

Zonta Club of Grand Rapids
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Zonta NewZ



Helping improve the legal, political, economic, health, education and professional status of women and girls locally and internationally.

VOLUME 1, ISSUE IV

NOVEMBER 2008

2008-2009

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Clothing store, local efforts help fight human trafficking

by Matt Vande Bunte | The Grand Rapids Press | Saturday November 08, 2008, 12:46 AM

ROCKFORD -- Pearl earrings, necklaces of turquoise, silk pajama pants and beaded shawls. At a new Rockford shop called the W.A.R. Chest, these are the weapons of choice for fighting worldwide human trafficking. The local organization behind the store is making forays into foreign countries and needs soldiers back home to buy up ammunition. Handcrafted in places like a Thailand safe house, the wares generate income to keep women out of the sex trade. "Not everybody can go be Mother Teresa, but they can help Mother Teresa," said Rebecca McDonald, founder of Women At Risk International. "We're giving women an American opportunity to be involved. "When a woman purchases a necklace, she is literally lifting another woman from the gutters to a life of dignity. There's something healing about working with your hands and making beautiful things."

Awareness day

The United Nations has launched an initiative to fight forced labor and sexual exploitation, and the United States has declared Jan. 11 a national Human Trafficking Awareness Day. The Evangelical Covenant Church is making resources available for its congregations to raise awareness. Locally, students at Christian colleges are organizing talks on trafficking, and a women's Bible study group at the area's largest church last month invited McDonald to brief them on the subject. "Purchasing some of that jewelry is kind of a fun way to be able to help," said Nichole Swiger, facilitator of a Moms in Christ group started through Mars Hill Bible Church. "As women and as moms especially, sometimes we get overwhelmed with our own little lives in West Michigan. We're looking for attainable ways to help out. "Education is a big, big part. Some of the women were just floored to hear that women are trafficked." A mother of four, Swiger, 32, of Byron Center, is an example of U.S. evangelicals with a broadening social agenda. Her family looks for Fair Trade labels when buying items such as sugar, coffee and chocolate. Human trafficking is a hot topic. She and friends plan to attend a Thursday gala to benefit Women At Risk International. "Most of the trafficking is linked to sexual crime," Swiger said. "I think that just breaks a woman's heart. That is such a vulnerable issue. Just to imagine that it could happen, it's scary." Traumatic is how McDonald described her first encounter with sexual oppression of women. The daughter of a missionary surgeon, she grew up in

south Asia and recalls meeting a 14-year-old girl in Bangladesh who had acid poured down her throat for resisting rape. That was about 35 years ago. Now 51, McDonald has borne Women At Risk International from that experience. The effort began a few years ago as an offshoot of Closed Door Ministries, an international evangelistic outreach run by her husband, Phil McDonald. It's now involved in job-skills projects including a bakery in Nepal and goat-herding in Sudan. In-home jewelry parties have raised money to support the various efforts. A grant has funded the Rockford store, which opened this week. The grand opening is Nov. 18. "The demand has skyrocketed because women really connect with things having been made by women," said Jessica Gordon, store manager. "We want to get the word out and give people a practical way to get involved." Various international agencies estimate as many as 4 million people worldwide are trapped in a trafficking web each year, including 18,000 in the United States. About 80 percent of victims are women and girls, and half are minors. According to Stop the Traffik, a U.K.-based anti-slavery movement, human trafficking is the fastest-growing form of international crime and each year generates \$7 billion. Stop the Traffik founder Steve Chalke spoke at Mars Hill last summer, putting the issue on the radar of the moms' group. Five girls who are part of Resurrection Life Church in Grandville heard about the epidemic at a ministry conference in St. Louis, then organized a 5-kilometer walk-a-thon fundraiser. Combined with a church coin collections, the girls have raised \$24,000, said Amanda Begley, a youth ministry assistant. The girls this winter plan to hold a Battle of the Bands to raise more money. "I had heard of human trafficking, but I didn't know the extent of it. It's a lot bigger than I had ever imagined," Begley said. "For the high school girls, it's like 'That could be one of my friends.' The moms are like 'That could be my daughter.'" At Calvin College, the student-led Social Justice Committee plans a human trafficking awareness week Dec. 1-4 with an information table, videos and panel discussion. The Amnesty International chapter at Hope College held a similar event last year. "It's just kind of always been one of those things I've heard about," said Brittany Van Hal, 21, a Calvin senior from Seattle. "People are interested and asking questions."

