORM

October was membership renewal month. Complete the membership form and send it with your dues to your local chapter. If you do not have a local chapter, send form and dues to the state chapter at the address below.

VOCAL - Victims of Crime and Leniency, P.O. Box 4449, Montgomery, Alabama 36103 2013 - 2014

Name _____ Title _____

Agency or Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone (Office) _____ (Home) _____ Email _____

Victim's Name _____ My Relationship to Victim _____

Date of Crime _____ Nature of Crime _____

City and County of Crime (City) _____ (County) _____

Type Membership: Regular \$25 Agency/Organization \$50

Are you available and interested in volunteer work? Yes No

CIRCLE

CHAPTER: Central AL East AL Gulf Coast Jefferson Mt. Cheaha North Central River Region Shoals Southeast

NEW PAROLE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM EXPECTED THIS FALL

In 1984, a law was enacted requiring the Board of Pardons & Paroles to locate and notify victims of violent crimes (or immediate family members in the case of a homicide) about upcoming hearings at which an inmate might be paroled or pardoned. In a couple of months, a new system is expected to launch revamping this system, as a result of a 2011 law.

The new system – referred to as AlabamaCAN (Alabama Crime Victim Automated Notification) – will still require the Parole Board to notify victims of violent crimes about upcoming hearings, but individuals will have access to a new website to monitor an inmate's status, and can verify that their own contact information is up-to-date and choose how they want to be notified (certified mail, first-class, email, etc.). Plus, additional family members and friends (or retired detectives and prosecutors) can register for a parole notice, and victims of any crime can register online for a parole notice (not just victims of violent crimes).

Under the 1984 law, victims were first being located and notified sometimes 8 to 15 years after a crime, when many victims had relocated numerous times and/or changed names. Under the new law, a victim's name and contact information can be captured and stored much earlier in the process, in hopes that more victims will receive notification of an upcoming hearing. In the past under the old law, it seems that many victims were not being notified of hearings, as the Parole Board exercised "due diligence" but was unable to locate victims, or they failed to pick up their notice which was sent via certified mail.

For the past three years, a Task Force representing various criminal justice agencies, in addition to two victim advocates, has been developing the ground-breaking system. Although the new law only relates to parole/pardon notices, the Task Force anticipates that the system will provide many additional resources to victims. Members of the Task Force realize the valuable role victims play in the parole/pardon process and want to assure they have access to important information.

Watch for additional details on the new system in the September newsletter. For questions, feel free to contact Darlene Hutchinson Biehl at 334-450-5851 or DFWeditor@aol.com.

Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope.

Robert Kennedy (1925 – 1968)

DONATIONS

VOCAL appreciates the faithful contributors who support our efforts in assisting crime victims. Your donations make it possible for us to provide more services and support to victims and is tax deductible.

In Memory of Lee Richard Story
Karen & Lee Story

In Memory of Jon Shehane
Miriam & Edward Shehane

In Memory of Quenette Shehane
Miriam & Edward Shehane

In order to cut mailing costs at VOCAL, receive your newsletter by Email. We will still mail newsletters to those who prefer mailing. If you prefer Email, call State VOCAL at 334-262-7197.

VOCAL - Victims of Crime and Leniency
 The Quenette Shehane Counseling Center
 422 South Court Street, P.O. Box 4449
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<p>VOCAL'S 2014 Charity Golf Tournament Thursday, September 25th Quail Walk Golf Course in Wetumpka Lunch catered by the Capital City Oyster Bar in Montgomery Registration at 10:30, lunch at 11:30, and tee off at 1:00 p.m.</p>				
<p>VICTIM CONTACTS</p> <p>Governor Robert Bentley State Capitol Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Taylor Vice, Director Constituent Services</p> <p>334-242-7100 1-800-591-4217</p>	<p>Attorney General's Office of Victim Assistance</p> <p>501 Washington Avenue Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Patricia S. DeBortoli Victim Services Director</p> <p>334-242-7300 1-800-626-7676 www.ago.state.al.us</p>	<p>Department of Corrections Kim T. Thomas, Commissioner P.O. Box 301501 301 South Ripley Street Montgomery, AL 36130</p> <p>Stephanie Hust Victim/Constituent Services</p> <p>334-353-3871 www.doc.state.al.us State inmate parole info. 1-888-726-9799, Option 4</p>	<p>Alabama Crime Victims Compensation Commission</p> <p>Dr. Cassie Jones Director</p> <p>P.O. Box 231267 Montgomery, AL 36123 1-800-541-9388 www.acvcc.state.al.us</p>	<p>State of Alabama Board of Pardons & Paroles Cynthia Dillard, Director P.O. Box 302405 Montgomery, AL 36130-2405</p> <p>Debra Bonds Victim Services Rep.</p> <p>334-242-8050 Fax 334-353-7701 www.pardoles.state.al.us</p>