

Miami Herald

WATCHDOG

Domestic violence workers' complaints shed light on issues

BY SAMANTHA J. GROSS
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Illustration: Tania Tefelasso-Davis

TALLAHASSEE
For the eight years she was in an abusive marriage, Lisa LeBel had no idea there was a shelter in Ocala to help people like her. When LeBel eventually left her relationship and got a job on staff with the Ocala Domestic

Violence Center, it was a huge part of her healing. But after two years, she saw the side of domestic violence centers in Florida that was "so shady and disgusting that I had to leave," said LeBel, 43, of Dunnellon.

Violence/Sexual Assault Center, it was a huge part of her healing. But after two years, she saw the side of domestic violence centers in Florida that was "so shady and disgusting that I had to leave," said LeBel, 43, of Dunnellon. LeBel enjoyed performing

duties others wouldn't do, like taking victims to court dates and often escorting them to prenatal doctors' appointments and counseling sessions. But she only got paid for it if



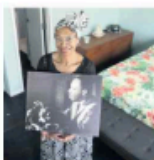
Tiffany Carr

she lived. LeBel's position was completely funded by what is called a "VOCA grant" or a Federal Victims of Crime Act, administered by the Florida Attorney General's office. And if she performed duties outside of her job description, the funding got pulled.

It was the first of many grie-

SEE WATCHDOG, 6A

SAVE UP TO
\$268
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TROPICAL LIFE

LANDMARKS TELL OF RICH CULTURAL BLACK HISTORY

From schools to a Brownsville hotel where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stayed, pictured above, black history landmarks abound in South Florida. 1M

Heart health



SPECIAL SECTION

JUST HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR HEART?

We examine women's heart health, cardio risks of Hispanics and blacks, the benefits of a vegan diet, children's cardiac issues and more. 1UH



MIAMI HEAT | DWYANE WADE LGACY CELEBRATION

EMOTIONAL CEREMONY FOR BELOVED D-WADE

Dwyane Wade's No. 3 jersey is raised to the rafters of AmericanAirlines Arena during halftime of the game against the Cleveland Cavaliers as part of the LGACY Celebration for the former Heat superstar on Saturday night. I hope I've inspired all of you. Thank you for making me a part of your legacy. Please know you are a huge part of mine. Wade said. More coverage in Sports, 23A

GREEN ENERGY

Ygrene, controversial PACE energy program, is booming in Florida

■ The Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (PACE) is exploding in Florida, according to a University of South Florida study of the biggest companies. Ygrene Energy Fund. Critics say it doesn't protect consumers.

BY ALEX HARRIS
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A decade ago, if a Floridian wanted extra cash to replace a roof, install solar panels or a brand new air conditioner, the most common choice was a bank loan. But for the last few years, homeowners also have had a controversial new option.

SEE PACE, 6A



Junior Jean, 82, installed solar panels on his Miami-Dade home through PACE, which can leave some people in a financial hole.

PHILANTHROPY

Habitat for Humanity is on a house-building blitz in Miami

■ For 30 years, Miami's Habitat for Humanity chapter has been putting low-income families into low-cost homes of their own through its "sweat equity" approach. Homeowners and volunteers hammer together the houses.

BY ANDREW VIGUCCI
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Melissa Jones, a single mom with four kids, has a good job at a major corporation. But the growing numbers of Miamians, she has struggled with rising rent — and forget about hoping to ever own a home. Or so she thought. But then she was turned

and the homeowners themselves. And so one warm morning last week, Jones found herself on her knees, going dark wood laminate to the floors of what will soon be her new Habitat home in the south Miami-Dade neighborhood of Goulds. That's after she spent much of the previous nine days helping to nail down the roof, put up drywall, frame and install doors and windows, paint



SEE HABITAT, 2A

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CHOPIN FOUNDATION OF THE UNITED STATES PRESENTS
10th National Chopin Piano Competition
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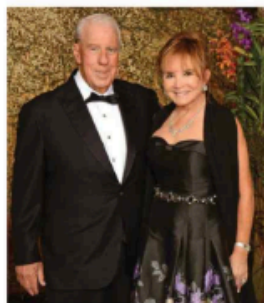
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FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

GALA IN THE GARDEN MIDNIGHT GARDEN

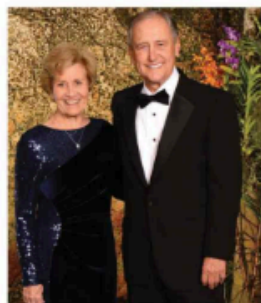
Fairchild's 27th annual Gala in the Garden was held on February 1, at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden's lakeside marquee, which allowed for gorgeous panoramic views of the Garden under the moonlit sky. Guests dined and danced the night away under a Midnight Garden, this year's Gala theme. The ceiling was decorated in pink orchids and monstera leaves hung over the dance floor. Proceeds from the Fairchild Gala support the Garden's science education, conservation science and horticultural programs.



Suzanne DiMoro, Co-Chair, Gala in the Garden and Member, Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and Paul DiMoro



Frances Sevilla-Socarr, Co-Chair, Gala in the Garden, and Eugene Sevilla-Socarr



Joyce Burns, Philanthropic Chair, Gala in the Garden and Secretary Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and Tony Burns



Daniel and Trish Ball



Mary-Jean Pitt and Louis Pitt, Senior Vice President and Treasurer, Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



Larry Pimental, Member, Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, and Sandi Pimental



Bruce Green, President Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, and Evelyn Langlois Green

FairchildGarden.org



Share photos of your fundraiser, celebration or corporate event in South Florida Album. Call 305-376-2611 or email SouthFloridaAlbum@miamiherald.com.

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Bob Dickinson and Andrea Hanley



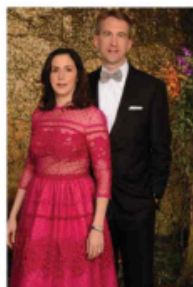
Jan and Jen Faldt



Ken O'Keefe and Jason Stephens, Members, Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



Richard and Colleen Fain



Ana Codrea Berlick and Rob Berlick



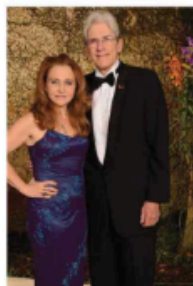
Nawette Zapata, COO, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, and Dr. Carl Lewis, Director, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden



James Bunk and Raphael Bester



John Shubin, Member, Board of Trustees, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and Savannah Shubin



Dr. Felicia Krauß and Dr. Julio Frank, President, University of Miami



Mike and Margaret Edison



Josh Salmon and Laurie Jennings



Constance Collins, Leslie Lorenzi and Angela Whelan



Gala 2020 Committee Members (L-R) Jennifer Montoya, Joyce Burns, Bonnie Crabtree, Chary Rico, Tara, Margaret Edison, Swaine D'More, Frances Sevilla-Sacasa, Ana Vergara-Milón, Mylee Lopez, Raphael Bester, and Leslie Dennis

Save the Date for Gala in the Garden

Saturday, February 6, 2021

For sponsorship opportunities or to support Fairchild initiatives like partnering with NASA to grow plants in space, The Million Orchid Project to restore native orchids and our continuous efforts to include local students from kindergarten through graduate school in our mission to conserve and explore the tropical world, visit www.fairchildgarden.org.

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