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By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

October is Domestic Violence month and an annual campaign is now underway to shine light on this on going problem all month.

The 4th Annual Purple Light Nights Awareness Campaign is now underway throughout

northeast Ohio. Cuyahoga County law enforcement and leaders kicked off the 4th Annual Purple Light Nights Awareness Campaign with a ceremonial lighting.

The Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center started with a commencement breakfast at Massimo da Milano beginning at 8 a.m. yesterday morning.

The Purple Light Nights campaign aims to create dialogue surrounding domestic violence, provide information and resources, and engage the community to stop and prevent its future occurrence.

From now until October 31, community members are urged to shine a purple light bulb or strand of lights on porches or in windows in support of the campaign and Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

In support of the campaign, Tower City will serve as this year's central hub. Throughout October, the mall will feature Purple Light Nights information and decorations. Terminal Tower will also support the campaign by remaining lit in purple from October 1 to October 7.

Domestic violence and abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of size, gender, or strength, yet the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. This is especially true when the abuse is psychological, rather than physical. Emotional abuse is often minimized yet it can leave deep and lasting scars.

Noticing and acknowledging the warning signs and symptoms of domestic violence and abuse is the first step to ending it. No one should live in fear of the person they love. If you recognize yourself or someone you know in the following warning signs and descriptions of abuse, don't hesitate to reach out. There is help available.

Domestic abuse, also known as *spousal abuse,* occurs when one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other person. Domestic abuse that includes physical violence is called *domestic violence* .

Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control over you. An abuser doesn't "play fair." Abusers use fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear you down and keep you under his or her thumb. Your abuser may also threaten you, hurt you, or hurt those around you.

Domestic violence and abuse does not discriminate. It happens among heterosexual couples and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds, and economic levels. And while women are more commonly victimized, men are also abused, especially verbally and emotionally, although sometimes even physically as well. The bottom line is that abusive behavior is never acceptable, whether it's coming from a man, a woman, a teenager, or an older adult.

You deserve to feel valued, respected, and safe.

Laura Cowan is an advocate and domestic violence survivor whose courage has served as a beacon for other survivors of domestic violence and friends of those who lost someone to domestic violence.

Cowan, who now is a volunteer at the Domestic Violence Center of Cleveland and shares her story as an example for others. For years, Cowan was in an abusive marriage where her husband abused her and her children.

This went on for several years and, during this time, she kept a letter with her chronicling the abuse to her and the others in their house. One day, her husband took her into town to retrieve a package at the post office. When he was distracted, she passed the letter to the postal clerk, who took the letter and slid it under the desk and then mailed it for her.

Two days later, the sheriff's department came and arrested her husband and freed her and her

children and the other family members who had suffered abuse.

Later, Cowan testified at this man's trial and her accounts of the abuse were essential in getting him sentenced to life in prison.

There are many success stories but you know there are many sad stories from Domestic Violence that has resulted in murder. So, for all of October, let's dedicate our efforts to helping those in need to rise above their situation and improving their lives and the lives of future generations.