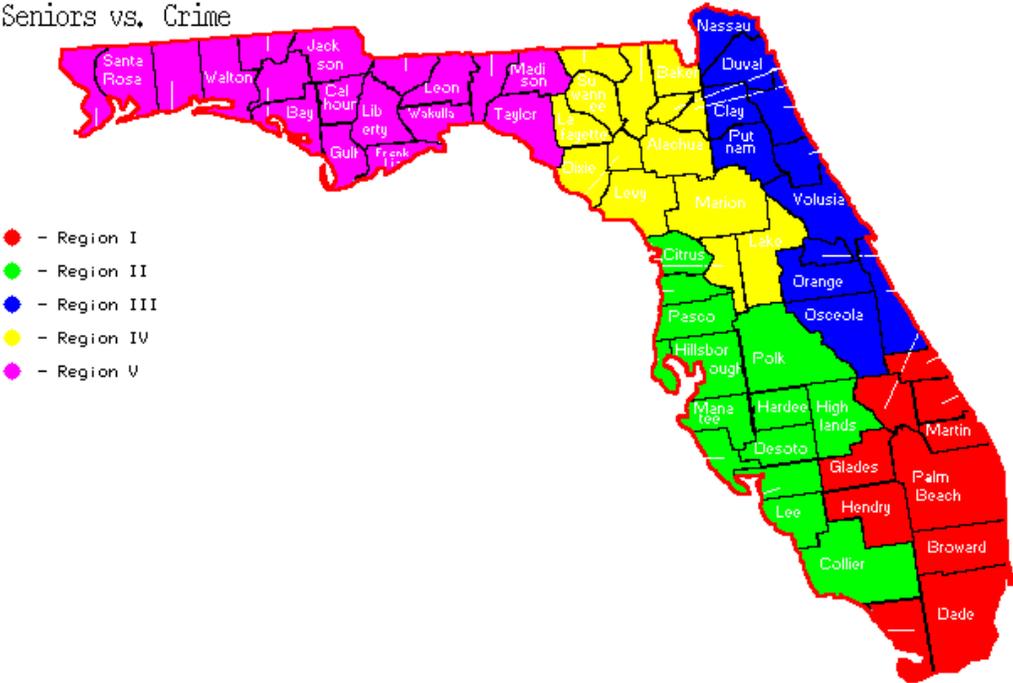




Seniors vs. Crime Project

Annual Report 2003



Submitted To Attorney General Charlie Crist

Executive Director

Donald Ravenna

Seniors vs. Crime Project Annual Report 2003

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Seniors vs. Crime Project Annual Report 2003

To Attorney General Charlie Crist

Executive Summary

Seniors vs. Crime, Inc. is a non-profit organization established to help prevent the victimization of senior citizens through education and the creative involvement of seniors in their own protection. Seniors vs. Crime was established in 1989 as a direct result of a Legislative Statewide Task Force Report on Crimes Against the Elderly.



General Crist with Pinellas Sleuths

The Seniors vs. Crime Project is a Special Project of the Office of the

Attorney General. The Project was established under the auspices of the Office of the Attorney General to act as the vehicle for providing direct services to Florida's seniors and to assist the Attorney General and other law enforcement in combating crime against the elderly.

The Project has grown steadily since its inception with 2003 being a breakout year in providing direct services to Florida's senior population. This year the Project helped the Statewide Prosecutor with 82 cases, helped the Attorney General with Identity Theft cases from his Hotline, recovered over \$2,461,278 for seniors since July 1, 2001 through Storefront operations, resolved 44 complaints referred to the Project

from Citizen Services Division, and educated Florida seniors about crime aversion at over 100 speaking events.

Attorney General Charlie Crist's continued support has been instrumental to the success of the Project in providing much needed services to seniors statewide.

Project Operations

Storefronts Help Seniors

Storefronts are the centerpiece of the Project's efforts to provide direct services to our seniors. A Storefront is an office, staffed by Senior Sleuth volunteers, where any senior who feels that he or she has been victimized or otherwise taken advantage of can come and speak to a peer. Many seniors will not report crimes against them, especially frauds, due to embarrassment or fear of repercussions. The Storefront gives them a safe place to make their complaints known. Senior Sleuths will

attempt to resolve the complaint, often while the complainant is still present at the Storefront. Complaints that may be criminal in nature are referred to the proper authorities for investigation. Complaints that are civil in nature may be resolved by the Storefront Sleuth or referred to another agency, such as Consumer Services.

