

## SAFE HARBOR

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, April 4, 2007

The story warms your heart with a starring cast of good people going above and beyond the call of duty to create a home make-over, which provides a safe place for victims of abuse. The private-public partnership began with a house provided to the County by Community Memorial Hospital. The house, located right near the hospital, was completely renovated by thirty-six companies whose employees volunteered their time and the materials for this worthy goal. Everything from landscaping, flooring, cabinets, roofing, windows, paint, and plaster were donated with the help of John Laing Homes, and the workmanship is truly top-notch.

The grand opening of the new Safe Harbor House West last month joins its sister house in the East County in providing a home-like setting for children and women who have been abused and sexually assaulted. Instead of taking these victims to an institutional hospital setting to be examined and then to a busy police station to be interviewed by a host of people from legal, medical and social service agencies, the whole process can take place inside of the home.

State of the art medical examination equipment is provided along with a nurse from the County's Health Care Agency. Non-intrusive video taping technology and a coordinated interview format helps the victim report the details of the crime against them in one taped session that is then shared among law enforcement, the District Attorney, and social workers. Instead of the victims having to tell and re-tell all the different agencies the painful story of their attacks, they just need to tell it once. Before we had the Safe Harbor Houses, victims were moved from hospital to police station, to social service agency, and could end up having to recount their attack a half dozen times.

The District Attorney's office has taken the lead in getting funding and volunteers to bring this truly collaborative approach to fruition. The collaboration among County agencies including the Human Services Agency, Health Care Agency, Sheriff's Department and District Attorney's Office, combined with college and city police departments and Naval Base Ventura County, extends Safe Harbor House's program to all such victims in the County. The dozens of businesses that contributed time and material, as well as the donation of the house, made it a reality. The Ventura County Leadership Academy class made the Safe Harbor House West their class project and brought the volunteer effort that also helped move the project forward.

At the grand opening of Safe Harbor House West last month, I spoke with a woman who had stopped by because she saw the crowd. She said she had grown up in the house and was thrilled to see the exceptional quality of workmanship that was put into making the older home into the lovely place it had become. She said if her parents were still alive, they too would be happy to see their home become such a special place for those in crisis. Staff told me of a child victim who had been brought in who kept wondering whose

house he was in. Toys, books, and child-sized furniture show these young victims that they are welcomed and hopefully it eases their difficulty.

The Safe Harbor Houses were built by hard work and generosity. The idea behind the concept shows the compassion of those who work with the victims of abuse and sexual assault, and hopefully it will help those victims know that good people care.