

Justice for Justice Coalition's Victims' Advocate

Words and Design by Kaili Cochran

Thirty years after first giving a voice to those silenced by violent crimes, the Justice Coalition's Victims' Advocate paper returns in print.

Founded in 1995 by Ted Hires, a Jacksonville business owner and crime victim, the Justice Coalition was created to provide support and advocacy for others navigating the legal system.

As a restaurant owner, Hires found himself a victim of crime eight times. All were non-violent, but the eighth one was an attack on Hires and a coworker.

"It was then that Hires discovered, to his dismay, that the justice system was weighted heavily in favor of the perpetrators of violent crime instead of their victims," according to the Justice Coalition biographical profile of Hires.

Since its founding, the nonprofit has taken on the role of trained advocates who accompany victims through the legal process. It also provides crisis intervention, education about victims' rights, assistance in applying for victim compensation, and grief counseling.

Almost two decades later was the launch of Justice Coalition's Victims' Advocate in print and digital—a 16-page paper with over 100 distribution locations throughout Northeast Florida. Its purpose was to share the stories of victims, highlight law enforcement and citizens who played crucial roles in justice efforts, and promote community involvement and unity.

The nonprofit and paper also played a role in the passing of Marsy's Law in 2018, which ensures that victims of crime have equal constitutional rights on the same level as those accused and convicted of crimes.

However, that same year, the Justice Coalition's funding was cut in half, making printing costs increasingly difficult to sustain.

Then, COVID-19 hit, making it impossible to continue the publication. The board decided to cut the paper, and the final issue of the Victims' Advocate was released in 2020.

Robert Bracewell became the Executive Director in 2023 and said that one of his main objectives was to revive the paper. But funding was continuing to be an obstacle to getting it back on the streets.

He restructured funding, made budget cuts, among other sacrifices to make room for the relaunch of the paper.

"I've always wondered if it was the right decision. I've had a lot of people tell me that everything's online, you don't need to print," Bracewell said. "But I still believe in print because even if it's found lying somewhere a year later, it's still telling the story. Whereas online, once you've read it, it's gone, you don't see it again."

The relaunched Victims' Advocate was published this August as an eight-page paper with plans to expand back to 16 pages in the future. The design and structure of the paper remain true to the original for easy recognition by readers.



Although there are plans to gradually update as it continues to grow.

Future editions are expected to include recurring sections like "Outstanding Citizens," "Champions for Justice," and a law enforcement feature recognizing monthly "heroes," such as the Officer of the Month.

Since the paper's return, Bracewell said the community response has been "overwhelmingly positive."

"What's backed me up on my theory of relaunching this paper is all the compliments we've had with people telling us how happy they are that it's back and where they've seen it," he said.

As the Justice Coalition marks its 30th anniversary, the organization and its publication continue to reflect its founding vision of advocacy and accountability for victims of crime.