



Fort Bend County Women's Center

A United Way Agency

PRESS RELEASE
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Local Women's Center Celebrates 25 Years of Service in Fort Bend County



Past Fort Bend County Women's Center Board Presidents L to R: Steve Ewbank, Mattie Carillo, Joe Jarmillo, Pat Altman (founder), Cynthia von Tesmar, Mike Bell, Cyndi Shofner and David King.

SUGAR LAND, Texas – October 26, 2005 - Each year the Fort Bend County Women's Center hosts a volunteer luncheon during October's Domestic Violence Awareness month. This year the Women's Center decided to commemorate the month by celebrating their 25th anniversary.

The Center began as a crisis hotline in 1980 to provide emergency support and referrals to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The need for an emergency shelter was quickly recognized and housing was secured. As problems were identified, programs were added: a Children's Program to address the physical, emotional, social and academic needs of resident children; the Learning Resource Center to provide job skills training, GED/ESL classes, parenting skills instruction, computer training, etc.; and the Aftercare Program to provide follow-up services to families after they leave the shelter and to families not needing shelter. As the shelter's caseload increased, the need for a larger shelter became apparent. A capital campaign was launched in 1998 and the new shelter was opened in January 2001. The new facility expanded programs significantly and allowed for a shelter capacity of 65 women and children. In the past 25 years, the Fort Bend County Women's Center has grown from a crisis hotline to a full-service agency addressing the diverse physical and emotional needs of survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children.

Pat Altman, local attorney and one of the founders of the Women's Center, was this year's keynote speaker. Altman reflected back to the need she saw for support against domestic violence and sexual assault. She began to see the need for these support services while attending classes at University of Houston Law School. She had also met who were involved with the Houston Area Women's Center who had experience in dealing with domestic violence and sexual assault.

"Overcoming people's natural desire to think that there was not a need for this type of support." Altman said with regards to the difficulties of the modest Women's Center beginnings. "Many thought it was a small problem. The other problem was of course, funding."

To help celebrate the successes of the Women's Center guest's included: volunteers, community leaders, past board presidents, long-time staff members, grantors and other devout supporters. Guests enjoyed a delicious lunch graciously donated by Carrabba's Italian Grill.

"It is really remarkable how this progressed from a small grass roots organization to a community-wide supported agency. People truly want to support this well run agency. My only regret is that we still need it. Until then, we need to keep doing what we are doing and break the cycle," Altman finished.

In 25 years of serving the community, the Fort Bend County Women's Center has helped more than 20,000 women and children achieve violence-free lifestyles. Through fundraisers, donations and community support, the Center can continue to provide emergency shelter, crisis intervention, counseling, support services and educational outreach to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children. For more information about the Center or the services it offers, call Executive Director Vita Rogers at 281.494.4545. If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, please call the Center's 24-hour Hotline at 281.342.4357 (HELP).