

VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY

422 South Court Street

P.O. Box 4449

Montgomery, Alabama 36103

VOCAL NEWSLETTER

Volume 14 ~ Issue 5

March 2014



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A NOTE FROM STATE DIRECTOR, JANETTE GRANTHAM

As we gather to light candles and release balloons at the State Vigil, I would like to thank all those who have supported victims all these years. At this time, I can't help but reflect on the accomplishments of VOCAL. However, these accomplishments would not have been possible without those who have diligently worked day in and day out to ensure justice for victims.

Thanks, first of all to Miriam Shehane who stood tall back on November 15, 1982 at the formation of VOCAL. Now thirty-two years later, Miriam is still standing (maybe not as tall physically) and fighting for justice. Another big contribution to our accomplishments are our VOCAL Chapters. We have eight chapters across Alabama. The presidents and officers of these chapters devote many hours supporting and advocating for victims. They travel near and far wherever a victim needs them. Thanks to those chapters and all members of VOCAL. Your time, your contributions, and your prayers have kept VOCAL strong. Victim advocates from all agencies continue to be instrumental to victims. Every day advocates from the Victims Unit at the Attorney General's Office suit up and go out to paroles, courtrooms or wherever they are needed in support of victims. A big thanks to Attorney General Luther Strange, Patti, Ashley and Doris for being there for crime victims. Of course the Pardon and Parole Board deserves thanks. They have a tremendous job in balancing the scales of justice. They do not always rule the way I think they should (in fact I have come close to being banished from the room), but I know they would never release anyone they think might reoffend. I can live with that. Thanks to Mr. Wynne, Mr. Walker, and Mr. Longshore for their fairness to both sides. Those supporting these three 'Just Men' deserve a real big thanks - Carol, Debra, Stacy, Rhonda and Lakebial are the backbone of the Pardons and Paroles Board. All the district attorneys and their victim service officers across the state ensure victims are treated with dignity and respect in the courtroom. Here again, we may not get the justice we should, but I know the DAs fight for every victim every time. There are many elected officials who deserve thanks. They work hard to write and pass crime bills to make our communities safer. Our law enforcements puts their lives on the line each and every day to protect us. There are many agencies for victims who, along with VOCAL, strive to make the victim's journey a little easier. I am not sure I saved the best for last - but nonetheless - thanks to those who serve on the VOCAL Board. They are true warriors for justice. They devote many hours and much time on the road to ensure VOCAL accomplishes their goals and is still going strong. Whoever I missed - I apologize.

We did not choose to be victims. We have been dragged into courtrooms because of others. The journey we travel has not been smooth, and there have been many twists, turns, and detours. For some of us, the journey never ends. I want each and every victim to know they do not travel this road alone. All those I mentioned before are with you trying to make your journey a little better.

Please join us Friday night, April 11th at 7 p.m. in front of the Attorney General's Office in Montgomery for our annual Candlelight Vigil.

CHAPTER NEWS

CENTRAL ALABAMA CHAPTER

Chapter members attended the trial and sentencing of Jody Byrd. Byrd was found guilty of murder in the death of his wife, Desta Dodson Byrd, in Bibb County and sentenced to 99 years. Desta was killed on February 25, 1999 at her home in Brierfield. On January 31, Bibb County Circuit Court Judge Jack Meigs heard a motion for a new trial. Defense attorneys argued that Byrd deserved a new trial because prosecutors presented only circumstantial evidence during the trial and said that a rational jury would have considered reasonable doubt in the case. They also argued that a juror initiated improper contact with one of Desta Byrd's family members and a Bibb County Sheriff's deputy. Attorneys for both sides were present when Judge Meigs interviewed the juror while the trial was ongoing. The judge stated in his order that one of the defense attorneys said at the time of the juror interview that they were satisfied and did not request him to take any other action, such as having the juror replaced with an alternate. The motion for a new trial was denied, and Byrd's attorneys say that he will continue the appeal.

The chapter's Candlelight Vigil will be held on Monday, April 7, at 7 p.m. at Shelby Christian Fellowship, located on Main Street in Columbiana. Attorney General Luther Strange will be the keynote speaker. We invite all to attend as we commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week and honor and remember victims of crime.

Our April meeting will be held on Saturday, April 12, at 2 p.m. at the Owens House in Columbiana.

