

# Domestic Violence Memorial Service Honors Victims, Lifts Up Survivors

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Several organizations and community advocates gathered for the 17th annual Domestic Violence Memorial Service on Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023.

The Alton Memorial Hospital Domestic Violence Team invited speakers from law enforcement and anti-violence groups to speak about their work. The service also recognized nine recent victims of domestic violence in Madison County, from ages 3 months to 85 years.

“Our goal should be to change the way society thinks about, talks about and responds to domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse,” said Madison County Coroner Stephen P. Nonn. “Simply put, we need to turn up the volume on these issues and let people know we still have a problem here.”

Pastor Jim Johnson with First Christian Church of Alton led the service. Minister Joyce Elliott started the night with a prayer, and Kathy Schultz with Oasis Women’s Center sang “Let There Be Peace on Earth.”

Mary Cordes, the executive director of Hayner Public Library District and president of the Oasis Women’s Center Board of Directors, took to the podium to read off the names of community members who have been lost to domestic violence. As she read each name, Johnston struck a Tibetan prayer bowl, which continued to ring long after the list was finished.

“This epidemic of abuse touches us all in one way or the other,” Nonn added. “For centuries, society kind of permitted this tragedy... We let it linger in the dark shadows. We talked about it in hushed tones. It was kind of a family thing behind closed doors, a family matter. ‘We shouldn’t really get involved in something like that.’ And we actually tend to blame the victim.”

Johnston noted that he has served as a chaplain at crime scenes where domestic violence was involved. He has also counseled both abusers and survivors, and he has seen what domestic violence does to people who have suffered.

“Those who are yelling and screaming at their children, the children are not hating them. The children are hating themselves. That’s what abuse does,” Johnston said. “It’s an attack against another person’s sense of self.”

In addition to groups like [Oasis Women’s Center](#), [Land of Lincoln Legal Aid](#), [Madison County Child Advocacy Center](#), [Church Women United](#), [Refuge](#), [Riverbend Family Ministries](#), [Riverbend Head Start & Family Services](#), [Zonta Club of Alton-Wood River](#) and [Metro East Every Survivor Counts](#), there were several attendees representing the legal side of domestic abuse prevention.

Chief Judge Stephen Stobbs of the 3rd Judicial Circuit Court thanked the advocacy groups for their work. He noted that he often hears cases where domestic violence is involved, and he is thankful to the people who help survivors outside of the courtroom.

“It takes more than just judges and lawyers and folks in the court system to address these cases. It takes people in the community that attend to these problems before they get to us,” Stobbs said. “This is a problem that doesn’t seem to ever want to go away, but it certainly is something that we can help reduce, we can help stem the tide of it growing, and that involves folks like you that are here today.”

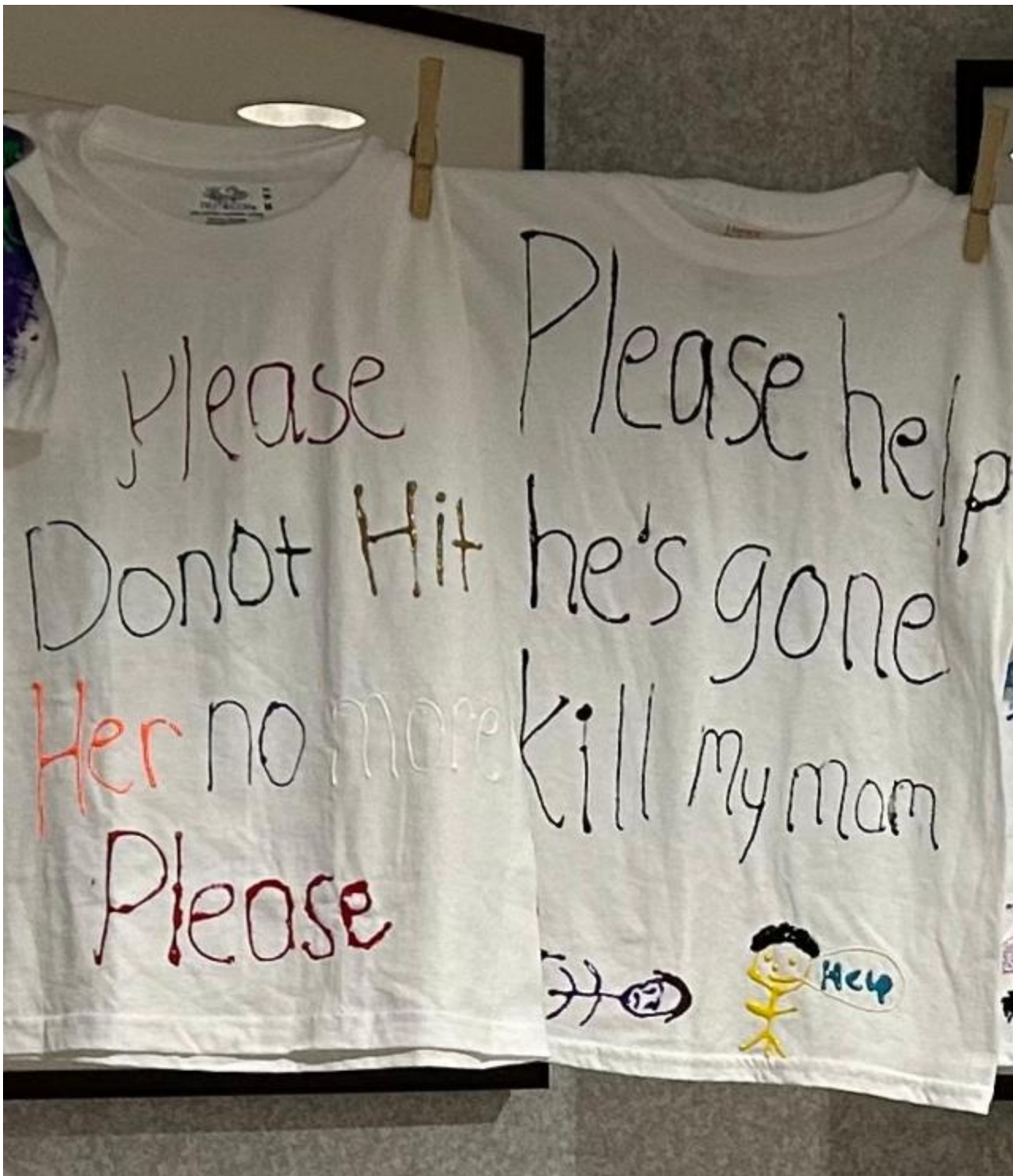
Chief Deputy Sheriff Marcos Pulido echoed Stobbs. He noted that while his team is often on the frontlines, their work would not be possible without the survivor advocacy groups and prevention resources available in the community. He also expressed the importance of talking about domestic violence, as this encourages people to reach out for help.