The Project's first Storefront opened in Delray Beach on July 1, 2001 as a pilot project. Based on its success, the concept is being replicated throughout the state. In 2002 there were four (4) Storefronts operational in Citrus, Marion, Palm Beach and Sumter Counties. With the exception of the original Storefront in Delray Beach, the additional Storefronts were all opened in partnerships with the county Sheriff's Offices.

In 2003 an additional six (6) Storefronts were opened as the Project became more widely recognized and as the value of the Storefronts became more apparent. New Storefronts included Ocala (Marion County Sheriff's Office), Leesburg and Clermont (Lake County Sheriff's Office), Orlando (Orange County Sheriff's Office), Merritt Island (Brevard County), and Pinellas Park (Pinellas Park Police Department).

Storefront openings are being planned for Okeechobee, Polk, Seminole, Osceola, Leon, Indian River and Collier Counties in early 2004. In addition two new



Marion County Storefront in Sheriff's Office

Storefronts will be opening after the 1st of the year in the cities of St. Petersburg and Tarpon Springs.

At the request of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, the Executive Director met with staff from his office and members of the Mesa Police Department to discuss the Project and Storefronts. The meeting, held in August, laid the groundwork to replicate the Project under the auspices of the Arizona Attorney General.

Since July 1, 2001, Storefronts sponsored by the Attorney General have recovered over \$2,460,354 for seniors with over 2,868 cases handled by trained Senior Sleuth volunteers. In addition to money recovered directly for seniors, Senior Sleuths have also successfully resolved many cases to the complainant's satisfaction. Many seniors are served simply by having someone to discuss their problem with. Often times a complaint involves no wrongdoing. Helping a senior to understand a contract or helping them to read a phone bill is just as important to the Project as is a recovery when wrongdoing is involved.



Sleuths of the Year, the Fosters

Storefront Senior Sleuths have been directly responsible for over 100 criminal charges being brought against companies and individuals. The vast majority of these criminal charges would not have been filed without the good work of the Senior Sleuths in identifying multiple victims of scams and providing law enforcement with their case files.

Palm Beach County / Delray Beach

The Delray Beach Storefront opened June, 2001 as pilot project. The tremendous success of this Storefront has led to the expansion of this concept throughout the state. Delray Beach is the only rented office space utilized by the Project.

Citrus County / Beverly Hills

The Citrus County Storefront opened on July 2, 2002. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Citrus County Sheriff's Office.

Marion County / The Villages

The Villages Storefront opened in July of 2002. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Marion County Sheriff's Office.



Villages Manager Mary Starr on a case

Marion County / Ocala

The Ocala Storefront opened in June, of 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Marion County Sheriff's Office.

Pinellas County / Pinellas Park

The Pinellas Park Storefront opened in July, 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the City of Pinellas Park.



Pinellas Park first complaint

Sumter County / The Villages

The Sumter Storefront opened in November of 2002 in The Villages. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Sumter County Sheriff's Office.

Lake County / Clermont

The Clermont Storefront opened in March, 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Lake County Sheriff's Office.

Lake County / Leesburg

The Leesburg Storefront opened in March, 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Lake County Sheriff's Office.

Brevard County / Merritt Island

The Merritt Island Storefront opened in April, 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by The Sunflower House, a care giver organization for Brevard County seniors.



Brevard Storefront at Merritt Mall

Orange County / Orlando

The Orlando Storefront opened in July, 2003. This office is located in space provided, at no cost, by the Orange County Sheriff's Office.

Senior Sleuths Help Law Enforcement

Senior Sleuths were utilized to assist the Office of the Attorney General in a number of areas this year. Two pilot programs were run in the Orlando OAG in support of the Statewide Prosecutors Office.



Theresa teaching sleuths

Theresa Project

Theresa M. Adlam, Victim Services Program Specialist, Office of Statewide Prosecution, is assigned to the Orlando Office of the Attorney General. Much of her time is spent on addressing identity theft crimes that are directed to her from the Attorney General Fraud Hotline.