GULF COAST CHAPTER

As Crime Victims' Rights Week approaches, VOCAL Gulf Coast, along with Baldwin County District Attorney Hallie Dixon, have planned a sunset memorial evening set for Thursday, April 10, from 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm, to be held at the 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center in Spanish Fort. We invite anyone who wishes to be part of this wonderful evening to please come join us. We will begin the evening with a social and refreshments shared by survivors, families and supporters as we share stories with laughter and some tears. Victims' families are asked to bring a picture of their loved ones they wish to honor that night and we will share memories as the sun sets, candles are lit, and music fills the air.

Our guest speaker will be VOCAL's own founder Mrs. Miriam Shehane, as she shares with the crowd her moving story of the fight for equality for victims and determination to fight against early release for the convicted, while in the depths of her own grief following the murder of her daughter.

We were excited to learn that, due to the wonderful effort by our Baldwin County DA Hallie Dixon and her staff, our county has received for the second year the Community Awareness Project Grant for 2014 National Crime Victims' Rights Week from the Office for Victims of Crime. This grant will assist with various projects during National Crime Victims' Rights Week, including our Candlelight Vigil on the Delta. It is rare that a county receives this grant in back-to-back years, so we feel honored to have been a part of it.

VOCAL Gulf Coast, District Attorney Hallie Dixon, CARE House (for abused children), and The Lighthouse (for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault) will have information tables set up at the Vigil with information available regarding their services. There will also be area law enforcement and chaplains on hand for the service.

In other news around the Gulf Coast Chapter, re-elections were held and the membership voted to keep the same Board of Directors. Officers elected include Tracey Goens as President, Diane Foster as Vice President and Monica Patience as Secretary.

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, Robertsedale
 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**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**422 South Court Street, Montgomery
1st Sunday monthly, 2 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 Mitzie Wheat, Editor, at the VOCAL address or mwheat@bellsouth.net.

We continue to meet the 2nd Thursday of each month at the Robertsdale Annex and invite anyone in our area to join us. We ask for payers for our area families that are hurting and still enduring the legal process like the Murphys, the Fishers, the Hintons and so many others. We are still working on VOCAL Gulf Coast awareness in our area and how help leads to hope.

JEFFERSON COUNTY CHAPTER

Jefferson County chapter members will be working with the Jefferson County District Attorney's office to plan the annual Candlelight Vigil. Chapter members have been ill, have transferred to other jobs, or are unable to assist because of the demands of their jobs. Letters will be mailed as soon as plans are made. Our chapter is in need of members who can assist with the meetings and chapter business.

RIVER REGION CHAPTER

A lot has happened in the River Region lately. In late February, long-time District Attorney Ellen Brooks announced her resignation. We are so thankful to Ellen for her commitment to justice and for always being a dedicated advocate for victims. Many of our chapter members have known Ellen since the 1990s and have watched her in action – not just in the courtroom, or leading one of the busiest DA's offices in the state, but also being a champion in the area of public policy. While she has certainly earned a restful and enjoyable retirement – after 20 years as DA and a total of 37 years as a prosecutor – we are hopeful that she will continue to contribute to the cause of justice and to help victims of crime.

The same day Ellen announced her retirement, Governor Robert Bentley appointed her Chief Deputy DA Daryl Bailey as Montgomery's newest top prosecutor. Daryl began working in Ellen's office about the time he graduated from law school in 1996 and has consistently been a smart and tough prosecutor who fights for victims. We wish him the very best and are eager to assist Daryl in any way we can.

Recently, the third defendant charged with the 2011 murder of Travis Williams has entered a guilty plea and will be sentenced in April. Our chapter members continue to be available to assist Travis's mother, Rochelle, and the rest of the family during this phase. We know the entire ordeal has been so difficult for them.

The legislative session is expected to end in early April, and the last few weeks are always the craziest. With our close proximity to the Capitol complex, some of our members occasionally visit the State House to monitor pending bills and attend committee hearings -- and to remind lawmakers and public officials that victims matter. As some of you may have heard, there's been an effort to combine parts of the Board of Pardons & Parole with the Department of Corrections, which is still facing serious issues of its own. Plus there are many other bills we're watching. By the way, the legislative seat for Elmore/Coosa counties (which was empty for 4 months) has been filled, as Mike Holmes was elected on February 4. Representative Mike Holmes has already taken great interest in victims' issues and

we look forward to working with him.

Many of our members continue to attend meetings and follow the implementation of the new Parole Notification system, which may launch this spring (because of legislation that passed in 2011). Our goal is to assure that victims' rights are always protected.

