

Men against abuse hold sale, prep for parade

By Michele Steinbacher | msteinbacher@pantagraph.com | Posted: Saturday, September 5, 2009 4:10 pm.

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[Buy this photo](#) Larry Werner, left, and his son Jeff Werner, right, both of Bloomington, look through a book and tape assortment on a table during the Central Illinois Men Against Domestic Abuse garage sale at the Family Community Resource Center at 509 W. Washington St. in Bloomington Saturday morning, September 5, 2009. The proceeds will go towards school education materials. (THE PANTAGRAPH

BLOOMINGTON -- A Twin Cities group that wants to make domestic abuse "everybody's business" is using the Labor Day weekend to spread its message.

On Saturday morning, Central Illinois Men Against Domestic Abuse hosted a garage sale fund-raiser near its office at 509 W. Washington St., Bloomington.

Later, members readied Monday's parade float - stacking hay bales on a trailer and attaching anti-violence signs.

"The parade is one of our largest, most visible public events," said Steve Heldstead, who along with the Rev. Frank McSwain, is co-president of the 3-year-old organization.

This marks the third year it's marched; and the second it's held a Labor Day weekend sale.

In 2007, the group wasn't sure it would fit in with other parade entries, Heldstead said, but, they were welcomed.

"People (along the route) were applauding for us," said Judge Charles Reynard, a group member helping at the sale Saturday.

Central Illinois Men march as a reminder that silence about violence and abuse is not acceptable, said Heldstead. Domestic abuse is everybody's business, he said.

"Our mission is to better educate youth and adults about what a healthy relationship is. And we're trying to be the role models, too," said Heldstead. As role models, they represent all walks of the community, he said.

Heldstead, of State Farm Insurance Cos., comes from the business world. McSwain is a minister. Reynard, comes from the courts; and Sheryl Siebert, a former Illinois State University librarian, and Tim Moore, Bloomington High School principal, represent education, he said.

Central Illinois Men welcomes both genders. But its title is intended to convey that men can, and should, serve as role models for what are normal domestic relationships, said Heldstead.

The group acknowledges sometimes males are victims and females are perpetrators. But overwhelmingly, males are the problem, Heldstead said.

On Saturday, a dozen people perused usual garage-sale fare: Clothes, books, electronics, stuffed animals and other toys spread across tables.

Central Illinois Men volunteers, many wearing purple shirts bearing the message "Real Men Don't Hit," helped shoppers at the sale. Near some clothes racks, Reynard chatted with Heldstead about the sale and the group's history.

Back in 1993, then McLean County State's Attorney Reynard helped launch a domestic violence task force to address the social issue. Other groups - such as the Neville House shelter, Mid Central Community Action and PATH have helped too.

The formation of Central Illinois Men has been another step in the right direction, said Reynard. Community outreach is just as important as legal consequences, he said.

"I think this is where it really starts. It's a cultural problem," said Reynard. "For years people would say 'Why doesn't she leave?' When the real question is 'Why doesn't he stop hitting her?'," said Reynard.

The problem won't be solved overnight though: Since January alone, police in Bloomington, Normal and McLean County communities have responded to more than 1,500 domestic violence calls.

Help fight domestic abuse

In 2008, in Mid Central Community Action's Countering Domestic Violence program recorded helping:

- More than 800 adult victims, nearly 100 children, and more than 3,600 hot line callers.

These Central Illinois organizations offer help and volunteer opportunities:

Central Illinois Men Against Domestic Abuse

509 W. Washington St., Bloomington

(309) 821-1616

www.cimada.org

The Neville House domestic violence shelter

(309) 827-7070 (24-hour confidential hot line)

www.mccainc.org

PATH

(309)827-4005 or (800) 570-PATH

Stepping Stones

a YWCA program for sexual assault and sexual abuse victims

(309) 662-0461

www.ywcamclean.org

SOURCE: CIMADA