For several months during 2003 a team of internet savvy Senior Sleuths assisted Theresa in eliminating a backlog of cases referred by the Hotline. Senior Sleuths called the victims, gave advice, recorded new information that might be considered intelligence or pattern recognition and made the victims feel good about the help received from the Attorney General.

Angel Project

The Senior Criminal Financial Analyst, Angel Taylor, a former FHP trooper, assists Assistant Statewide Prosecutors in Orlando in investigating cases and preparing them for prosecution. Her duties involve investigation, intelligence, analysis, and trial preparation. A team of seven volunteer Senior Sleuths, who are experts at finding information on the internet, was formed to assist in this endeavor. The Senior Sleuths work under Angel's supervision at the Orlando Office. Since the inception of the Angel Project, the Senior Sleuth team has donated 254 hours of their time to 82 assigned cases.

The following are two examples of email feedback from Angel to Sleuths regarding the benefit of their assistance.

Example One. “ In this case, a complainant from Tampa had a lien against her for a car that was towed in Miami that belonged to a person of the same name in West Virginia. Thanks to all of you, that lien is being removed by



Sleuths sleuthing on the internet



Angel teaching internet sleuthing techniques

the towing company in Miami, who has now been supplied with the WV registration information and driver's license information on the true owner.

If Kim had not taken the initial report and Theresa had not culled it for the sleuths and Dan had not located the towing company and I had not located the true owner, would still have a lien against her for a car she never owned.”

Example Two. “ Again, a fine job by Senior Sleuth Ed Herbst on 11/10/2003 - The victim had someone using her identity. Ed located notes in file indicating her checking account number was used to attempt a recent purchase.. Ed located the company, called the right folks, got instructions on how we could get the order information and coaxed the order number out of the company. I typed up a letter as requested by Ed and faxed it to the number he provided for me and had the suspect address and telephone number used by the imposter to call the company in about an hour via fax. A copy of the audio of the phone call for the purchase is being mailed to me in CD form, thanks to Ed. This saved me about 4 hours of work! Go Sleuths!!!! Thanks so much! ”

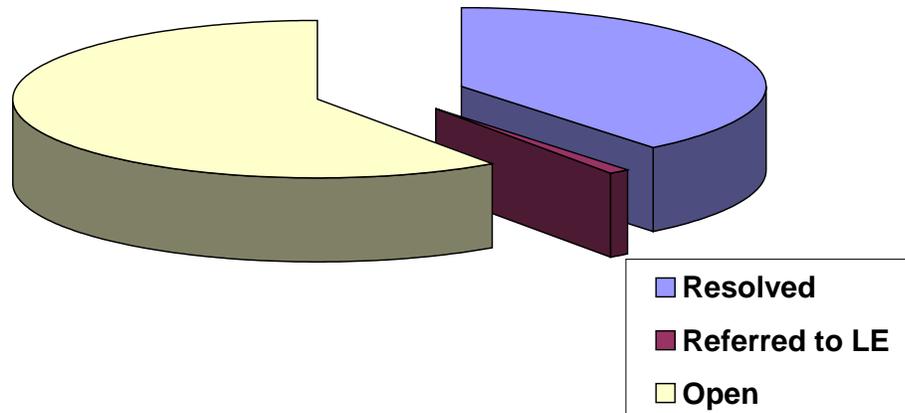
Sting Operations

Senior Sleuths are currently active in two counties assisting law enforcement and federal agencies in sting operations involving deceptive/illegal sales practices and frauds involving door to door meat sales and air conditioning repair.

Senior Sleuths Help Citizen Services

Senior Sleuths were enlisted to help the Office of the Attorney General, Citizen Services Division, with a backlog of complaints. The backlog was generated by the transfer of numerous consumer complaints by the Consumer Services Division due to reorganization in that Division. Sleuths assisted by getting Attorney General Crist letters out to all complainants in a matter of days. All complaint letters received were also reviewed to determine if any were of a nature that Seniors vs. Crime may be able to address. Those that were deemed to be workable by Senior Sleuths were sent to various Storefronts for follow-up with impressive results. Out of 146 letters received, 112 were designated as “workable” complaints. A total of 44 complaints were resolved to the complainant’s satisfaction with over \$2,800 recovered for seniors. One complaint was referred to law enforcement and 67 remain in an “open” status. To date, approximately 40% of the workable cases gleaned from the backlog letters have been resolved satisfactorily for the complainants.

