

Casting a light on the world of trafficking girls, women

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Sending a nude picture of anyone, including yourself, electronically is a sexual offense.

It’s a form of pornography “ even if you are sending it to your significant other. If caught and you’re over 18, you will have to register as a sex offender for the rest of your life.



Alice Wells

Think your boyfriend or girlfriend won’t share it? What happens if you break up?

It’s called sexting and it’s happening in Lake Tahoe.

Alice Wells, immediate past president of Soroptimist of the Americas, gave a presentation to the two South Lake Tahoe chapters on Dec. 9 titled “Tackling Trafficking Today.” Also in attendance were young women from South Tahoe High School who are in the S Club.

They admitted to knowing about sexting, but not the consequences.

Those at the lunch at Harrah’s seemed taken aback by the statistics that filled slide after slide of Wells’

presentation.

• 100 million children are sexually exploited each year, mostly girls

• 100,000 children and young teens are trafficked in the United States each year

• 1 in 3 teens on the streets is lured into prostitution within 48 hours of leaving home

• 1 in 5 pornographic images is of a child

• pornography is a \$3 billion a year industry

• human trafficking is the third largest organized crime in the world

• most johns are middle class men

• sex tourism is growing where primarily men travel to other countries to purchase a young boy or girl; with U.S. residents accounting for 25 percent of these tourists

Wells spoke with South Lake Tahoe police Officer Rebecca Inman before giving her talk. Inman relayed that girls being lured into prostitution is not an issue here, now, but that some know they can make quick cash by putting out for some guy.

Sexting is not addressed in the schools.

A fellow Soroptimist put Lake Tahoe Unified School District board President Wendy David on the spot that afternoon.

David said she would discuss the issue with staff and her fellow board members. As the former director of the local Court Appointed Special Advocates office, she also knows when young people leave a foster home at 18 they do not have a support network and that prostitution can be the route they choose.

Anna Richter with the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center said she would look into the curriculum her organization takes into the local schools.

It was two years ago that Wells' club in Phoenix undertook the project to bring awareness about the trafficking of girls and women to the forefront. They have launched an education campaign in Arizona and are spreading the word to other Soroptimist groups.

The other goal, she said, is to provide people with facts and information to enhance personal safety.

Wells said pop culture and movies like "Pretty Woman" glorify prostitution.

She said the men luring girls and women into prostitution are not looking for the prettiest one. They want someone who is vulnerable, who will fall for the attention he offers and the things he can buy her.

Then he turns the tables on her and before she knows it she is turning tricks for \$40 or \$100 an act every 10 to 15 minutes so she can make her quota of a \$1,000 night.

Wells said the three things that are constant in this way of life for women who are trapped in it are rape, beatings and drugs.

"There are no 'pretty women' " this is the message we need to get to young women," Wells said.