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Photos available upon request.

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Overland Park's SAFEHOME Executive Director named Statewide Advocate of the Year

Topeka, KS, February 9, 2012 – A statewide domestic and sexual violence advocacy organization honored SAFEHOME Executive Director Sharon Katz with its Julienne Maska Advocate of the Year Award on February 8.

The Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence tapped Katz, who has been at the helm of SAFEHOME since 1992, with the honor at its ninth annual Safe Homes, Safe Streets reception in Topeka.

“Sharon is an incredible asset to the work in Kansas, says Joyce Grover, KCSDV Executive Director. “We are so fortunate to have her as a colleague.”

Since taking the helm of SAFEHOME, Sharon has expanded services, increased revenue, and raised the agency's standing as a respected and valuable part of the community. Beginning with only a skeleton staff, Sharon herself often answered the 24-hour hotline and oversaw critical shelter repairs, while also writing grants and meeting with community members and potential donors.

Under Sharon's twenty years of leadership, SAFEHOME has seen tremendous growth in services, moving from simply providing emergency shelter to offering a whole spectrum of professional supportive services including education and prevention, professional counseling, a unique and effective transitional housing program, a staff attorney, on-site district court program, and healthcare advocacy – services that now serve 6,500 people per year.

“It is difficult to describe a person whose life and passion embodies the meaning of the words pioneer, visionary, dedication, inspiration, and champion for victims of domestic violence,” said Don Curtis, president of the SAFEHOME Board of Directors.

At one time, faced with an outdated and undersized facility, Katz spearheaded the purchase, renovation and a \$6.2 million capital campaign to move the agency into a state of the art domestic violence facility. When initial plans to purchase and build a new facility were foiled by people afraid to have a domestic violence shelter in their community, Katz did not lose heart and continued seeking other options, including the purchase and renovation of the former hotel that became today's SAFEHOME facility as of August 2006.

“We at SAFEHOME, as well as throughout the state of Kansas, owe Sharon Katz a huge debt of gratitude for daring to commit herself to helping victims of domestic violence and dedicating her life to this cause,” said SAFEHOME Associate Director Janeé M. Hanzlick.

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Founded in 1982, the purpose of KCSDV is the prevention and elimination of sexual and domestic violence through a statewide network of programs providing support and safety for all victims of sexual and domestic violence and stalking, with primary focus on women and their children; direct services; public awareness and education; advocacy for victims; comprehensive prevention; and, social change efforts. Learn more at www.kcsdv.org.