Breakdown of Workable Cases



Senior Sleuths Serve as “Eyes and Ears”

A primary goal of the Project is the involvement of senior citizens in their own protection. Toward this end the Senior Sleuths program was developed. Senior volunteers who are willing to assist the Attorney General or other law enforcement in combating scams and other crimes against the elderly are enlisted as Senior Sleuth volunteers. Currently, the Project has over 1,700 Senior Sleuths throughout the state. Their numbers are growing weekly as more seniors become aware of the Project. Sleuths may assist the Attorney General within a range of activities from simply responding to a request for them to report certain solicitations to acting in an undercover sting against unscrupulous businesses. Senior Sleuths act as “eyes and ears” of the Attorney General’s Office and local law enforcement by reporting on scams, high pressure sales techniques, false or misleading advertisements and any other deceptive or illegal activity that may come to their attention. Active Senior Sleuths can also be found serving their fellow seniors through the many Storefronts being opened and assisting in various special projects at the Office of the Attorney General or in support of law enforcement operations.

Project Administration

Mission Statement

Our mission is:

- to assist the Florida Attorney General in preventing crime against the elderly,
- to educate seniors about consumer frauds, con games, scams, and other criminal acts,
- to alert seniors to criminal behavior in their area,
- to provide law enforcement and regulatory agencies with Senior Sleuth volunteers to assist in investigations,
- to assist senior victims through volunteer mediation services or referral to another help or law enforcement agency, and
- to promote senior involvement with law enforcement for the protection, well being, and peace of mind of seniors.

Organization

The Seniors vs. Crime Project is staffed with seven (7) paid positions.

CEO/Executive Director

The Executive Director has overall responsibility for daily operations of the Project including budget preparation, funding, hiring/dismissal of employees, supervision of Regional Directors and Administrative Assistant, planning and research, Project conformance to all local, state and federal laws regarding non-profit corporations, promulgation of Written Directives and Operations Manual, public speaking and all other functions commonly associated with the operation of a non-profit corporation.

Administrative Assistant

The Administrative Assistant is responsible for preparing payroll, financial records management, staffing of toll-free 800 telephone line, referral of complaints to proper Regional Directors/ Storefronts, personnel records maintenance, compilation of monthly reports, Secretary/ Treasurer to Board of Directors, and other administrative duties associated with the operation of a non-profit corporation.

Regional Directors

Five Regional Directors oversee daily operations of the Project within their geographic areas of responsibility, recruit qualified volunteer Coordinators, schedule and present Project talks/crime prevention programs, investigate/refer complaints from seniors, develop/conduct training sessions for Coordinators and Sleuths, contact person for all area law enforcement, establish Storefronts in conjunction with area law enforcement, assist the Executive Director as required, perform all other functions commonly associated with a Regional Director's position.

Project Organization Changes in 2003

The Project was expanded from four to five Regions of the state. Two, new Regional Directors were hired to fill vacancies. All five regions of the state are now being served by the Project.

The Administrative Assistance position was moved from the West Palm Beach Office of the Attorney General to our newest Storefront in Tarpon Springs. This move was made to accommodate the expansion of the Project and to allow for more contact and oversight by the Executive Director. A new Administrative Assistant has been hired and will work out of Tarpon Springs.

The Project Headquarters was moved from office space at the Office of the Attorney General, West Palm Beach office to New Port Richey.



Sandy Phillips, Orange County Coordinator

Senior Sleuth Membership

Senior Sleuth membership has shown a steady increase over 2003. It is anticipated that membership will expand rapidly as the Project becomes established in many areas of the state previously not served. Interest being shown in the northern area of the state and the Panhandle region bodes well for the expansion of the Project into those areas.

