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Teammates rally for women's causes

Host auction for domestic violence victims

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They met and became friends while playing soccer together on a women's team in Montclair. But when the players met a breast cancer survivor who was playing in a tournament in New York, this group of friends decided to take their hobby a step further.

Two years ago, the handful of women players started Goals for Life, a nonprofit organization to raise money for women's health issues.

"We thought, why not take it a step further?" said Lisa Ciardi of Montclair, one of the group's founders. "We thought this was a great way to raise money for women's causes."

In 2001, they put their feet to work fund-raising and held a soccer tournament and a small auction, which raised \$30,000 for the Susan G. Komen Foundation for breast cancer research and treatment. Last year, the group raised another \$30,000 to pay for screenings, surgeries and health care for a breast cancer outreach program run by St. Michael's Hospital in Newark.

Tomorrow night, the women are turning their fund-raising in a new direction, to help victims of domestic violence right in their own back yard.

"A lot of people don't talk about it, but it's there," said Beth Albert, a member of the Goals for Life board of directors. "We have an opportunity to help and to prevent it and really make a difference."

Teammates rally for women's causes

A sports memorabilia auction will be held from 8 to 11 p.m. tomorrow at the Van Vleck House and Gardens at 21 Van Vleck St. in Montclair. The proceeds will be donated to Montclair's Domestic Violence Response Team. The auction costs \$40 per person and includes refreshments. Among items to be auctioned will be soccer, baseball, football and hockey memorabilia -- including a baseball signed by Hank Aaron and a hockey stick signed by Mike Eruzione, the captain of the 1980 USA Olympic hockey team who scored the winning goal against the Soviet Union for the gold medal.

Montclair's response team is a group of volunteers who meet with victims of violence after the police have been called to their homes.

Barbara Havlik-Martoglio, president of Goals for Life, said she was inspired after meeting with domestic violence workers who told them it can take on average nine beatings before a woman will leave her abuser. "We want to help women with low self-esteem, we know people are suffering in this situation," she said. "There are not enough services and not enough money."

The money raised by the auction will help pay for cab fares, hotel rooms, toiletries, diapers and other urgent needs for abused women who may not be able to return home right away, said Celia Trembulak, project coordinator for the response team.

Trembulak is one of several volunteers who are available 24 hours a day to respond to the needs of abuse victims after they have been identified by the Montclair Police Department. The volunteers attend a 40-hour training session and are available to listen to the victims, offer them referrals to counseling and shelters, and help them devise a safety plan if they have to leave their homes quickly, Trembulak said.

"We are not judging them, we want them to know there's a lot of other support out there for them," she said.

Trembulak said she also hopes money from the fund-raiser can be used to stage educational plays for high school students in Montclair, Verona, Cedar Grove and Nutley -- to warn them of the signs of domestic violence.

Besides raising awareness for the problem of domestic violence, Trembulak said she hopes the auction inspires more volunteers to get involved. The next training session begins March 3 and applicants must submit to a fingerprint and background check by the Montclair police.

She said she's found the work rewarding. "When you have a woman who has been so isolated from family and friends, and you get to talk to them and the floodgates open, they see that finally someone understands."

Ciardi said the Goals for Life group also welcomes new members -- whether or not they play soccer.

For more information, those interested can call the Goals for Life office at (973) 744-3003 or e-mail goli fe@aol.com