

GASP Gathers Steam in First Year

WESTAKRON — In just a little more than a year, Fran Doll has helped get 80 local people trained to help law enforcement in case of a child's abduction.

Doll, 66, who just moved from Bath to Fairlawn, is the founder of Grandparents Against Sex Predators (GASP) a non-profit organization she formed 2006.

In a recent presentation to The Women's Network during a luncheon at the Akron Woman's City Club, Doll shared some statistics that she said surprised her.

"I was shocked to learn that we have well over 800 registered sex offenders in Summit County," Doll said. She noted that it's estimated that 90 percent of sex offenders are never caught and registered. It's very frightening."

Doll, who founded the temporary-help firm Superior Staffing, said her life changed a few years ago when she found out she had cancer.

"It made me focus on something beside business," she said.

It was about 18 months ago that Doll was in Florida on vacation when she saw an article marking the year that had passed since Jessica Lunsford had been abducted from her grandmother's home and was later found dead at a neighbor's house. Doll said she felt she had a calling to do something about cases like this.

"There's got to be some way we can help," she said she thought.

After forming the group in April 2006, Doll began working with the Summit County Sheriff's Office. The group has now hosted two training sessions at which the 80 volunteers have been trained in how to assist the department should an abduction occur.

"We want to be the extra eyes and ears, but do it in away they need us to do it," Doll said.

Christine Croce, who oversees the sheriff's sex offender unit, said when an abduction or major crime happens, law enforcement agencies can sometimes be overwhelmed.

"We have to do our jobs on a daily basis," she said, noting that officers must still be on patrol and jails must be staffed. "All of these places are expected to keep running. Having an extra 80 pairs of eyes and ears is like having a whole other shift of deputies available."

Croce said abductions aren't common, so one area she has tried to help GASP focus on is becoming educated about how to prevent abductions or other crimes by sex predators.

"GASP is a huge help in getting the word out," Croce said.

Doll said the group will have more training opportunities in the future. She added that she has tried to get grandparents involved, since they are usually available during the daytime hours, but she welcomes anyone who is older than 18.

The group also is focusing on fund-raising. Its first event will be a concert by pianist Steve Hall Sept 20 at First Congregational Church of Akron, 292 E. Market St. Tickets are \$15 and are available in advance by calling (330) 322-4632 or (330) 923-5886.

Doll said GASP volunteers also are interested in appearing before local groups to talk about the group's mission.

For more information about GASP, call (330) 247-1402 or go to www.gasp123.org.



Fran Doll, founder of Grandparents Against Sex Predators (GASP), is shown in the bottom row at left next to Dee Genda, head of the speakers bureau with (second row) Deborah Graef, a GASP board member; Eve Torocsik, a member of the advisory committee; and Flo Haas, administrative assistant. Photo by: Kathleen Folkerth
