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Friday Nights Done Right - Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition seeks to save lives, families and the community



Katrina VanAernam is seen at the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition office on the afternoon before the Friday Nights Done Right event on Dec. 1. Seen here next to her on the wall are paper snowflakes and angels representing the many partners in the prevention of drug abuse in Dixie County. Drug abuse and drug addiction are seen by many law enforcement officers as being significant sources for criminal behavior.

Story And Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 2, 2017 at 4:17 p.m.

CROSS CITY -- She was caught walking to her car in the parking lot of the Ameris Bank in Cross City late Friday afternoon (Dec. 1).

Katrina VanAernam thought she would be able to rendezvous with her son and then be on her way to the Friday Nights Done Right program that happens on the first Friday night of each month. Instead a visiting journalist stalled that movement.

As is the case on occasion, though, her plan was sidetracked to potentially help the causes of the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition even more than the plan of the moment had called for her to do. VanAernam leads the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition and the group is seeing success in its efforts.

She knows that by helping prevent drug abuse and drug addiction, the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition helps to save individual's lives, families and ultimately the community as a whole.

On that particular Friday afternoon, a journalist had just dropped in – unannounced and unscheduled – to see the facility for the Coalition. She provided a tour of the new office and she spoke about some of the foundations of partnering with others to help stop drug abuse and addiction.

Now established within the Ameris Bank in Cross City, the group that strives to save lives is continuing to see progress in Dixie County.

The Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition previously had enjoyed and was thankful for the rent-

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free use of a building thanks to Carol West for some years prior to the move, but it had grown to a point where it needed more space.

As for the pressing matter of the evening, VanAernam took her pending Friday Nights Done Right duties in stride.

What is Friday Nights Done Right?

Friday Nights Done Right is a program that shows young people that they can have a good time without drugs, alcohol or tobacco.

This coalition does more than one monthly get-together.

One of the other most recent events was an open house on Nov. 28 at the new office inside the Ameris Bank in Cross City. It started at 11 a.m. and lasted to at least 4 p.m.

There were free barbecue sandwiches and more.

About 40 people showed up to learn about the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition at the Nov. 28 event. VanAernam mentioned that communities with a coalition such as this see a 2 to 3 percent reduction in drug-related activity.

Currently, the whole United States of America is said to be suffering from an opioid crisis. That is to say there are many people addicted to morphine, heroin and various other narcotics – including an array of pills prescribed for pain relief.

Another drug issue affecting Dixie, Gilchrist and Levy counties is methamphetamine manufacturing, sales and use.

This is a stimulant similar to the prescription amphetamines of the 1960s and 1970s, but this is a homemade concoction that is even more toxic than the pills of old that were prescribed to provide energy and reduce weight.

One of the many partners featured during the open house event on Nov. 28 is Overcomers. They have a meeting room within the same bank confines as the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition.

Overcomers is active in Dixie and Taylor counties, and it works with the judicial system in the Third Judicial Circuit to help people with misdemeanor and felony drug charges to work toward rehabilitation away from the drugs that helped cause their criminal behavior.

Overcomers offers hope and help to any person struggling with an addiction. Overcomers classes are taught by Davy and Pam Cannon of Steinhatchee.

Davy Cannon became addicted to methamphetamine and alcohol. The he became clean from those drugs in 2012 and has not returned.

He wanted to help people quit their addictions as he had quit them. As an alternative to Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous, he created Overcomers.

There is no cost to attend the meetings.

Overcomers meets at three different places and times:

- Every Monday at 6 p.m. in the New Life Church, 28 N.E. 159 Ave. in Old Town, Florida 32680.
- Every Thursday at 4:30 p.m. in Rigoni Timber, 2365 U.S. Highway 19 N., in Perry.
- Every Thursday at 7 p.m. at the Friendship Chapel, Church of God, Friendship Chapel, 915 Highway 51 N.E., in Steinhatchee.

For more information about Overcomers, call Davy Cannon at 386-965-8461.

VanAernam has found many resources in the area and she has succeeded in helping groups combine their efforts for singular causes, such as helping people who are addicted to drugs to get over their addictions, and to help young people understand the strong value of not using drugs.

Another community partner with the Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition is Heart of a Servant Outreach Ministry, which is led by Sherry Coffill of Old Town.

This group is known for sharing the love of Jesus by feeding the body and soul. This ministry group works with the Bread of the Mighty Food Bank of Gainesville, which is led by President Marcia Conwell.

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Another significant organization that helps people quit using drugs or to not start using them is Meridian Behavioral Healthcare of North Florida.

As for Friday Night Done Right, this program welcomes more volunteers and participants.

For individuals who would like to host an event, there are three requirements. The event is open to all people; it must be held in Dixie County; and there is no alcohol or other drugs allowed.

For individuals who want to host a Friday Nights Done Right event, please call Debby Sweem at 352-210-2601.