Crime Prevention

Crime prevention, especially as it pertains to seniors, remains a top priority of the Project. Project Coordinators, whose role is to assist the Project as liaison to local law enforcement, are actively recruited from the ranks of various law enforcement Crime Prevention Units. The majority of all Coordinators are certified Crime Prevention Practitioners. Project Staff and Senior Sleuth volunteers continue to present crime prevention programs to a wide array of civic groups ranging from condo associations to national retiree groups. Crime Prevention activity is also enhanced by Project membership in various TRIAD and SALT (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together) Councils throughout the state.



Orange County TRIAD meeting

Training

The Project's annual two-day training conference was held in Vero Beach. This years training was limited to Storefront Managers and a Senior Sleuth selected by each manager. Project Staff moderated the sessions with each Manager making a presentation regarding his/her Storefront operation. Ideas were exchanged between Project Staff and the attendees focusing on identifying "best practices" for replication. Standardization of all offices and use of technology in investigating and reporting were also main topics addressed.



Brevard Storefront Manager Lucy Kline

Conference attendees will be intimately involved in assisting Project Staff in developing future training modules and in addressing needs identified at the training.

Project Staff have also conducted numerous continuing education training sessions for Senior Sleuth volunteers at various Storefront locations.

Media Coverage

The Project has been very successful in generating positive media coverage for the Office of the Attorney General and the Seniors vs. Crime Project. Feature stories on the Seniors vs. Crime Project have been run in several of the major newspapers in the state, as well as in a number of smaller, local papers. Feature pieces have also been aired by local TV affiliates throughout central and southern Florida.

In addition, Project Staff have appeared as guests on a number of radio shows around the state. These shows offer an opportunity to promote the concept of “seniors helping seniors” and inform seniors about the Project while providing crime prevention tips to the listening audience.

The unique nature of the Project and its success in involving seniors in their own protection makes it a popular human interest story for the various media.



Media coverage of Pinellas Storefront opening

Public Speaking

In 2003, Seniors vs. Crime staff and Storefront volunteers conducted over 125 speaking engagements. Approximately 9,984 seniors learned the history of the Project, its goals, and how to utilize Project resources. The role of the Attorney General in supporting the Project and his concern for senior safety is addressed and crime prevention tips are also offered.

The majority of speaking engagements are requested by senior community groups such as homeowner associations, church groups, clubs, and senior citizen centers. Staff also spoke to



Presentation made to Stroke Club in Orlando

large gatherings at Senior Citizen Expositions and other senior events. Each presentation allows for adequate time for questions and answers, which are usually very animated sessions.

Public speaking engagements continue to be the Project's most effective recruiting tool in signing up new Senior Sleuths. Seniors are very interested in their own safety and are willing to do what they can to ensure the safety of others. The Senior Sleuth program is very appealing to these seniors as even the homebound can contribute.

Granny Marketing

Two "Granny Super Sleuths" help market the Project. A Senior Sleuth dresses in costume as a vulnerable, sweet senior and attends various public forums. It helps make concrete the message that a Florida senior may be a Senior Sleuth - the eyes and ears of the Florida Attorney General. One Granny is located in the Palm Beach area and the other one in Pinellas. They service a geographic region for marketing purposes and are a hit with seniors and the media at their appearances. "Granny" can usually be found at the Attorney General's booth during the "Capitol for a Day" events.

Project Goals For 2004

No new Storefront will be opened until the internet can be accessed. All Storefronts will have a minimum of one computer with internet access for investigative and reporting purposes. New, internet compatible computers will be purchased or obtained through donations for all Storefronts who do not have that access currently.

Storefronts will be opened only in counties that are currently underserved or where there is a demonstrable need for their presence. Due to the nature of the services provided and the means employed, it has become apparent that each county does not need a Storefront physically located in their area.

The Project will partner with a law enforcement agency in all areas that require a Storefront presence. Storefronts co-located with or opened in partnership with a law enforcement agency have proven to be the most effective model for replication.

The Project will explore new ways to partner with the Attorney General in helping Florida seniors avert economic crime or assist them should they become a victim.

The Project will aggressively pursue available grant funding to expand its operations and properly equip Storefronts.

The Project will use its internet web site to provide seniors with crime avoidance information and to provide an intranet for Project management to increase productivity.

