

She's a woman helping Women Helping Women

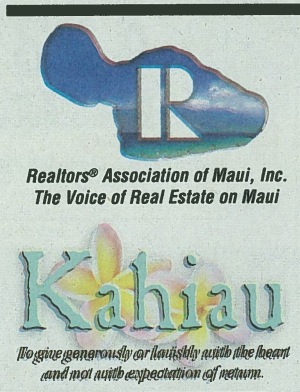
By JOSEPH W. BEAN

Some problems are so ugly that we consider them unthinkable. We each tell ourselves, “nothing like that could ever happen in my family.” However, if the supposedly unthinkable problem is domestic violence, it definitely can happen in your family. Abuse of family members, especially wives and girlfriends, is not limited by ethnicity, religion, age, class or financial status — or by being on a beautiful Pacific island.

Statistics are difficult, and often misleading, because most cases of domestic violence are never reported or investigated. Nonetheless, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that one in every four women will experience domestic violence at least once in her lifetime.

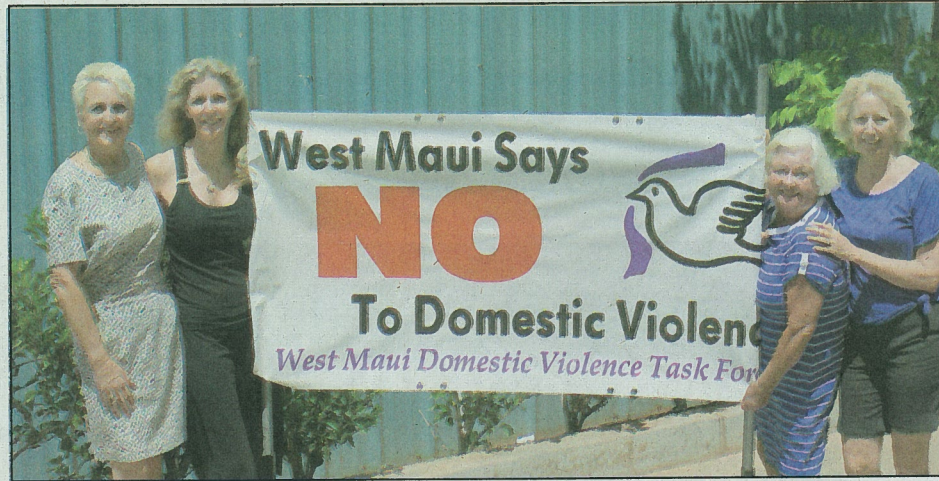
P. Denise La Costa, founder of La Costa Realty Hawai'i, can help us all think about this: “Domestic violence not only affects women,” she said, “it also affects children. In fact, 95% of domestic violence is against women and children; 5% is against men. Of that 5%, more than 75% is in retaliation for years of abuse.”

In bad times for families — times with financial stress and unemployment, for instance — domestic violence rises. Fortunately, even in the worst



of times, Maui has Women Helping Women (WHW) providing information and support for women in abusive situations, and shelter for women and their children when they escape the abuse.

La Costa agrees, “As financial woes increase, the number of incidents of domestic violence increases,” she said. “Most of the women in these situations are so severely mentally abused that they do not think they are able to leave because of their children, their unworthiness, or the threat of death. These women need a voice, and they need a place to get help.” That explains, at least in part, what inspires La Costa to volunteer with WHW, and the organization's West Maui Advocacy Center (WMAC). “I am a member of the West Maui



TAKE 1 VIDEO CREATIONS photo

The money from this Business Network International rummage sale went into the WHW Client Assistant Fund. Seen here, left to right, are P. Denise La Costa of La Costa Realty Hawai'i; Carol Brown, RE/MAX Paradise Properties; Ruth McKay, Maui USA Realty, and Sharon Brooks, Take 1 Video Creations.

Domestic Violence Task Force,” she said. “I became involved from the inception of the Task Force in 2006. My support for this organization becomes even more critical as more and more women need help.”

Besides her general support for the WMAC, La Costa said, “I volunteer for committees, and I took domestic violence training to be better versed in recognizing problems, and to be able to provide information on resources available to those who need help.”

La Costa has lived in Maui for more than 20 years, and she has been a Realtor® for 18 years. So, it's no surprise that she has community involvements both in conjunction with real estate and beyond her career. Still the number of service activities she makes time for is surprising. “I am a Lector at Sacred Hearts Mission Church and Maria Lanakila,” she said. “I am a volunteer at Feed My Sheep, and a Realtors® Political Action Committee Trustee. I serve on three Re-

altors® Association of Maui committees: Scholarship, Public Relations and Strategic Planning.” She is also on the association board as a director at large.

“October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month,” La Costa said. Somehow, that's not something most people think about, so you may need a little history to understand it. According to the Domestic Violence Awareness Project, the official month “evolved from the Day of Unity in October 1981 conceived by the Nation-

al Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The intent was to connect advocates across the nation who were working to end violence against women and their children.” The Day of Unity became a week of activities, and was declared Domestic Violence Awareness Month in 1987.

Maui will honor the Awareness Month along with people willing to take action against the unthinkable all across the country. La Costa said, “We have an annual commemoration of those who have died at the hands of their abusers over the past year. We also celebrate Peace and Happiness in the Family.”

You can join some of the events in October, and maybe you'll find yourself inspired to help out in the year beyond. “It is an honor to be able to serve the people of Maui,” La Costa said, “both as a Realtor® and as a volunteer, and to be able to get the word out about domestic violence, and how we must break the cycle of these horrific occurrences.”

Be in touch with WHW at www.whwmaui.net; e-mail info@whwmaui.net; or call the administrative office, 242-6600; or WMAC, 661-7111.

If you are in trouble right now, call the 24-hour domestic violence hotline at 579-9581.