In late January, chapter president Darlene Hutchinson Biehl was saddened to learn of the death of Buddy Ammons, who served more than 30 years as a police officer/investigator in Coffee County. Buddy was integral to investigating Darlene's kidnapping in 1987 and became a cherished friend in the years that followed. Compassionate public servants like Buddy Ammons, who excel at their jobs, are so important to the survival and recovery of victims of violent crime, and we have lost a giant.

Our chapter meetings continue to be a great way for folks who have suffered awful tragedies to support and encourage each other – whether those crimes happened recently or decades ago. We are still meeting at the VOCAL office on Sunday afternoons (although we have been considering changing to a weeknight meeting near the Coliseum); let us know your thoughts on this change. But our next meeting date is Sunday, April 6 at 2 p.m. We hope you'll join us!

SHOALS CHAPTER

Shoals Chapter's annual Candlelight Vigil will be held on Tuesday, April 8, at First United Methodist Church, located at 415 North Seminary Street in Florence. Children's activities will be held in the church gym beginning at 6 p.m., and the vigil program will begin at 7 p.m., also in the church gym. The keynote speaker will be Assistant Lauderdale County District Attorney Will Powell. The program will also include speakers from Rape Response, Safe Place, The Healing Place, and VOCAL. Following the program, the candle lighting and balloon release will be held at Wilson Park, across the street from the church.

SOUTHEAST CHAPTER

The Southeast Chapter of VOCAL met on February 18 at Wiregrass Angel house. We made plans for our annual Victims' Rights Week activities. Our Candlelight Vigil will be Sunday April 6, at 3 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church, 302 West Main Street, Dothan.

We will meet again on Tuesday, March 18 at Wiregrass Angel house. We urge all members to please try and attend this important meeting as we will plan our vigil.

Chapter President Beckie Schuler attended the memorial service honoring Mr. Charles Poland. The service was wonderful and a true memorial to Mr. Poland, who gave his life for the children he loved and drove to school daily. He is a true Hero.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK | APRIL 6-12, 2014

VOCAL CANDLELIGHT VIGILS

Southeast Chapter - Sunday, April 6, 3 p.m.
First Presbyterian Church, Dothan

Central Alabama Chapter - Monday, April 7, 7 p.m.
Shelby Christian Fellowship, Columbiana

Shoals Chapter – Tuesday, April 8, 6 p.m.
First United Methodist Church, Florence

Gulf Coast Chapter - Thursday, April 10, 6 - 8 p.m.
5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, Spanish Fort

North Central Chapter – Thursday, April 10, 5 p.m.
Large Courtroom, Blount County Courthouse

State Chapter - Friday, April 11, 7 p.m.
Lawn of Attorney General's Office, Montgomery

30 years: restoring the balance of justice

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

Anger has a voice . . . it always has. The voice of anger sometimes give birth to tears, sometimes it is quiet and withdrawn, sometimes it's loud, sometimes it yells, sometimes it screams, sometimes it cries; then other times it's like a consuming ball of fire deep in the core of our souls jumping out through tears, misguided actions, and poor word choices we are unable to retract. I suspect the voice of anger ignited many of the historical events we read about in our history books: the civil rights march in Selma, the increase of our salaries, and possibly the formation of women's rights suffrage which gave women the right to vote 1920 according to the 19th Amendment.

In our personal lives, losing a loved one may contribute to anger sprouting up in our hearts and our minds. Anger without direction or understanding can lead to poor health, heart attack, stroke, lack of sleep, migraines, frustration, and lack of progress in our personal lives. Anger is a human emotion that is corrosive in nature; it doesn't go away when we release it. We must learn to redirect the anger to a positive place and learn to cope with the emotion so that we may live a positive life and honor the loss of our love ones through celebrating the life they once had here on earth.

Anger is a combination of pleasure, happiness and pain. The pleasure is in loving our family member and knowing them intimately, mixed with the pain of not having them in our physical presence any longer. We cope with the loss by placing energy and thoughts on the positive loving side of knowing them and demonstrate it through looking at a photo or eating at their favorite restaurant, once we are strong enough to accept the loss and recognize it as a meaningful loss. Then once we accept the loss as meaningful, we can take small steps to show our love for them. One such way is during the week of April 6-12, which is National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This time is set aside to honor and reflect on the lives of those loved ones taken away by homicide crimes. A Candlelight Vigil will be held in Montgomery on Friday April 11, 2014 on the lawn of the Attorney General's office located at 501 Washington Avenue, Montgomery. You will have an opportunity to see their face(s) again through a slide show presentation of pictures submitted and witness a display of over 200 crosses assembled on the grounds, honoring the lives of our loved ones who are no longer with us. It is okay to cry and feel saddened by the loss as it was an important part of our lives. So give your anger a resting place and honor your loved ones by acknowledging that your life was touched by their presence. If you have a photo of a family member you wish to have included in the presentation, please send it no later than April 4.