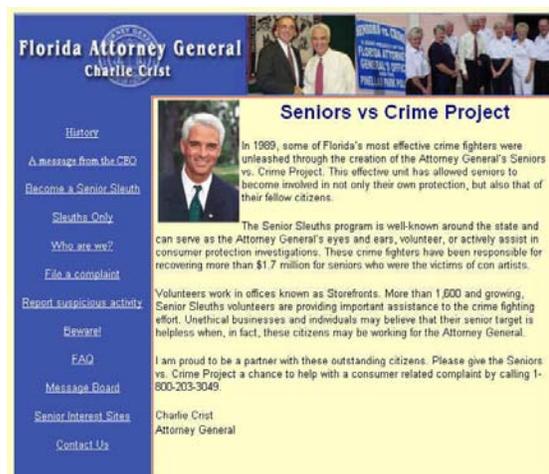
The Project will develop a vigorous media program involving all regions to educate seniors and law enforcement to the help available from the Project.

The Project will expand partnerships with AARP, RSVP and state/local senior services organizations to better coordinate services. Our partnership with Stetson Law College will also be expanded to include further use of law student interns assisting in Storefronts and an intake office will be established on their new Tampa campus.

The Project will expand training to include a “continuing education” requirement for Storefront Sleuths.

The Project’s Future

Expansion of the Storefront concept will remain a priority. The success of established Storefronts is leading many law enforcement agencies to recognize the value of providing such a service to their senior citizens. Storefronts are an additional resource for patrol officers. There is no reason to feel helpless to assist seniors when the complaint is civil in nature. They now can refer the senior to the Project where help may be available. Discussions are underway with many agencies, other than those noted, that have expressed an interest in partnering with the Project in a Storefront operation.



Seniors vs. Crime website

An interactive web site is being developed to assist those seniors with computer access in learning about the Project, enrolling in the Senior Sleuth program, reporting suspicious activity/ scams and filing complaints with a Storefront online. Seniors are the largest group of new computer users. The Project will expand its resources to reach this population.

Conclusion

The year 2003 has been a watershed year for the Project. Storefronts have more than doubled since 2002 with a corresponding increase in the number of seniors receiving our direct services. We anticipate the demand for our Storefronts will continue throughout 2004 with a corresponding increase in volunteers willing to work in Storefronts and in new volunteers anxious to be “eyes and ears” for the Attorney General.



Chief Thomas Pinellas Park PD w/ Project Staff

In 1989 the Project founder, Mr. Vern Thornton, approached the Attorney General with the simple idea “Let’s involve seniors in their own protection”. The Project was launched focusing primarily on senior crime prevention and on volunteers being the “eyes and ears” of the Attorney General. Through the intervening years the Project has evolved from simply offering crime prevention tips to providing direct services to seniors who feel they are victims.

Mr. Thornton was right. Florida’s seniors *did* want to be involved and *were* willing to share their time and expertise in making Florida a safer place for all citizens. The Senior Sleuth volunteers’ willingness to serve others and their dedication to the Project’s mission has made a difference. We are proud to continue what Vern started.



Senior Sleuth Phyllis Bartolo with shirt

We are extremely grateful to Attorney General Charlie Crist for his continued support of the Project's activities and his concern for the safety and economic well being of all Florida seniors.

Appendix

Testimonials

Law enforcement officers are, generally, the first responders to many complaints made by senior citizens. All too often the larceny or fraud complaint that the officer is dispatched to is, in reality, a civil action that is outside the officer's authority to investigate. A common response from an officer would be "I'm sorry. It's civil" or "You will have to get an attorney or go to small claims court". Often times a senior can not afford an attorney or it would cost more to litigate a matter than to take the loss- a fact well known by those who target the elderly for fraud or scams.

The Chiefs and Sheriffs who have partnered with the Seniors vs. Crime Project are also aware of the many cases that fall through the cracks of the current system. The Project, through its use of Storefronts, fills that gap for many people. Now an officer has a resource available where he can direct the senior, at no cost. The officers are seen as more caring by the population they serve by getting the senior help with their problem and the officers feel better, knowing that someone will try their best to help the complainant. The partnering of Seniors vs. Crime and law enforcement is truly a "win-win" situation for all involved.