“This is something that has been hidden. It’s been taboo for years and it’s not really discussed as often. But lately it’s been discussed more and more, and I think that’s what we need to continue to do,” Pulido said. “Our law enforcement community continues to stand strong and continues to stand arm in arm to let everyone know that we continue to support our victims. We’ll do our best to advocate for any type of prevention.”

Like Stobbs, Judge Maureen Schuette frequently hears from survivors in her courtroom. She said that as of Wednesday, Nov. 8, 2023, the 3rd Judicial Circuit Court had granted 1,637 orders of protection this year.

“Twenty-seven years ago, the 3rd Judicial Circuit had a mission to eliminate family violence,” Schuette added. “Our theme has always remained the same: to remember those who have been victims, to honor and heal those who have survived, and to connect those who work to end and prevent violence to better serve those in need.”





In addition to the speeches, attendees could hear from survivors firsthand by viewing the Madison County Clothesline Project, which was onsite at the event. The project encourages survivors to anonymously decorate a white shirt to reflect their experience. These shirts are hung on a clothesline to bring awareness to the prevalence of domestic violence. There are many clothesline projects throughout the country, and the Madison County Clothesline Project is sponsored by the Oasis Women's Center.

But because the night was a memorial service above all else, speakers also addressed the victims of domestic violence who didn't survive. Community member June Blaine told the story of her friend and neighbor Ellie, who was "beautiful," "artistic" and "so gentle." Ellie was killed by her husband after a judge granted her the house during divorce proceedings.

"But what I want you to know is not the sad story. What I want you to know is who she was, and she was phenomenal," Blaine said. "Sometimes I wonder how my life would be different and what kinds of experiences would she and I share and, most of all, because she was such a wonderful person, would she have made me a better person, too?"

Ellie's family and friends, including Blaine, have gone on to support many domestic violence resources and initiatives. They started a program called "Ellie's Safe Haven" that provides free kenneling and veterinary care to survivors' pets. One reason why Ellie didn't leave the house that day was because she was worried her husband would hurt her pets. The program provides peace of mind for survivors and continues Ellie's legacy of kindness, Blaine explained.

"She felt trapped," Blaine said. "But I know she would want people to know that there are options and there are ways to get out of an abusive situation. She was truly an amazing person. I wish you could have known her. She was so special. And she didn't deserve to lose her life. But she won't be forgotten."

The memorial service recognized the following people who have passed away due to domestic violence. All of these people died in Madison County in the last two years, and the final four names on the list were all killed in September 2023.

- Malachi Scruggs of Alton, age 5
- Unnamed Child of Alton, age 1
- Lisa Dunnivant-Polach of Pontoon Beach, age 46
- Jameson Shires of Highland, age 3 months
- Wilma Melchert of Wood River, age 85
- Maha Tiimob of Troy, age 25
- Norma Caraker of Troy, age 60
- Adell Davenport of East Alton, age 47
- Phillip Armstrong of Granite City, age 39

For more information about domestic violence resources in the Riverbend community, read [this article](#) at [RiverBender.com](http://RiverBender.com). You can also call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233 or text START to 88788 for more information and immediate help.