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Police Chief's Campaign Takes to TV

By Vanessa De La Torre

Here is a 30-second public service announcement coming from Largo police Chief Lester Aradi to a TV near you. Roll the video montage:

"Real men don't hit women," says Mario Diaz, Tampa Bay 10 news anchor.

"And a good woman doesn't hit their partner," says Jen Holloway of Bay News 9.

"Good parents don't shake or beat their children," notes Fox 13's Mark Wilson.

"Good people don't abuse the elderly, physically or financially," says Keith Cate of News Channel 8.

"Good people don't hurt or neglect animals," says ABC Action News' Deiah Riley, holding a little dog.

"A real man doesn't sexually assault anybody," says Tampa Bay Lightning coach John Tortorella.

"Are you having trouble getting the message?" Aradi asks viewers.

"Well, we can help you figure it out," says Clearwater police Chief Sid Klein, ominously.

"If you really need us to," adds Pinellas County Sheriff Jim Coats, shutting a prison door as a guy in an orange jumpsuit bows his head against a wall.

"Abusers are losers," coach Tortorella declares.

Cut.

The announcement is part of the Largo Police Department's campaign against domestic batterers, and will be aired on Pinellas County cable stations and local public service channels starting Tuesday.

The campaign started this year with a billboard on southbound U.S. 19, near East Bay Drive, that carried this simple message: REAL MEN DON'T HIT WOMEN & CHILDREN.

While reports of domestic violence dropped slightly across the state and county in 2005, that wasn't the case in Largo.

"Last year we saw a decline in the crime rate, yet there was an increase in domestic violence calls," Aradi said Friday.

Some at the Police Department think the increase has something to do with annexing more people into the city. Last year the population increased 3 percent, making the resident total about 76,000.

But domestic abuse calls rose 9 percent.

"What stuck with me is that we deal with a lot of households where children have no role model," Aradi said. "At some point, someone needs to stand up and say, 'Hitting a woman is wrong, abusing an animal is wrong, sexually assaulting a woman is wrong.'"

After getting a \$20,000 donation from Pinch A Penny pool supplies, the campaign began its first of three phases.

The \$11,000, three-month billboard was unveiled to motorists at the end of April and will be taken down at the end of this month. The billboard could be seen by southbound motorists on U.S. 19 near East Bay Drive, a spot passed by more than 73,000 cars and trucks a day.

People gave it mixed reviews, Aradi said. Some women e-mailed him, thanking him for putting the topic out in the open.

"One man wrote a letter saying, 'Chief, you got it wrong. The Scripture says women and children should be beaten from time to time,'" Aradi said.

Two men associating themselves with men's rights groups also sent him a message, complaining that Largo was just picking on guys, Aradi said.

Not with the campaign's second phase.

"The message we're trying to show is that domestic violence of any kind is wrong," he said.

And TV viewers can expect to see that message on BET, ESPN2, MSNBC, Home & Garden Television and the USA station.

The air time cost \$6,000 and is enough for 78 commercial spots. All five news stations in the Tampa Bay area provided a news anchor and raw footage for the public service

announcement, shocking Aradi, who heard they might be too competitive with each other to work together on a project. Another happy volunteer was Tortorella, the Lightning coach.

“He was phenomenal,” Aradi said. “I have not met a more gracious man in my life.”

The campaign’s third phase will focus on distributing anti-abuse bookmarks or brochures to schoolchildren.

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