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Zonta Supports SWFAS's Detox Center funding request with Lee County Commissioners

Submitted by Darla Letourneau

Last Tuesday, the Lee County Commissioners voted unanimously to award \$2 million to the region's only publicly funded detox center, which is run by Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS). With the funds provided by the County, SWFAS has raised more than \$5.3 million towards the total \$8 – 10 million facility. Other funding sources include the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, Foulds Foundation, Gannett Foundation, the Federal government, and private donors.

Members of the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva worked closely with Kevin Lewis, the CEO of SWFAS, in building community and political support for increased investments in addiction treatment services, including the Detox Center. "Your efforts and the voices of others were heard when the Commission decided to provide the capital funding requested by SWFAS—congratulations on being a catalyst for a step in the right direction," wrote Kevin Lewis to the Club after Tuesday's vote.

Many leaders of the coalition of community supporters, including the Zonta Club, attended the County Commissioners' meeting and spoke in support of the funding request. Jim Nathan, the CEO of the Lee Memorial Hospital system, talked about the direct impact of substance abuse on the cost of health care in our community. He said, "Investing in this new detox center makes good business sense, and provides hope for the individuals and their families." Paul Flynn, the President of Southwest Florida Community Foundation, said that the Foundation trustees provided \$100,000 in a challenge grant to this project because it makes good economic sense; "It relieves pressures on the police and hospitals. The cost of a detox bed is a lot less than the cost of a jail bed." Fran Myers, a Fort Myers Beach businesswoman, made a personal plea for funding of the detox center, saying "SWFAS is in the process of saving my son's life."

Darla Letourneau of the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva spoke in support of the request, saying, "In working with the women in the Transitional Living Center, we've seen the effectiveness of SWFAS' programs in helping these women put their lives back together. Everyone who needs these services should have the same opportunity."

The Club also worked closely with Commission Chairman Bob Janes, who has been a long-time leader in support of increased resources for substance abuse and mental health services. "I'm delighted by the Commission's actions and the strong community support in favor of this initiative", said Chairman Janes.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva has had a rewarding 7-year partnership with SWFAS, helping women transition from addiction to self-sufficiency, and supporting the dedicated and talented staff and leadership at SWFAS. The partnership has included hands-on assistance, grants, and advocacy in support of their mission. Over the past two years, the Club provided grants of \$22,000 to SWFAS, thanks to the generosity of our community.

The Club is encouraged by the actions taken by the Lee County Commission, and the growing public awareness and support for finding solutions to substance abuse problems in our community. The Club is continuing its advocacy efforts in support of Lee County officials' proposed social services triage center, which will provide much-needed crisis intervention services for those with substance abuse, mental illness, and the homeless, instead of sending them to our jails and emergency rooms. This \$3.6 million proposal is currently pending in the State Legislature.

Zonta's Household Goods Drive for SWFAS

At its April 4th meeting, members of the Zonta Club of Sanibel/Captiva generously responded to the Club's first household drive of 2007 for the Transitional Living Center (TLC) of SWFAS. Car trunks yielded small appliances, linens, a computer and decorative items to help furnish the women's permanent supportive housing and the halfway houses at the TLC. After the truck left the Beachview parking lot, it headed to members' homes to collect larger pieces of furniture. By the end of the run, the truck was full.

The household goods drive was part of the Club's ongoing effort to help the women of SWFAS in their growth to self-sufficiency. Many of the women who go through the TLC program have been homeless before coming to SWFAS; therefore, when they are ready to move into an apartment of their own, they have no furniture or household goods of any kind. This drive was coordinated by Sue Denham and Suzanne Weinheimer of Zonta and Cheryl Ray, Occupational Therapy Supervisor for TLC of SWFAS. Noah's Ark, the thrift shop run by St. Michael All Angels Episcopal Church, has also been an active participant with Zonta in helping SWFAS women furnish their new apartments.

The Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva is a service organization of professional women working together to provide hands-on assistance, advocacy, and the funds to strengthen women's lives on the islands, in Lee County, and around the world through Zonta International. Additional information about Zonta is available to at www.zontasancap.com.

