

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

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Shalimar—Okaloosa County Commissioners gathered with advocates for abused children to declare April Exchange club and Fort Walton Beach Woman’s Club Child Abuse Prevention Month in the county.

Commissioners Ketchel, Fountain and Windes attended the event with members of the local Exchange Club and Fort Walton Beach Women’s Club, despite the dreary weather.

Commissioner Ketchel read the proclamation in full and spoke about the specter of child abuse in the county and in the nation.

“The Pinwheel garden, planted in front of the Shalimar Administration building, demonstrates Okaloosa County’s commitment to raise awareness and our support for children to live healthy and happy lives. Our families deserve to live in communities that have adequate resources to support children who are victims of abuse,” Ketchel said.

According to the Florida Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers, almost 700,000 children were abused annually in 2012. Neglect being the most common form of abuse.

Chairman Graham Fountain spoke with the assembled group about the proclamation.

“It’s very important to me that we have community support to fight child abuse in our homes,” Commissioner Fountain said, “I appreciate the goodwill of the Fort Walton Beach Women’s Club and the Exchange Club as they try to bring awareness to the problem of child abuse in our community.

As a former law enforcement officer, Commissioner Fountain says the public’s help is not only important, it’s mandatory.

“Everyone is a mandatory reporter. It’s like every other crime in that way. The only difference is that you do not have to give your name if you aren’t a specific professional with a duty to report and give your name.

Kathy Pacheco, with the Fort Walton Beach Women’s club helped organize the day’s event. She encourages everyone to take the safety of vulnerable children in their hands. “Because too many people in our community sometimes feel like it’s not their responsibility,” Pacheco said, “but in the state of Florida, it is everyone’s responsibility to be aware of making reports if they suspect something. They don’t have to have proof, that’s the job of the investigating agency. If they have a suspicion they need to call 1-800-96-ABUSE.”

For the remainder of the month, a row of pinwheels will make their home in the flower bed in front of the Okaloosa County Administration Building at 1250 North Eglin Parkway in Shalimar. They will serve to remind the public of their responsibility to report child abuse.

All photos attached can be credited to the Okaloosa County Public Information Office.

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