

A Month for Women

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As we move through the month of October, many of us are looking for the best Halloween costumes, stringing fake spider webs across windows and blissfully watching the temperature forecast drop below 100 degrees. It is a month full of ghouls and goblins, wizards and witches, dressed in their finest orange and black attire. However, women will notice two other color trends this October in ribbons of pink and purple, symbolizing Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Domestic Abuse Awareness Month.



It is a heartbreaking fact that last year in Arizona alone, 126 women suffered domestic abuse related deaths. Represented by a purple ribbon, October is known as Domestic Abuse Awareness month, striving to educate the public of a crisis that affects one in four American women. The Sojourner Center, named after Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave and women's rights activist of the 1800's, is a shelter for domestically abused women and children. Founded in 1977, the center began in a house with only 28 emergency beds. Today, the center has grown into the largest domestic abuse shelter in the nation with 280 beds over three campuses and 15 transitional apartments, enabling the housing of over 2600 women and children each year. Sojourner strives to empower women through advocacy, information and education. By doing this, it hopes to diminish the cases of domestic abuse by helping women rectify the balance of power within relationships.

As part of Sojourner's goal to empower women, it has partnered with Scottsdale Medical Imaging, Ltd. (SMIL) to offer free mammograms to as many as 100 of Sojourner's participants. Both organizations agree that women who take charge of their health are one step closer to taking charge of their lives. As October is also Breast Cancer Awareness month, SMIL, one of the largest and most respected radiology practices in the Southwest, feels that its partnership with Sojourner is a move that will allow the spotlight to shine on both of these causes.

While this noble endeavor is sure to benefit many women, there are thousands more who remain in abusive relationships, simply because they have no safe place to turn to. Despite Sojourner's fairly large capacity, budget cuts from the Department of Economy Security in the amount of 370,000 greatly affected Sojourner's projected 2010 housing capabilities. Following the news of these cuts, the center began what some call "mission impossible," the \$525,000 "Save a Bed" fundraising initiative, in an economic recession. However, the members of Sojourner find it unacceptable that they may have to turn away women and children tormented by abuse. To date, the center has raised 50 percent of its goal, hoping to reach 100 percent when the campaign ends in June 2010, allowing the center to provide 7,200 nights of shelter.

The purple and pink ribbons represent a battle that all must unify to fight, and with such organizations as the Sojourner Center and SMIL leading the way, it is a battle Arizona has a chance at winning.

To learn more about the Sojourner Center, including ways to volunteer and donate, visit www.sojournercenter.org.