

Jane Charmelo

out & about

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

FOCUS Ministries offers support, education, training

According to the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence (www.ilcadv.org), one in three women and one in seven men are victims of domestic violence.



Paula Silva

For Paula Silva, the need for awareness about domestic violence is not confined to October — she is the co-founder of Villa Park-based FOCUS Ministries, Inc., sharing that she is a survivor herself.

"It started out of my own need" as a domestic violence survivor, she said, and recalled that in the 1990s, "I had turned to my church and they were no help"—not laying blame but describing how resources were largely unavailable during that time due to lack of training and understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse.

When another church member was going through her own domestic violence situation, the two started a faith-based support group in 1995 out of Silva's home, with about six to 10 women attending — also members of the same church.

"We began to see women [in] a different way … noticing signs of abuse," Silva recalled, adding that the group began to grow through word of mouth.

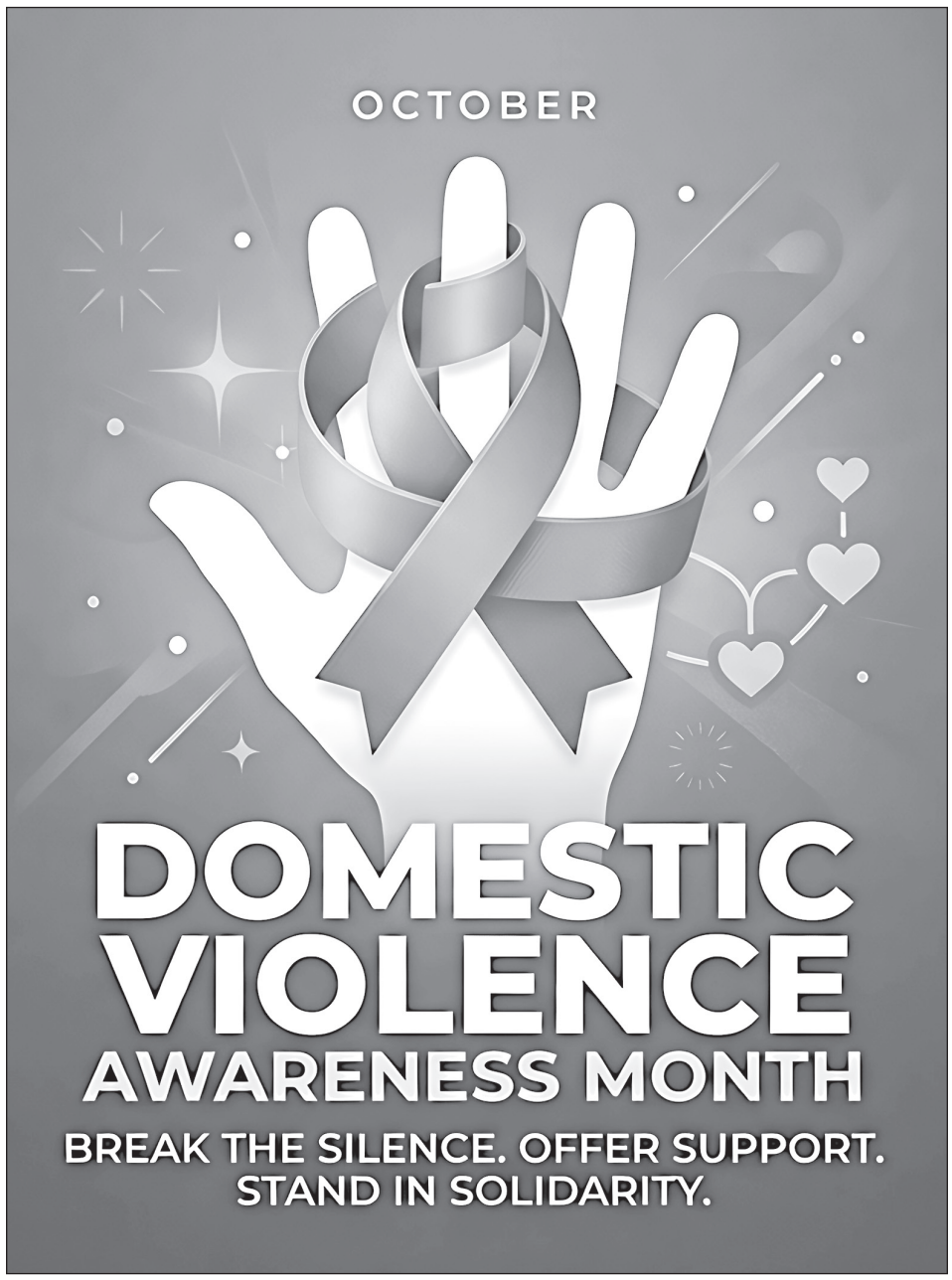
FOCUS Ministries met in Silva's home for over 10 years, she outlined, then met in a church "that was receptive to the group," and is now located at 57 E. Park Blvd. in Villa Park.

