



PHOTO BY GRACIE HART BROOKS

Pastor Jeffrey Light and volunteers with Canines for Christ light lanterns in honor of those affected by domestic violence.

# Lighting up the night sky

Local event held to commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month

BY GRACIE HART BROOKS  
Editor

As hymns floated through the air, the night sky at Hoover Ridge became a little brighter last week with the lighting of lanterns in honor of those impacted by domestic violence.

The Light Up the Night event, the first of its kind in Madison County, was sponsored by the Madison County Victim Witness Assistance Program and Services to Abused Families (SAFE) to commemorate October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Domestic violence is a problem that affects all walks of life throughout the world, including those in the county. According to victim witness coordinator Jennifer Hayes, during the last fiscal year, the local victim witness assistance program worked with 175 clients, 83 or 47 percent of which were victims of domestic violence. During the same time frame, SAFE served 81 clients with some overlap between the two agencies.

In 2012, there were 17,664 domestic violence crimes reported in Virginia with 117 people killed in domestic violence related homicides,

amounting for 34 percent of all homicides in the state that year. At any one time, there are more than 31,000 protective orders statewide. Hayes explained that statistically, one in three women and one in four men have or will experience some form of domestic violence.

"This affects all people," she said. "[The impact] can last lifetimes. Community involvement is critical in helping victims of any kind."

Cindy Hedges with SAFE said that domestic violence happens everyday. She thanked the first responders for their work in helping domestic violence victims. In addition to operating a 24-hour hotline for victims, SAFE also has a 15 bed emergency shelter for those fleeing violent or abusive situations and can refer victims to legal advocates. A youth program is offered as well. Like Hayes, Hedges said battling domestic violence takes a collaborative effort. She said the number of incidences continues to increase by 50 percent year over year, not because violence is increasing, but because the word is getting out and more people are reporting domestic violence. She stressed that domestic violence is not just physical abuse, but includes

mental and emotional abuse as well.

"When the community lets victims know they're cared for that allows them to come forward," Hedges said.

Madison County Department of Social Services Director Valerie Ward agreed and noted that domestic violence also has a large impact on children. She said in 2018, 40 local children needed an alternative safe environment. Like Hayes and Hedges, Ward said the community plays a large role in supporting victims.

"Each of us only have a tiny piece of a solution, but when put together amazing things happen," she said. "It's not just about the public agencies. It's really about the community and helping folks to not be afraid of say words like healing, abuse, victim, recovery."

Sheriff Erik Weaver encouraged people to speak up and say something when they see something occurring.

Madison County Commonwealth's Attorney Clarissa Berry said the theme really is community and collaboration.

"I hope the message people get is even when you're having a really bad day, there's a team behind you," she said.

In celebration of the work done to help victims, Hayes

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awarded three individuals with victim witness community partnership awards—Sgt. Randall Richards, First Sgt. Sarah McKnight and family services specialist Morgan Corbin. Hayes noted that all three work to get victims connected to the services they need. She also said they do so in an environment that can often be difficult. More officers are shot responding to domestic violence calls than any other type of call, she said, and one-third of social services workers have been assaulted at some point in their career.

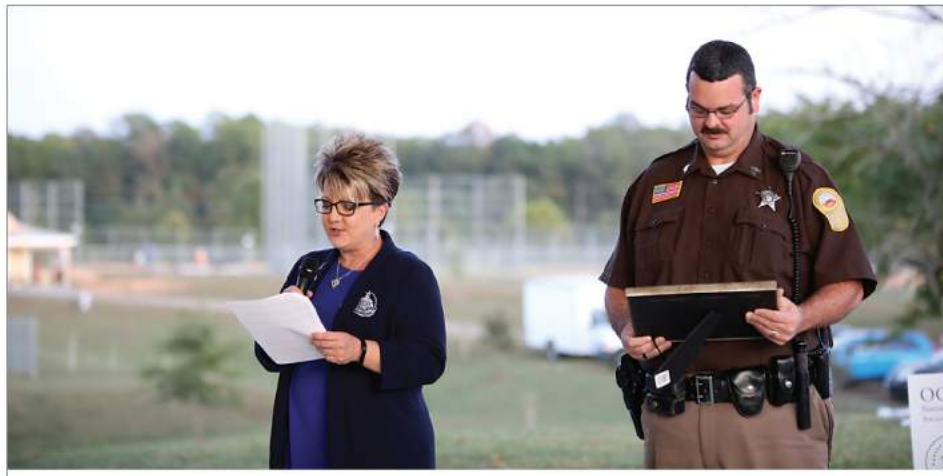
Hayes encouraged community members to reach out to those around them and offer help.

"Who will be the victim of domestic

violence," she asked. "Is it you? Your mother? Your father? Your best friend? Your child?"

"I encourage you to speak up," she added. "Give us a call; we're here to help."

The Madison County Victim Witness Assistance Program can be reached at 948-7550. SAFE operates a 24/7 hotline for victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. The hotline is also available to family members and friends seeking information to help as well as how to receive services to help cope during or after the situation. The hotline can be reached at 1-800-825-8876. Language line interpretation and TTY services are available.



Pictured clockwise from top right: Madison County Victim Witness Coordinator Jennifer Hayes thanks Morgan Corbin for her work visiting homes and checking in on families and children affected by domestic violence. Members of Antioch Baptist Church sing hymns as lanterns are lit. Madison County Economic Development and Tourism Director Tracey Gardner and Madison County Commonwealth's Attorney Clarissa Berry light a lantern. Hayes talks about 1st Sgt. Sarah McKnight and how she works to get victims connected with services. Hayes speaks about Sgt. Randall Richards' work to provide victims with referrals and followup to ensure they've received services.

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