Actress Jasmine Guy in Memphis on mission to stop child sex trafficking

By Jon W. Sparks
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For years, Jasmine Guy has made us laugh. But the actor-dancer-singer-director known for keeping America in stitches in the TV comedy “A Different World,” is on a serious mission.

Guy was the keynote speaker at Thursday’s Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis Annual Tribute and Symposium. Her speech, made before 1,574 people at the Memphis Cook Convention Center, described the fight against child sex trafficking, a problem she says is insidiously closer than most people believe.

It’s an issue the Women’s Foundation has embraced. The organization is working with groups statewide to push for strong anti-trafficking laws. It also funds groups that work with human trafficking victims.

Guy said in an interview Thursday that she’d long thought most victims were undocumented aliens or troubled kids or runaways. But a visit to a safe house in Atlanta shattered that perception.
“It’s our kids right under our noses,” she said. “It’s brutal and our laws have not caught up to it. Nobody’s being charged with statutory rape, the johns are going free, the pimps are not being caught and the children are in these houses in the middle of nowhere where they’re beaten and tortured and caged and raped.”

As spokesman for the Atlanta-based I Am Not Yours Foundation, she is raising awareness. If something doesn’t feel right, she says, call it in. There may not be proof, but it will get checked out.

Predators know they can find kids at malls and skating rinks, she said. “Little girls between 12 and 15 are trying to be grown up, but they’re still children and reek of naiveté.”

Parents, she says, should make sure kids go out in groups, never solo. And to hone their instincts for what’s going on around them.

Guy was warmly received by the audience at the luncheon and fundraiser, which honored five women who have contributed significantly to the community.

They are Nancy Bogatin, community activist; Erma Clanton, playwright and teacher; Frances Dancy Hooks, educator and civil rights activist; Mary Shainberg, philanthropist and volunteer; and Modeane Thompson, educator and family advocate.

Proceeds from the luncheon are used to fund grants to community organizations.

While Guy was starring in “A Different World,” she won six consecutive NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series from 1990 to 1995. Currently she’s appearing in “Vampire Diaries” as Gram, “even though I’ve been dead three times now,” she said.

Guy’s also been appearing on stage in a touring one-woman show “Raisin’ Cane: A Harlem Renaissance Odyssey” with the Avery Sharpe Trio.