Local efforts

When explaining her T-shirt company, Sarah Weichhand references an obscure Old Testament passage in which Yahweh tells the Hebrew prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. The story was an analogy about Israel's spiritual infidelity, and Weichhand thinks the example still applies today. After working to combat the sex trade in Amsterdam as part of a Youth With A Mission program, the Cornerstone University alum launched Zenia Cloth-

ing to help fund anti-trafficking efforts.

"I have always had a passion to see people be whole physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually so they can have a quality of life they were created for," said Weichhand, 28. "Obviously that's not the world that we live in. "We are all like prostitutes and we all have the opportunity to be redeemed by the God who is faithful to us." Bearing messages like "i am beautiful" and "Chastity is the new sexy," the shirts fit Weichhand's general passion for promoting the inherent value of women. One relates specifically to human trafficking, picturing on the front a woman's face with a tear and the word "prostitute," with "redeemed" printed on the back. Weichhand has sold about 250 of the shirts at \$15 for short-sleeves and \$20 for long-sleeves. Proceeds support a pair of organizations working to keep orphaned children in Myanmar out of the sex trade. "People are our priority. The clothing line is more of a vessel to get the message out there," Weichhand said. While Women At Risk sells jewelry and forms prayer circles locally, it raises money to support an underground railroad in Cambodia and a pearl shop in Thailand. McDonald also has a hand in helping AIDS victims in Africa and widows in Kosovo, but proceeds from the Rockford store will go to battles against human trafficking. Each purchase builds an endowment to fund emergency rescue of infants sought by traffickers, and helps repatriate trafficked women back into their home countries such as Uzbekistan and Bangladesh. Women At Risk also dreams of building a training center in Myanmar where women would be taught income-generating skills. "Human trafficking is not about sex. It's about money," McDonald said. "You cannot rescue a woman who has been chained to a bed without giving her job skills. You have to empower her." There is a moving of God in America among women. We are just being Christ with skin on and whispering the message that (the sex trade) is not what you were created for."



Press Photo/Jon M. Brower
 Rebecca McDonald founded Women At Risk International.



Press Photo/Hollyn Johnson
 Jessica Gordon, store manager at the new W.A.R. Chest Boutique in Rockford, folds and sets up a display of pashminas that were made in Thailand. The boutique sells items made by women who are at risk or rescued from human trafficking to raise money to prevent the crimes.

Service Committee



Sewing Projects:

The next sewing date will be 11/20/08 at 5:30pm at DA Blodgett. We have area middle and HS girls who will be attending and helping us with the project (Thanks to Vicki Vandenberg!).

There are several steps to complete each pad. No sewing skills are required. We will need lots of hands to make this project successful. If you are available, please come and help.

1. Cut fabric
2. Serge edges
3. Pin together
4. Sew together
5. Turn right side out
6. Top stitch opening
7. Apply snap

A machine with a teflon or walking foot works best for this project, if you have one, please bring it along. We will also need lots of scissors, pins, butter yellow or white/cream

thread and white tissue paper.

Girls Learning Day:

Anoosheh Niavarani, 2008 AE Fellow studying at MSU, has accepted our invitation to be an interactive speaker for the air portion of are air and sea science day. She is working on preparing experiments that can be performed over dinner to go with her presentation.



*“For there is
Hope in two women
Friendship in three
Determination in four
Confidence in five
And, with six women,
All goals are possible.”
—Gibbon’s Decline & Fall*

Membership Committee

Guests:

Lisa Bonney from St. John’s Home and Bonnie Cowles from GVSU Water Research Center are current prospects. They have been invited to help us on 11/20 at the sewing night. Please welcome them.

Lunch & Learns:

Our next L&L is scheduled for Friday, 12/5/08, at Miller John-

son. Darcie, Allison and Kate are currently scheduled to make the presentation. Miller Johnson is providing the lunch. This event was set up after they contacted Darcie via our website!

New Members:

Two new members, Gini Gordon and Judy Wyman, were inducted at our November membership meeting by

Area 2 Director, Joanne Lose. Special thanks to Joanne for coming over from Lansing to be in attendance, perform the ceremony and present an update on the Area/District happenings.

