

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

It is almost time for the golf tournament. (I did not realize there was so much work in playing golf.) It will definitely be a fun day for all. It is not too late to sign up. We will have a silent auction for autographed Alabama, Auburn, and Troy footballs. Someone will go home happy. It is sure to be a fun day. Oh yea – we are still taking donations also.

Last week at paroles, there were three different sets of victims who had the inmate who killed their loved one being housed or working close by. Then the McCombs family in Butler County was surprised to see the inmate who killed their brother working along the highway in Butler County. After the McCombs family spoke to Alabama Department of Corrections regarding this issue, the inmate was removed from community work in Butler County. Yesterday, Miriam and I met with Commissioner Thomas and some of his staff regarding work release and work centers. It was a good meeting and Commissioner Thomas promised to work with victims to get these issues taken care of.

VOCAL has been selected by The Foundation for Improvement of Justice for one of their yearly awards. District Attorney Kirke Adams and I will attend the 2014 Awards Banquet in Atlanta to accept VOCAL's Award. Kirke had to check Alabama's football schedule to ensure it was a bye week for the Crimson Tide. We do have our priorities! Seriously, VOCAL is honored to be the recipient of this distinguished award.

Don't forget about the Charity Golf Classic on Thursday, September 25th at Quail Walk Golf Course in Wetumpka. 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.

CHAPTER NEWS

CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER

The capital murder trial for Jon Staggs is set to begin on October 6, 2014. 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. 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.

At our August meeting, chapter members were provided with information on victim notification and the importance of updating their information in order to be informed of changes in the status of offenders (release on bond, change in facility, end of sentence, inmate's death, appeals, medical furloughs, retrial, etc.). All victims should make sure their contact information is up to date for the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles, the Alabama Attorney General's office, and the Department of Corrections. The "AlabamaCAN" (Alabama Crime Victims Automated Notification System) should improve victim notification. Through this system, victims and interested parties will have access to a public website (victims.alabama.gov) to keep contact information up-to-date, monitor the status of an inmate, and have electronic access to notifications produced by the system. All victims, family members, and friends can register for

CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER Continued

notice of an inmate's parole hearing. This system includes victims of any crime – not just violent crimes.

Mitzie Wheat attended a seminar on “Why Teens Kill” held at the University of Montevallo on July 23. She also attended a seminar on “Civil Justice for Crime Victims” on August 5 in Birmingham.

Our next meeting will be held on Saturday, October 18, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana.

RIVER REGION CHAPTER

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

We are thankful that the Court of Criminal Appeals recently upheld the conviction in the capital murder case of Bailey and Betty Nichols of Lawrence County. Their daughter Rachel is a member of our chapter. This precious couple was mercilessly gunned down in their home in December 2009. Fortunately the family is one step closer to having this case settled.

Our hearts have been heavy for the many violent crimes occurring in our region, but particularly the death of Anita Washington. Ms. Washington was the survivor of attempted murder in 2008 (for which her ex-husband is still incarcerated), and she had become a great advocate for victims. Then, her body was found this summer in Millbrook and her 27-year-old son has been charged with murder. Her dedication will not be forgotten.

We appreciate chapter Vice President Lester Ezekiel attending a parole hearing in August with Montgomery-area relatives of the victim of a Chambers County robbery in 1996. Jason Higgins received a 30-year sentence and was denied parole for at least 2 more years.

Parole hearings are extremely important to many victims of violent crime, as we want to assure justice is served and sentences are carried out appropriately. Therefore, the implementation of the new Victim/Parole Notification System is of great interest to many of us. The system, known now as AlabamaCAN, will revolutionize how notification of these hearings occurs, and our members have been deeply involved in the planning for more than 3 years to assure that the concerns of victims are considered and the new system is indeed helpful to victim. Collectively, our chapter members have volunteered HUNDREDS of hours to this effort. The new system is expected to launch on October 8 in Montgomery. If you'd like to attend this kick-off event, or want to know more about the system, contact Darlene at DFWeditor@aol.com for details.

Our members are also monitoring the work of the Prison Reform Task Force that is expected to propose legislation in the spring to reduce the state's prison population. It's important that as many victim advocates get involved in these initiatives to create the best systems possible. We can't sit on the sidelines!

We are extremely proud of the work by our good friends in Northwest Alabama, who are creating the state's second “One Place” Family Justice Center modeled after the program in Montgomery. The FJC provides comprehensive services to victims of crime – all under one roof. We are thrilled to have played a very small role and continue to offer our encouragement to DA Chris Connolly, the Shoals VOCAL Chapter, and other advocates.

