



# The Stuart News

SCRIPPS TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

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## Calling attention to human trafficking

MARYANN KETCHAM  
FOR LUMINARIES

With the will and determination to go the distance, 50 cyclists will join forces to bring awareness to the horrific crime of human trafficking while attempting to raise \$50,000 to benefit the Hope House of Florida. A partnership between Christ Fellowship's Hope for Freedom ministry and the Place of Hope children's home, Hope House is the only long-term, faith-based safe house located on the east coast of Florida.

The Inaugural Hope Ride for Freedom will take place Jan. 11-14 and span 250 miles from St. Augustine southward to Palm Beach Gardens. Several local heroes have stepped up to participate in the journey; Brenda Stokes and Kim Lobsinger with the St. Lucie Fire District, Port St. Lucie Police Officer Janet Palmer and her cousin Jessica Reynolds, a volunteer at a safe house in Orlando. Christ Fellowship member Ole Olsen will join this resolute group of women.

Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery. According to the Department of Homeland Security's website ([www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov)), "it involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act." Sadly, because its victims are afraid to come forward, the issue remains in the shadows.

St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara said, "Many in our community don't think human trafficking is in our back yard. However, as evidenced by our recent operation, human trafficking is here and in communities across our

country." In addition to the St. Lucie County bust, a human/sex-trafficking ring was also discovered in Fort Pierce just this month.

"Most victims are dealing with addictions which make them vulnerable to being exploited by individuals who want to take advantage of them," added Mascara. "Let's not forget these individuals are someone's love ones, mothers, daughters, and sisters."

Hope House Florida provides help to female minor victims. When asked about recovery success rates, director Bonnie Jo Daniels said, "Success is different for each child. Most children come to us two-three years behind in school. When they are safe and stable enough we try to get them caught up on their education. Four have received their high school diploma. We also provide comprehensive care, rehab, life skills and mental health services.

To help the cyclists get off on the right foot, Big Apple Pizza's Scott Van Duzer recently hosted a fundraising event, Breaking the Chains. Proceeds were applied toward the \$50,000 finish line. Several members of the nonprofit Friends in Pink were also on hand to help bolster funds by raffling off a sizeable cache of lottery tickets.

Hope Ride for Freedom cyclists will be making a stop at Jaycee Park, on State Road A1A, Hutchinson Island in Fort Pierce on Jan. 14. Be sure to check the Luminaries Magazine Facebook that morning for an ETA if you'd like to come out and cheer them on!

For more information or to donate, please visit [HopeRideForFreedom.com](http://HopeRideForFreedom.com)



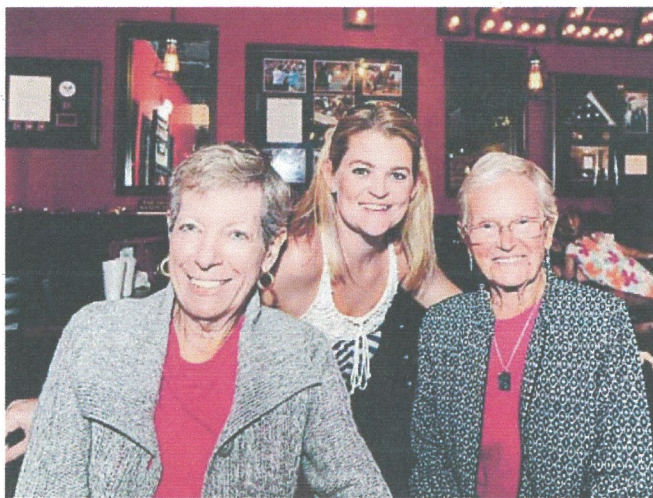
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Bicyclists- Jessica Reynolds, Kim Lobsinger, Ole Olsen, Janet Palmer and Brenda Stokes



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Scott Van Duzer and Tarra Olsen



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Vivien Coniglio, Kayla Walsh and Madeline Herrmann