LaTonya Coleman, Counselor

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.

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.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

National Crime Victims' Rights Week is an opportunity to re-energize the field of victim services, take stock of the achievements made, and focus on the important tasks ahead. This year's theme, 30 Years: Restoring the Balance of Justice, marks an important milestone in our mission to serve victims. The passage of the Victims of Crime Act in 1984 forged a new commitment to funding the empowerment and recovery of crime victims and their families. In the 30 years since, we have seen an evolution of our understanding of the impact of crime and the short-term and long-term needs of crime victims.

VOCAL, Victims of Crime and Leniency, was organized in 1982 to create a more balanced system. Somewhere along the way, victim's rights across the nation, for all practical purposes were non-existent. The same system that victims expected to protect them was hampered due to the aggressive efforts to ensure the rights of the offenders were protected. VOCAL's goal has been to balance the scales of justice by giving crime victims those same rights, rather than eroding the rights of the offender.

VOCAL initially focused on legislation to rectify the imbalance. Crime victims individually and methodically contacted legislators on behalf of crime legislation and have seen the fruit of their efforts to include a favorable method in selecting a jury. Today, the crime victim cannot be excluded from the courtroom simply because of his/her testimony at trial. Criminals can now compensate a crime victim for their victimization. The Parole Board is mandated to notify victims of a violent crime when their offender is being considered for parole, and a Victim's Rights Constitutional Amendment has been ratified to protect the rights of the victim throughout the judicial process. VOCAL has expanded its advocacy to include free counseling from a certified counselor, support at trials and parole hearings, crime scene clean-up, death notification, informing the victims of their rights and apprising the public of the plight of victims.

The most recent crime data available for the United States is from 2011. There were 14,812 homicides; 1,570 children died due to child abuse or neglect; and 72 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty. Violent crimes by intimate partners totaled 851,340 and accounted for almost 15 percent of violent crimes reported to the National Crime Victimization Survey. According to the FBI in 2011, there were 1,707 females murdered by males, with 94 percent murdered by a male they knew.

Celebrating 30 years of assisting victims is not an invitation to rest on three decades of progress, but a reminder of the work still before us in restoring the balance of justice to all those harmed by crime.

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.

Henry County Commission

Jeremy King

Montgomery County

**In Memory of
Desta Dodson Byrd
Mitzie Wheat**

**In Memory of
Patricia Collum
Mitzie Wheat**

**In Memory of
David Herrin
Dodie & Paul Herrin**

**In Memory of
Jon Shehane
Miriam Shehane**

**In Memory of
Chris Smith
George Smith**

**In Memory of
Rob Trussell
Marty Trussell**

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

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL VICTIM'S TESTIMONIAL

VOCAL will produce a testimonial booklet for the Candlelight Vigil to be held on Friday, April 11, 2014 in Montgomery during National Crime Victims' Rights Week. If you wish to include a brief memorial or tribute statement in this booklet, complete the following form and mail or fax to the VOCAL office by **April 4, 2014**.

PLEASE PRINT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO VICTIM: _____

IN MEMORY/HONOR OF _____ WHO WAS
(CIRCLE ONE) (NAME OF VICTIM)

_____ ON _____
(NATURE OF VICTIMIZATION) (MONTH/DAY/YEAR)

BRIEF MEMORIAL OR TRIBUTE STATEMENT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE INCLUDED IN THE TESTIMONIAL BOOKLET:

WILL YOU ATTEND THE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL IN MONTGOMERY ON 4/11/2014? _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO:
VICTIMS OF CRIME AND LENIENCY
P. O. BOX 4449
MONTGOMERY, AL 36103-4449
Fax 1-334-834-5645

VOCAL - Victims of Crime and Leniency
The Quenette Shehane Counseling Center
 422 South Court Street, P.O. Box 4449
 Montgomery, Alabama 36103

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 281
MONTGOMERY AL

Phone: 334-262-7197
Toll Free: 800-239-3219
Fax: 334-834-5645
Website: www.vocalonline.org

POSTMASTER: RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



ATTENTION: GOLF TOURNAMENT IS COMING IN SEPTEMBER. WATCH FOR UPDATES!

NOTICE TO VICTIMS
 Please send your victim testimonial or photo of a victim to the State Chapter by April 4 for inclusion in the statewide vigil.

<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.pardons.state.al.us</p>
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