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World Affairs Council to hold human trafficking forum Thursday at WKU-O

By James Mayse Messenger-Inquirer
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Human trafficking can involve the moving of people across national borders for forced labor or prostitution. But that doesn't mean human trafficking is something that's happening far away from Kentucky, or Owensboro.

In 2018, an Ohio County woman was charged with human trafficking, among other charges, for allegedly being paid by a man who was sexually abusing juveniles under the woman's care. The man believed to have been committing the abuse is suspected to have fled the country. The woman's case is still pending.

Last year, the Kentucky State Police's Henderson post investigated six complaints of human trafficking in the region, although only one of those complaints led to a charge, which was later dismissed.



Several arrests were made in Louisville in 2018 and 2019 on human trafficking charges around the Kentucky Derby, and the Attorney General's office and other agencies made numerous arrests on human trafficking charges last year as well.

On Thursday, the Owensboro Area World Affairs Council will hold a public forum on human trafficking at 7 p.m. at Badgett Conference Center on the campus of Western Kentucky University-Owensboro, 4821 New Hartford Road.

The featured speaker is H. Ray Shuler, assistant special agent in charge for Homeland Security Investigations in Nashville.

Angela Ash, president of the World Affairs Council, said she became interested in having a public forum on human trafficking while she was a member of the Owensboro Police Department's Citizens Academy.

“The Owensboro Area World Affairs Council has been around since 2005, and our mission is to enhance global understanding,” Ash said. The forums are for everyone, Ash said.

“It’s something we feel passionate about,” Ash said.

According to the federal Department of Homeland Security, human trafficking is modern-day slavery, where a person is forced or coerced into labor, domestic servitude or prostitution. Any commercial sex act involving a minor is considered human trafficking.



The forum “is something a little different we can offer the community,” Ash said. The World Affairs Council holds forums three times a semester, often on political topics.

Kevin Dorth, vice president of the World Affairs Council, said “we have been trying to get someone to speak on this topic for a long time.”

“I would hope (the forum) would raise aware awareness of the issue, and lead to prevention,” Dorth said.

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