## Living Well: Making a Difference in our Community

When I think of Florida (and the Tampa Bay area in particular), I think of beaches and palm trees. Beaches and palms trees, to me, are symbols of peace and serenity. They also remind me of my childhood in Puerto Rico, carefree times when I was unburdened by all the responsibilities of adulthood. The guest speakers at our November section lunch, however, painted a much different picture of Florida.

Lurking behind our tranquil bay area community lies a little known secret. Tampa Bay is a den for human trafficking. Did you know that Florida ranks as high as third (by some measures) for this rapidly growing crime that most people would prefer not to talk about? Each year, countless men, women, and children are forced against their will into trafficking—a modern-day version of slavery. They are bought, sold, and discarded in our own backyard. Initially, it was hard not to get discouraged at the thought that children are being bought and sold in the very same community where I raise mine.

But any thoughts of despair quickly gave way to hope as I learned extraordinary efforts by local attorneys—Stacie B. Harris, Brent A. Woody, Jenay E. Iurato, and Sophia Lynn among others—to make our communities safe. For instance, Stacie Harris, an Assistant United States Attorney, was named prosecutor of the year in large part due to her success prosecuting human trafficking cases, including securing the first life sentence for sex trafficking (one of only 10 in the country). Brent Woody, a local attorney, launched the West Florida Center for Trafficking Advocacy to assist trafficking survivors. And Jenay Iurato and Sophia Lynn both provide legal assistance to human trafficking survivors. In fact, Jenay recently received the Luis "Tony" Cabassa Award for her human trafficking advocacy. Efforts by our local attorneys—including Stacie, Brent, Jenay, and Sophia—to fight human trafficking in our community are nothing short of impressive.

As I thought of our guest speakers, I couldn't help but be reminded of a favorite quote of mine by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well." There is no question Stacie, Brent, Jenay, and Sophia (and others fighting human trafficking) are honorable and compassionate people that are truly making a difference in our community—albeit with little fanfare. They are also an inspiration to the rest of us. If I learned one thing from our November luncheon, it is (at the risk of sounding trite) that you should never underestimate the difference one person can make in the lives of others. If enough of us focus on "living well," I am confident that our community can return to the peaceful and serene place many of us hope it to be.