

Zonta Celebrates the opening of its partner SWFAS' new Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center

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On February 26th, the new SWFAS Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center on Evans Avenue in Fort Myers was dedicated. It took only one year from the groundbreaking ceremony in February 2008 to the February 2009 grand opening to construct this state-of-the-art new facility, which includes many “green” features. This is the first detoxification center to be built in Lee County in 50 years, and offers many services that have not been available before.

The dedication and grand opening ceremony was a particularly joyous and inspiring occasion for the entire community at a time when the economic crisis has dominated the news. This major accomplishment was possible because of the vision and leadership of SWFAS' CEO, Kevin Lewis, and a close collaboration and private-public partnership that came together to benefit everyone in the community. At the dedication, the opening of the facility was hailed as evidence of the community's growing awareness of the price we all pay for addiction problems. “It's an affirmation of the community's understanding that addiction is treatable,” said Kevin Lewis.

The grand opening, hosted by the SWFAS staff, was attended by many of Lee County's community leaders and elected officials. The government partners—the Lee County Board of County Commissioners, the State Housing Initiatives Partnership, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the city of Fort Myers Mayor and City Council, were represented, along with representatives from the Lee Memorial Health System, and law enforcement officials. Key individual, corporate, and foundation donors were in attendance.

Island attendees included Zonta members Darla Letourneau, Kris Ritts, and Wendy Humphrey. The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva has had an 8-year partnership with SWFAS, providing both grants and hands-on service to help women transition from addiction to self-sufficiency. Some of the proceeds from the 2009 Peek at the Unique house tour will be awarded to SWFAS. The late LeClair Bissell, M.D., also a Zonta member, was active in SWFAS and served on its Advisory Board. Geoffrey and Robbie Roepstorff of the Bank of the Islands were also in attendance. Geoffrey is Treasurer of the SWFAS Board.

The at-risk population locally has almost tripled in the last 20 years. The problems of substance abuse and related issues like family violence, crime, traffic deaths, unemployment, and human suffering in general are likely to grow worse in the current recession. Having seen first hand SWFAS' effectiveness in assisting women in their recovery from substance abuse, members of the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva have worked closely with Kevin Lewis to build community and political

support for increased investments in addiction treatment services. In 2007, Zonta was part of SWFAS' coalition of community supporters that successfully campaigned for \$2 million for the Detox Center from the County Board of Commissioners so that construction of the center could move forward.

Of the \$9.5 million cost of the center, SWFAS has raised \$6.1 million, and must now raise funds to pay off the rest, as well as expand its programs. While it has the capacity for 40 beds, it does not yet have the staff to open more than 25 beds. Room-naming opportunities in this beautiful new facility are still available. For more information about the capital campaign or to make a gift to SWFAS, call Kevin Lewis at 278-7595. SWFAS is the most comprehensive substance abuse treatment and prevention program in Southwest Florida, serving 6,000 people per year from ages 9-90. It offers outpatient and residential programs for both adults and youngsters. Fees are charged on a sliding scale, based on family income.

Photos (taken by News-Press, from their online gallery):



Kevin Lewis, CEO of SWFAS, making opening remarks at Detox Center Grand Opening



Elected officials, community leaders, and major donors officially cut the ribbon to open the new center.



The grand opening in the courtyard of the new SWFAS Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center at 3763 Evans Ave., Fort Myers.