



Linda D. Thomas (left), with A Woman's Place, answers questions Thursday during a presentation of a report by the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission at the Bucks County Courthouse in Doylestown.

Abuse victims studied

In an effort to prevent more tragedies, the cases of four Bucks County women who were killed in 2005 by their abusive husbands were examined for trends.

By **CHRISTOPHER RUVO**
 THE INTELLIGENCER

Shot in her apartment. Beaten and asphyxiated. Beaten and knifed. Shot outside her back door.

These are the brutal ways four Bucks County women died at the hands of their abusive husbands in 2005.

The Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission released a report Thursday that studied the cases for trends to help prevent such tragedies.

Assembled by the Bucks County District Attorney's Office, the review commission studied the murders of Susan Czarny of Solebury, Robin Shaffer of Quakertown, Suzanne Detwiler of East Rockhill and Mary Claire Alessandrone of Warminster.

While the women were abused in some way, the report found few telltale signs that would predict such terrible ends.

Victims did not report physical violence. In one case, family

members suspected physical abuse, but the woman denied it. The couples were not involved in custody battles.

The victims were not economically dependent on their perpetrators, nor did they have contact with social agencies for domestic violence support.

Such factors are often tip-offs that a major problem is brewing, officials said.

"The most striking part is that we expect to see the victim with a black eye. But these four cases demonstrate just the contrary," said First Assistant District Attorney David W. Zellis at a Thursday press conference.

Nonetheless, findings revealed that all four men had a history of substance abuse and legal entanglements. Three of the four were being treated for mental health issues, and there were reports of suicide attempts.

All the women had been the victim of some prior abuse, be it stalking or controlling behaviors. Police had been called regarding other matters with

See **ABUSE**, Page A 8

Susan Czarny, 50

Date of death: April 22, 2005
 Czarny was beaten and stabbed to death by her husband of more than two years, Jon Czarny, 48, at their home on Summer Hill Court in Solebury. Jon Czarny, who had a history of depression, substance abuse and arrests, then drove to Logan Square shopping center and killed himself inside his vehicle by overdosing on drugs.



Robin Shaffer, 43

Date of death: June 15, 2005
 Shaffer was shot to death by her estranged husband, Jeffrey Ogle, 47, at her Quakertown apartment on South Ninth Street. Authorities launched a massive manhunt to find Ogle. It ended after 10 hours when he shot himself upon being confronted by a SWAT team. The pair had been married for about a year. Ogle's previous wife had filed a protection from abuse order against him.



Suzanne Detwiler, 40

Date of death: June 18, 2005
 Detwiler was shot to death by her husband, Andrew Detwiler, 44, at their home on Green Leaf Circle in East Rockhill. Andrew Detwiler, who had sought mental health treatment days before the slaying, was then shot to death by the couple's son Corey Detwiler. A sophomore at Pennridge High School at the time, Corey was trying to save his mother and was not charged with a crime.

Mary Claire Alessandrone, 43

Date of death: Sept. 9, 2005
 Alessandrone died from asphyxiation and blows to the head after her husband, Joseph Alessandrone, 48, beat her, then suffocated her by putting a plastic bag over her head at their Olive Street home in Warminster. Joseph then took his own life by shooting himself in the head. The couple was estranged; Mary Claire had filed for divorce earlier that year.

Abuse

Continued from Page A 1

the couples. The victims were employed; three of the four men were not.

"It is important to make the public and all those who come into contact with the victims aware that potentially lethal domestic abuse can involve emotional abuse, financial abuse, controlling behaviors and stalking behaviors without involving any physical abuse," the study said.

Shaffer's sister Heidi Markow praised the report, but said it's only a first step in taking broader action to combat domestic violence and protect women.

"The report is the report, and the question is what do we do now? How are we going to change things?" said Markow, who is pressing state lawmakers to enact "Robin's Law,"

which would create an online registry of violent offenders similar to the Megan Law's database of sex offenders.

While officials cautioned that it's difficult to draw general conclusions from studying only four cases, the report puts forward recommendations on how to better combat domestic violence, including creating a local task force featuring law enforcement and victim assistance professionals.

It also calls for tightening gun laws so that anyone who has voluntarily committed themselves for mental health treatment or had a protection from abuse order filed against them cannot purchase firearms.

Current law prevents only people with active protection from abuse orders or a history of involuntary mental health commitment from buying guns, officials said. Increasing public education about domestic violence and its potentially

horrific ends is another recommendation.

As part of its research, the committee worked with more than a dozen people close to the victims — Markow included — in an effort to gain insight into the circumstances leading to the murders. Officials said that's a first for a study by such a commission in Pennsylvania.

"The success of the document is that that the families had input," Zellis said.

District Attorney Michelle Henry called the report an important tool in waging a successful battle against domestic violence.

The commission consisted of a panel of professionals from diverse backgrounds, including local police, representatives from A Woman's Place, the Network of Victim Assistance and legal and mental health professionals.

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