Ways & Means Committee

Poker Fundraiser:

Since we raised less money than budgeted at the October fundraiser, we will be scheduling a second poker night, hopefully in January. More details TBA.



President's Message



Our next ATNOZ event will be 12/2/08 at 6:30pm at the Voigt House for their annual holiday

Sugar Plum Tea. This event will include tea and crumpets with a tour of the historic home following. Parking is recommended at 50 College Ave. It is a plowed, lighted lot that is free of charge that is kitty corner from the Voight House. There will be 16 Zontians/Guests in attendance. If you haven't already done so, please pay me \$20 for your reservation. I had to pay in advance to save our spots and the fee is non-refundable. I am excited about the great turnout! It should prove to be a fun evening.

Remember there will not be our regular meeting in December (the 12/2 event takes its place). Our next scheduled regular meeting will be January 8, 2009.

At the last Board meeting, we commenced work on applying for a 501c3 foundation per our strategic plan. This is an exciting time for ZGR. More to come on this at the January meeting.

I hope to see you all at the sewing night for fellowship and service.

Happy Holidays! -Darcie

Naot Shoe Donation Newz

Thanks to Naot for gifting 200 pairs of shoes again this year to clients of the Women's Resource Center. Last year we had a greater need for large sizes and this year we needed small sizes but neither year did shoes go unused, in both years, WRC was able to give away the remaining shoes after the day of the event. This year, thanks to Mieras Family Shoes and volunteer Lisa Sostecke, 55 women were fitted for new shoes. One of the recipients sent the following letter via email to Sue Joyce:

"Thank you for the free pair of shoes given out so generously at the Grand Rapids Women's Resource Center recently. The shoes I was so kindly and personally fitted for are perfect walking/hiking shoes since moving out of the U.S. onto a military base in Germany. The hills and valleys we traverse are so beautiful in contrast to an increasingly uncomfortable situation I left behind in walking away from a home I loved, and a relationship that was less than desirable. The shoes I held in my hand

upon leaving, were and ARE a symbol of hope for me now as I seek a new life and new WAY of life.

yours most sincerely,

D. Jo Gualtieri"





Zonta Club of Grand Rapids

Member of Zonta International

Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide

Next Business Meeting:

Thursday, January 8, 2009

5:30pm Social

6:00pm Dinner

7:00pm Business Meeting

D.A. Blodgett Conference Room

805 Leonard St. N.E.

~Onsite Child Care provided~

Presenter: Deborah Roberts-Hanshue,

Director of Development for GROW,

Grand Rapids Opportunities for Women

Dinner \$15.00, includes beverages—Please sign sheet by drinks so we can track for purchase and reimbursement. Thanks!

Menu: Baked lasagna, tossed salad, French bread, and dessert

Catered by: Catered Creations, Inc.

Important Dates

- Thursday, November 20, 2008, 5:30pm @ DAB, Pad sewing date with middle and HS girls help
- November 25-December 10, International 16 Days of Activism
- Tuesday, December 2, 2008, 6:30pm @ Voigt House, Sugar Plum Tea ATNOZ event, guests and prospects welcome; NOTE: NO DEC REG MTG
- Wednesday, December 17th, BOD meeting
- Thursday, January 8th will be our January business meeting since the first Thursday falls on a holiday.
- March 8, 2009, International Women's Day/Zonta Rose Day
- May 14, 2009, Zonta GR hosts girls learning day with focus on math and science

HERstory

D.J. Rothfuss has been a Grand Rapids Zontian since 1953 and is a Past President. D.J. was the first woman CPA in Grand Rapids.

Not only has D.J. been involved with Zonta in her lifetime of community service, but also she helped found the Sunshine Hospital Guild, was a board member of the American Red Cross, was the first woman to be appointed to the board of the Better Business Bureau, was the first woman to serve on the board of the Grand Rapids Transit Authority, worked on United Way campaigns, served on the board of

DA Blodgett, received the "Distinguished Life Contributor" award from the YWCA, taught adult education accounting classes for UofM GR, was on the Board of Trustees of Westminster Presbyterian Church, and was the first woman in Grand Rapids to become a member of the Peninsular Club...just to name...a FEW!

The best day of the past year for D.J. was celebrating her 90th! The biggest lesson she has learned from life is to be happy. If she were to choose a new name for

herself, she would like to be called Jane.

D.J. is a great asset to Zonta and we are proud to have her as an active member.



D.J. Rothfuss