Providing tangible services to crime victims is very important to our chapter members and recently we were able to make a small contribution to help with the burial of a local murder victim. So many of us have traveled this painful path, and therefore we search for ways to lighten the burden and agony of other victims.

Our chapter meetings continue to be a good cross-section of victims who have suffered awful tragedies just recently

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

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Central Alabama Chapter

Owens House, Columbiana, 2 pm, 2nd
Saturday-Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct,
Dec

President: Mitzie Wheat

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Calera, Alabama 35040

East Alabama Chapter

President: Diane Walden

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Gulf Coast Chapter

Baldwin County Annex, 22251 Palmer
Street, Robertsdale, 2nd Thursday, 6 pm

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Jefferson County Chapter

2200 8th Avenue North, Birmingham
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Birmingham, Alabama 35217

Mt Cheaha Chapter

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

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River Region Chapter

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Shoals Chapter

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

Chapter Contact: Mary Anne Rippey

Phone: 256-648-6163

Email: marippey56@gmail.com

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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

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Pinckard, Alabama 36371

RIVER REGION CHAPTER Continued

or two decades ago, each supporting one another and offering encouragement and being effective advocates for each other. We're keeping our sweet friend and member Irene Jacobs in our prayers and hoping she'll be back with us soon. Remember, our next meetings are Mondays, October 13 and November 10 at 5:30 p.m. at the Domino's on Atlanta Highway. Please join us!

SHOALS CHAPTER

Shoals Chapter members attended the arraignment for Mark Edwin Montgomery. He is charged in the murders of Clo Ann Stoner and Joanna Strickland. We met with both families after the hearing. Also our chapter members have attended several hearings with the family of Jerry Ivy; the trial is scheduled for mid-September. The family of Lula Addison held a vigil on the one-year anniversary of her death. Shoals Chapter members attended the vigil and provided candles. Lula Addison was murdered July 26, 2013.

Denny Kimbrel has resigned the office of chapter president, but is remaining active in our chapter. Mary Anne Rippey is acting president until October when elections will be held.

For our August meeting we had a very special speaker, Ashley Harbin VSO from the AG's office. Ashley discussed the court system beginning with arraignments to the appeals. Our members were very appreciative of all the information Ashley shared with us along with handouts for us to use when assisting other victims.

Our chapter is currently looking for a new meeting place that will be centrally located and easier to find for persons not familiar with our area.

Debra Gray, one of our local members, was nominated for Shoals Women of the Year. Debra was in the final five nominated. We would like to congratulate her for everything she has achieved after surviving domestic violence and giving back to the community by volunteering for numerous organizations.'

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

LaTonya C. Speights, Counselor

Welcome back! It's so good to be with you again. Young people - you gotta love 'em. Thanks to young people, Americans now have adopted over 9081 slang terms created by young people. Case in point, "Chillax"! Chillax is pronounced /CHilaks/. Chillax is a verb which simply means to calm down and relax. As grownups, do we even know what that means? Consider all the luxuries provided for young people by adults such as food, shelter, clothing, transportation . . . need I say more.

On a softer note, be easy on yourself grown up or simply "Chillax". Grieving, loss, trauma, stress, pain, heartache . . . on goes the list of emotions associated with losing a loved one. These emotions and feelings wreak havoc on our healing and emotional state. The hurt and pain doesn't just go away in a day nor does it

go away in several nights or a full calendar year sometimes.

It takes time, so take a little of that time to reflect back on the coping techniques we have learned over the past several months. A few of them include (1) stay actively involved in something positive to avoid isolation. Isolation is a nonproductive place which doesn't allow healing to grow. (2) Allow time to have its perfect work in you! Honor your loss by celebrating the life your lost loved lived on earth. (3) Lastly, remember you have POWER through your voice! Use your power to support your local VOCAL chapter or start one of your own if your county does not have one. Their legacy lives on through you and the services you render on their behalf. Inquire about volunteering at your local District Attorney's office or its affiliates and stand up for other victims and families in your local community.

Finally! Chillax!!!! - take a deep breath and release, calm yourself down. Triggers are inevitable to avoid, so when one arises taking you back to sad memories and feelings, remember that "Rome was not built in one day." Neither will my grieving go away in a day. Take a calming breath, smile and say "Chillax self." Time will fix this. Don't go and beat yourself up about it or recounting how many times you've fallen before. Get yourself back up; put a smile on your face and "Chillax."

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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</p> <p>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>