

Foundation hits domestic abusers in the wallet

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WHITE MOUNTAINS — The time is right to deal with domestic violence, says Never Again Foundation founder Keith Perkins.

"That's why we are using the full power of the law, not only to bring awareness to the public but also healing for the victims," said Perkins, who represents abused women and children in civil cases against their abusers.

After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Perkins said, the nation on a whole has said it won't tolerate terrorism in which people, either in public or in their homes, get their way because of the fear they cause.

"We'll take the cost back to those who cause the problem and put the financial accountability squarely on those responsible," he said.

Over the past year, Perkins said, he has been asked to make a presentation on his unique service, for which he charges no fee, at the law schools of ASU and BYU as well the Hispanic Women's Conference in Phoenix and a number of different seminars.

To show how pervasive the problem of domestic violence is, he cited Arizona governor's office statistics show 50,000 cases of abuse annually throughout the state in which police come out and make a report. Of those, he said, only 20 to 25 percent are prosecuted. In addition, a woman has been abused seven or eight times in a relationship before it's even reported, he added.

"We're missing 75 percent of those cases reported," Perkins said. "We are trying to open them up

for civil action regardless of the criminal case. We want to put the power back with the victim.

"We're shining the spotlight on the secret of abuse and we think that's what helps. It may discourage others if they know there's the opportunity of being discovered and made to pay. The very person who is supposed to protect the person does horrible things to her. There is an element of emotional control involved."

Women often take so long to report abuse, he said, because they try to forgive the abuser and give him the opportunity to change.

"It's one thing to believe in a person, but then they have to look at the pattern that he doesn't change," he said.

Leaving can also be hard if the woman doesn't have a place to go. Statistics show the woman is right in believing the most dangerous time for her is when she actually gets the courage to leave and the abuser knows he has lost his power over her.

Perkins said he is sure physical abuse of men happens but it's a small percentage of the total number of abuse cases.

"The real abuse comes when the victim is terrorized," he said. "Very few men are in that position."

As for the Never Again Foundation, Perkins said there is no one else doing what they do and they want to expand to send a message of deterrence.

"The abuser needs to know if you do this, you could lose everything in a divorce," Perkins said. "That's the power of the civil system."

"Abuse is costing the country billions of dollars each year in hospital costs, lost work days, families on welfare. It's only fair that the perpetrator be

made to help pay these costs. It shouldn't be the victim or the rest of society. Why should I and others, who have never abused their wives or children, have to help pay for the results of someone else's abuse.

"We want to send the bill back to the abuser and the only we can do that is through the civil courts. They shouldn't be able to sit idly by and make others pay for the aftermath of their actions. They should have a financial millstone that will follow them for the rest of their lives."

Never Again's first case was heard in Navajo County Superior Court and involved Show Low resident Patricia Lumpkin, who was brutally beaten by her husband. He was sentenced to 12 1/2 years in prison but stood to gain \$1 million from his wife's inheritance in a divorce settlement.

"The divorce judge doesn't have a power to consider marital misconduct in such a case," Perkins said. "In this case, he was on the verge of ordering Pat Lumpkin to turn over all her financial information or be held in contempt. We felt this was wrong and we filed a civil lawsuit."

After the trial, in which the husband defended himself and tried to put the blame on his wife, a jury awarded Patricia Lumpkin \$1.25 million. Although the husband didn't have any money of his own, the lawsuit judgment was listed as a debt he owed her, thus protecting her trust fund.

That, he said, is the highest standing domestic violence award in Arizona history.

"These abusers should know they can't commit crimes and then benefit from them," he said. Information on the Never Again Foundation can be had by calling 1-480-539-9111.