Stop abuse of elderly, Shelby County Mayor Mark Luttrell says

Speaks at awareness gathering

By Tessa Duvall

Saturday, June 16, 2012

Shelby County Mayor Mark Luttrell remembers when he became passionate about elder care.

After being elected Shelby County Sheriff in 2002, Luttrell learned of a group within the office who would check on the welfare of area residents, often elderly people who don't have loved ones nearby.

"I became convinced this was a public safety issue," he said.

Luttrell spoke of the importance of caring for older residents at a World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event at Lindenwood Christian Church Friday morning, bringing together a variety of resources to protect the elderly.

From January to October 2011, 446 cases of elder abuse were reported in Memphis, said speaker Jane Ann Sullivan, a nurse practitioner in trauma at the Regional Medical Center at Memphis who has researched elder abuse locally.

Nationally, about 2 million elderly Americans are abused each year, according to the U.S. Administration on Aging.

However, the exact number of victims is hard to pin down because elder abuse frequently goes unreported or is classified as another type of crime.

Elder abuse can be physical, sexual, or involve taking advantage of an elder financially.

About two-thirds of the time, the abuse comes at the hands of relatives, according to the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability.

Dora Ivey, executive director of the Aging Commission of the Mid-South, said the crime often goes unreported because victims don't want to tell on their loved ones.

Janet Lamb, elder rights supervisor for the Commission on Aging, said an "aging tsunami" is approaching.

Currently, 1 in 5 Americans is age 65 or older, but the percentage will increase as Americans live longer and Baby Boomers reach retirement age, Lamb said.

With the increased need for caretakers, financial exploitation of the elderly will become an even greater problem, she said.

Lamb said awareness is key to reducing elder abuse, and encouraged anyone who is
suspicious of abuse to report it.

"You have to listen to the elder and believe them."

Proclamations signed by Gov. Bill Haslam, Mayor A C Wharton and Luttrell were presented at the event, recognizing elder abuse as a serious problem with a need for increased awareness.

Presentations included information on filing for Social Security, spotting age discrimination, and understanding legal documents that can help older Americans protect themselves and their property.

The event was presented by Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, YWCA, the Aging Commission of the Mid-South, Shelby County Crime Victims Center and Memphis Area Legal Services.

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