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Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force to Present to USF Students

By Dr. Steven Spina, Visiting Instructor, Public Administration



An important component of the Introduction to Public & Community Service course (PAD 3003) is the final project where students work together to explore and understand issues of concern to local communities. These issues include homelessness, impacts of coronavirus on governments, the Black Lives Matter movement, privatization and human trafficking.

This month, students studying the impacts of human trafficking will participate in a presentation on human trafficking in the Tampa Bay area by Major Nathaly Patterson with the St. Petersburg Police Department and coordinator of the **Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force**. As supervisor of the Task Force, Major Patterson oversees the Human Exploitation and Trafficking (HEAT) unit, as well as works with school resource officers, the Police Athletic League (PAL), and "hand in hand" with state, federal, and local agencies. Her duties include writing grants, coordinating meetings and speakers with local groups to keep human trafficking in the public view, and training officers to assist in battling the problem. It is important to emphasize the harm caused by human trafficking, and to ensure that the community is aware of the dangers and impact human trafficking has on local residents.

The task force works with 23 law enforcement agencies in the Bay area, including the Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Sarasota County sheriff's offices, the Tampa, St. Petersburg, Largo, Bradenton, Clearwater, Temple Terrace, and Zephyrhills police departments, as well as the FBI, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), and 15 separate non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits, providing seamless coverage throughout the area.



The Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force focuses on three areas:

1. **Education:** provide education and training to law enforcement as well as the public to build awareness.
2. **Rescue:** coordinate with support programs and resources to help victims.
3. **Enforcement:** implement technology that makes it easier to collect and share data across jurisdictions. Provide law enforcement support and assist with investigation and prosecution.

In her presentation to the students, Major Patterson will discuss some of the different tactics used to combat human trafficking and to keep residents safe and secure. These include insights into "traveler operations" that deal with suspects who travel to the areas to engage in trafficking, and the concept of the "chatters," in which detectives converse online "with the bad guys" who also try to engage and lure people into trafficking, as well as operations on the ground. The Task Force is also working with diplomatic services and Homeland Security to keep the community safe. Major Patterson's presentation is scheduled for March 18th via Zoom. Detectives within the Task Force and other personnel will participate in the presentation.