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## Police Effort on Curbing Domestic Violence is Worthy and Necessary

A glance at the daily calls handled by the Largo Police Department, or most any large city police department, would show that police spend an inordinate amount of time responding to domestic disturbances. Too often, in the opinion of Largo police Chief Lester Aradi, those disturbances escalate to violence.

Aradi is so troubled about recent increases in domestic violence in Largo – it increased 9 percent from 2004 to 2005, while other crime categories fell – that he and his department have kicked off an aggressive campaign to stop it.

The most visible sign of the campaign will be an in-your-face message plastered on a U.S. 19 billboard: “REAL MEN DON’T HIT WOMEN AND CHILDREN.”

However, the most effective parts of the campaign are likely to be the quieter, long-term effort to educate the public with a television advertising campaign featuring celebrities and a children’s brochure.

Aradi says that domestic violence is a “dirty little secret” in many households, and he intends to expose it for the horrible act that it is. That is one reason the campaign will try to reach out to victims and potential victims – most often women and children – rather than just focus on catching or reforming abusers. The Police Department is partnering with the Haven of RCS, an agency that helps domestic violence victims, to develop a brochure for children. The brochure will attempt to teach children that violence in any form is wrong, that there are better ways to live, and that there is help available to families that are suffering.

“One thing we do know about domestic violence is that it is passed down from generation to generation. It is learned behavior,” Aradi told Largo city commissioners at a recent meeting.

Aradi intends for the campaign to target and attempt to educate not just male abusers, but women who abuse, children who abuse animals and other forms of violence, in an effort to end the recurring cycle of violence in families.

Aradi went to Pinellas businessman Fred Thomas to ask for funding to kick off the campaign. The department will use Thomas’ \$20,000, donations and in-kind services to

pay for the campaign, but city officials responsible for budgeting should ensure that the campaign gets and retains sufficient funding.

The Largo Police Department has worked on the issue of domestic violence for years already, putting it “on the cutting edge” in battling the problem, according to an official of the Haven, yet the rate of domestic abuse continues to grow in the city. Aradi doesn’t intend to take that lying down.

Domestic violence is a serious social issue that takes serious effort to combat. Congratulations to Aradi and his department for recognizing that and persisting in the fight.

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