General Crist with Pinellas Law enforcement



Sheriff Farmer of Sumter and Michael Cadore of Brevard

The following are some of the testimonials received from law enforcement who have actively participated in establishing Storefronts in their jurisdictions:

“We are pleased to offer space and assistance to the Seniors Versus Crime Program. We look forward to a productive partnership with this fine organization”

___ Sheriff Ed Dean, Marion County

“We are glad to have them [Seniors Versus Crime] here. They provide us a tremendous service.”

___ Sheriff Bill Farmer, Sumter County.

“The partnership between Law Enforcement and Seniors Vs Crime is a clear example of community policing at its best. We are proud to be a part of this organization.”

___ Lt James Pogue, Commander, South Marion District, Marion County.

“We have seen many instances where the Seniors Versus Crime volunteers were able to help us with cases that we could previously do nothing about.”

___ Lt. Nehemiah Wolfe, District Supervisor, Sumter County.

“Since the dedication of our Seniors vs. Crime Storefront in July, we are extremely proud of the accomplishments made by our volunteers. Through their hard work and dedication, our volunteer Senior Sleuths have assisted people, not only in the Tampa Bay area, but across the state. Over 148 cases have been handled and over \$90,935 recovered! The Storefront, made possible through our City’s efforts, is featured in the City of Pinellas Park 2004 Calendar.”

___ Chief of Police, Doreen Thomas, Pinellas Park Police Department

“The Seniors Versus Crime Project is an important and valuable program for our senior citizens and I am proud and delighted to have the opportunity to work with these fine dedicated volunteers.”

___ Sheriff George Knupp, Lake County

Case Synopses

The following are examples of the types of cases that have been successfully resolved by Storefront Senior Sleuths in 2003.

A roofing company charged an elderly woman \$13,000 to repair a roof on a home valued at \$62,000. The roof being repaired was covered by a lifetime warranty. Storefront Sleuths were able to negotiate a deal with the roofer to refund the entire \$13,000. (Lake County)

A contractor was collecting money for home repairs and either not doing the work at all or not finishing the job. Storefront Sleuths documented a number of cases and turned the cases over to the Sheriff's Office. Warrants were issued based on the information provided. The contractor made full restitution to all victims to avoid court action. (Sumter County)

A lawn service/ landscaping company was cheating seniors by collecting ahead for service and then not returning to do the work. Storefront Sleuths were able to identify numerous victims, changing a civil case into a criminal fraud. The business owner was arrested by the Sheriff's Office and jailed. (Marion County)

An elderly gentleman who was dying of cancer decided to have some home repairs done so his house would be in good shape for his heirs. He hired a contractor who agreed to do the work for \$700 plus the barter of such things as tools, a computer and other items. The contractor never came back to do the work. After numerous calls from Senior Sleuths the contractor returned the computer and other items to the victim's house. He then came in to the Storefront and made arrangements to repay the \$700 in full. (Brevard County)

A woman living in a condo suffered extensive water damage from a leak in the unit above hers. She complained when the insurance adjuster only offered \$5,000 to resolve her claim when she was certain that she had much more damage. The assigned Senior Sleuth was able to help her get an appraisal of damage through a Public Insurance Adjuster. The claim was then settled by the carrier for \$18,500. (Palm Beach County)

A female senior hired a private home contractor to perform work at her house. He received a \$250.00 payment and promised to begin work immediately. He then failed to show up to perform the work per the contract. Storefront Sleuths contacted the local police department where the senior lived when it became obvious that the contractor had no intention of performing the work. The contractor was arrested on a theft charge and has since failed to appear for his hearing. A warrant has been issued. The senior who was victimized was so impressed with the help she received that she joined the Senior Sleuths! (Orange County)

An elderly woman purchased an expensive reclining chair from a well known national company. The chair needed to be ordered. When it arrived, five months later, it was out of alignment and tipped over. The complainant called and wrote to the company but the local distributor refused to replace it. Seniors vs. Crime resolved this case with the woman getting a new chair. (Pasco County)

Complainant purchased a new car from a local dealership. He later found that he had been charged \$1,270 for an additional warranty that he did not ask for. He was unable to resolve the issue with the dealership. The assigned Senior Sleuth was able to resolve the complaint and the dealership refunded the \$1,270. (Pinellas County)