

- Special to the Leader & Times

Kansas Assistant Attorney General Pat Colloton will speak on human trafficking at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 23, at Seward County Community College Conference Room SW 229CD. Informational materials will be available.

This event is sponsored by Soroptimists of Liberal.

STOP is what Soroptimists say to trafficking. Liberal Soroptimist Club is working with Soroptimist International of the Americas, an international volunteer organization for business and professional women that has an awareness campaign called Soroptimists STOP Trafficking to shed light on its negative impact on women and girls.

Soroptimist, whose mission is to improve the lives of women and girls, launched the campaign on Jan. 11 – the National Day of Human Trafficking Awareness. The U.S. Senate passed a nationwide resolution in June 2007 designating this day to acknowledge that the techniques used by traffickers to keep their victims enslaved severely limits self-reporting; thus, it is imperative there be increased public awareness and advocacy.

Human trafficking affects mainly women and girls, but males are also victims. To raise awareness of trafficking, Soroptimist of Liberal will be hosting a presentation by Pat Colloton of the Kansas AG's office.

Human trafficking is the enslavement of people for the purposes of involuntary servitude, slavery or of commercial sexual exploitation.

"It's a misconception that trafficking only occurs in far away countries. It occurs everywhere, even in our own backyards," Linda Miller said. "We want the public to become aware of it depth, and to be able to recognize someone – perhaps a neighbor – who may need help getting out of a dire situation."

Human rights groups estimate that anywhere from 12.3 to 27 million people are currently living as slaves – 79 percent of whom are women and children. Seventy-five percent of trafficking victims are trafficked into the commercial sex industry. Prostitution and trafficking are inextricably linked and women and girls who are forced into prostitution are victims of human trafficking. The average age of entry into prostitution is 12 to 14. Each of these girls is a victim.

Soroptimist encourages people to visit its website (www.soroptimist.org) for more information about sexual trafficking and what individuals can do to stop it. The sex trafficking white paper located on the site provides those who know little about the problem with detailed information.

For more information, contact: Linda Miller at (620) 629-6339 or Rhonda Howard at (907) 378-3396.