



## Around the town

WINTER PARK PROFILES

# Showing latchkey kids safety's door

By Mark Andrews

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Perhaps 1,000 children under the age of 13 in Winter Park — and thousands more across Central Florida — come home to empty houses after school.

Alone until their parents come home, they are called latchkey kids. And they need to know how to take care of themselves.

That is the mission of Lyn Wright, 37, a Winter Park fire inspector and arson investigator who is the mother of four latchkey kids — all girls. She has developed a program to teach youngsters in local elementary and middle schools safety tips that could save their lives.

The idea for the program came one day last fall when Wright got home from work. With her arms full of packages, she rang the doorbell instead of reaching for her keys. It bothered Wright that her 12-year-old daughter flung open the door without first checking to see who was there.

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# LATCHKEY

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That is the kind of mistake that cost Angeli Bare, a 12-year-old south Orange County girl, her life one morning in October 1987. Home waiting for a ride to school after her parents left for work, she opened the front door to a stranger who raped and killed her.

When Wright chastised her daughter for her carelessness, the girl told her, "I knew it was you. You always come home at this time."

Not good enough, Wright concluded. The world is a dangerous place and children need to be taught how to be more careful, she said.

Using a narrated slide presentation put together by a national organization, Wright got permission from her superiors to develop a one-hour program to take to the schools. Principals eagerly received her and she began the lessons last month.

Wright focuses on children in grades three through eight. One group she spoke to recently consisted of six classes of third-graders — children who are about 8 years old. Just over half raised their hands when she asked how many were home alone after school.

The advice Wright offers kids is simple and direct:

■ Don't openly display your house key to others.

Some youngsters hang the key around their necks on a string and show it off as proof that they are "big kids" — old enough to be trusted at home by themselves, Wright said.

It is not just child molesters who break into houses when youngsters are home alone, Wright said. A teen-ager who is on drugs may see a child flash a house key and figure the house would be easy pickings for a burglary.

■ Above all, do not open the door to strangers.

Wright advises youngsters to check through a peephole or the draperies to see who is at the door. If they do not know the person, children should tell them their parents are busy and to come back later, she said.

■ If fire breaks out, get out of the house. Call the 911 emergency phone number from a neighbor's house. If fire ignites their clothes, "stop, drop and roll," Wright said.

■ If a youngster is followed by a stranger on public streets, duck into a store and tell an adult, she advised. If possible, get the tag number of the suspicious vehicle.

With the younger children she addresses, Wright said she is careful not to scare them with stories about kidnaping and murder.

"They don't realize the dangers that are out there today," said Wright, who expects to talk to about 2,000 schoolchildren in Winter Park before the academic year is over. "I don't want to scare them. But we have to make them aware of the dangers."