

ZONTA AUSTIN INTERCITY PANEL FOCUSES ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING EFFORTS



Zonta Club of Austin members with the Panel. Members include (L) Susan Greenberg, (R) Leigh Schlett and President Diane Hodges Popp. Nola Theiss, Zonta Club of Sanibel is in the center left.

The efforts of area law enforcement and non-governmental agencies to stop human trafficking were brought to light at the February 23 Intercity Event, sponsored by the Zonta Club of Austin. The luncheon event, comprised of a panel of local, state and national authorities, was held at Green Pastures Restaurant in South Central Austin. Over 80 attendees came from eight Zonta Clubs (seven in the district) and the Central Texas community.

Area Zontians learned that human trafficking is as much a problem for our communities as it is in larger metropolitan areas across the country.

Panelists addressed the problem of human trafficking, what it looks like and who its victims are, as well as provided local and regional information on the efforts of authorities to stop the crime. Austin television news coverage of the event was provided by KXAN-TV.

Leading the panel was **Nola Theiss**, Executive Director of Human Trafficking Awareness Partners, Inc., (www.humantraffickingawareness.org). Ms. Theiss, former mayor of Sanibel, Florida, has spoken about human trafficking to over 3,000 people in the last years in three countries.

Panelists also include:

- **Kate Rocke**, Director of the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking and Victim Services Coordinator, Refugee Services of Texas
- **Billy Sifuentes**, APD Community Liaison for Human Trafficking Task Force
- **Leila Voyles**, representing the NEST Foundation, www.playgroundproject.com
- **Kathi West**, Victim Witness Coordinator, US Attorney's Office – Western District of Texas

The event was chaired by Austin Zontians **Susan Greenberg** and **Leigh Schlett**.

“It is the responsibility of each of us as part of a community to become aware of this issue and share educational resources,” said Greenberg. “We need to be able to connect the appropriate persons with the proper next step or agency for assistance.”

Key to the discussion was the Four P's Strategy:

PREVENT conditions driving demand and supply for trafficking, illegal prostitution and sexual exploitation,

PROTECT trafficking victims by providing reintegration assistance and opportunities for social inclusion,

PROSECUTE and PUNISH traffickers. Criminalize all forms of trafficking

PARTNER with other NGO's (non-government organizations), law enforcement and civil society.

Future activities are being planned that will allow Zontians to become more involved and spread awareness regarding human trafficking on the local level.