

Bidding for a Wonderful Cause

By James Combs

The Lake Sumter Children's Advocacy will conduct its fifth annual "Bids for Kids" fundraiser from April 21-24. It will conclude with an invitation-only barbecue and silent auction celebration at The Villages Polo Club on Saturday.

Last year, the center provided services for 324 children in Lake and Sumter counties who were sexually and physically abused. It serves as 'one-stop shopping' where victims ages 0-18 receive forensic interviews, crisis counseling, supervised visitation and medical exams at one location. "This center spares children the trauma of being interviewed and telling their stories over and over again to unfamiliar adults," said Executive Director Diane Pisczek.

Board of Directors President Paula Stinson said that Bids for Kids raised nearly \$60,000 in 2003. "We're increasing in the amount of referrals we receive, yet our state funding has been cut," she said. "This is such an important event to the organization because it allows us to keep our doors open and continue our services. We truly appreciate the goodwill of everyone who participates."

A complete list of auction items will be published in The Daily Commercial during the community-wide telephone auction. To make a bid, participants can call the event's phone bank, which will be manned from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and from 4-7 p.m. on Saturday. The wide selection of items includes golf packages, dinner packages, vacation getaways, jewelry, artwork, furniture, automobiles and much more. The newspaper will update the current high bids daily.

Diane said that those who contribute to the event can potentially help children develop into productive adults. "I used to work with many adults who were abused as children but had nobody to help them cope with the situation. This organization is a place of hope for abused children, and believe it or not we do hear a lot of laughter and giggling going on in the hallways. That's when we know the healing process begins, and there is no greater feeling than giving their childhood back to them."

The organization's Board of Directors includes: Paula J. Stinson, Alex Ogilvie III, Sue Purdy, Mike Pederson, Tim Camp, Vaneese Collins, Pam Duvall, Terry Elwood, Peggy Fuller, Sarah Jane Hewitt, Meredith Kirste, Diane Louis, Donna Richey, Henry Richter, Kelly Ferrigno, Daniel Skidmore, Pete Wahl, Jill McDowell, Christine Heaton, Katie Stradinger and Linda Galloway.

For more information, contact the Lake-Sumter Children's Advocacy Center at (352) 343-6200 in Tavares and at (352) 568-3152 in Bushnell.



Standing: Board President, Paula Stinson
Sitting: Executive Director Diane Pisczek