The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization has expanded to both in-person and online support groups; free counseling by phone, email and in person; and leadership training and education for churches, support group leaders and others who want to help victims, with opportunities for continuing education credits.

"Partners in the Journey" is a faith-based online training program for support group leaders which offers certification for church leaders, lay persons and professionals.

"Helping the Helper: Identifying Trauma Related Warning Signs & Taking Action" is a workshop for licensed professionals, social workers and certified domestic violence professionals, but is open to lay persons and church leaders.

Silva said that while FOCUS Ministries is faith-based — and is accessed from all 50 states and several countries — the organization is open to all women, and has helped women as young as 18 and as old as in their 80s.



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"We don't indoctrinate … Their faith gets shaken but God's still there," she added.

Silva pointed out that domestic abuse is not always about physical violence but can be psychological, emotional, verbal, spiritual and financial, and "a lot of those things keep women stuck."

"It [abuse] can come from all different angles," Silva emphasized.

She noted that some of the topics covered include boundaries, co-dependency, safety, finances and transitional housing, adding, "We want women to grow and learn … and to help women understand what [situation] they're in and what they can do about it."

"We want to empower them to make the decisions," Silva continued. "The effects of abuse last a long time."

When asked why she launched FOCUS Ministries, Silva simply stated that because of her own experience, and with the lack of resources, "I saw the need and it started with me."

FOCUS Ministries has been working to raise $60,000 during the month of October, to help sustain the free counseling and survivor support services.

In 2025 alone, FOCUS Ministries welcomed 204 new clients; provided 812 counseling sessions; and responded to 976 calls, emails and office visits from people seeking help and support, according to a FOCUS Ministries news release.

"We want people to know that support is available, that they deserve to be heard, and that they do not have to navigate this journey alone. We hope the community will stand with survivors by helping us keep these services accessible," Silva stated in the release.

For more information about FOCUS Ministries, visit focusministries1.org or call 630-617-0088.

About Paula Silva

Paula Silva is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC), a trainer for Partners in the Journey and Faith Based DV Certificate Training and Workshops, leads a domestic violence support group, and offers lay counseling and daily email or phone support to women who need help with relationship issues.

She coauthored "Violence Among Us: Ministry to Families in Crisis;" the article "To Terrorize No More" in the 2009 fall issue of Just Between Us magazine; and the article, "Domestic Violence Among Believers" in the 2005 Vol. 13 No. 3 issue of Christian Counseling Today magazine.

Silva has been a guest on "Midday Connection" and "This is the Day" (Moody Broadcasting Network), the "Scott Thomas Show" (WYLL radio in Chicago), "Time for Hope" and the "Harvest Show." She has served as a host of "Restoring the Hope" conferences for women held in Illinois.

Silva has served on panels at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and has been a panelist at Mayor Daley's Domestic Violence Seminar, as well as a member of the Faith Based Advisory Committee for the Office of Domestic Violence.

She has trained pastors, leaders and churches on the dynamics of domestic violence at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida and Community Fellowship Church in Illinois. She has presented "Behind Closed Doors, What Color is Your Elephant" at seminars and "Ten Keys to Counseling Victims of Domestic Violence" workshops at the AACC World Conference in 2005.

Guitarist Muriel Anderson set to return for annual hometown concert on Nov. 28

Harp guitarist Muriel Anderson returns to Downers Grove for her annual hometown concert on Saturday, Nov. 28.

A tradition for 35 years, there will be home-made baked goods, hot apple cider, a guitar giveaway, world class music, and lots of smiles as we transition from one holiday to another.

Muriel's special guest this year is fellow national guitar champion and charming entertainer, Christie Lenée (christielenee.com).

A portion of the proceeds go to Anderson's Music for Life Alliance charity, supporting organizations that bring music education to young people who may not otherwise have the opportunity.

If you're not already familiar with harp-guitarist/composer Muriel Anderson, you will find yourself smiling as you feel the joy of her music shining through a stunning array of styles, bringing you on a tour around the world.

Muriel is the first woman to have won the National Fingerstyle Guitar Championship, and is a protégée of Chet Atkins. Her concert will begin at 7 p.m., online and live, at the First Congregational UCC, 1047 Curtiss St., Downers Grove.

Tickets are $28 in-person and $18 for livestream.

Both include a chance to win a new guitar courtesy of Tobias Music.

Tickets are available at murielanderson.com/tickets.

For more information, visit murielanderson.com/DG.