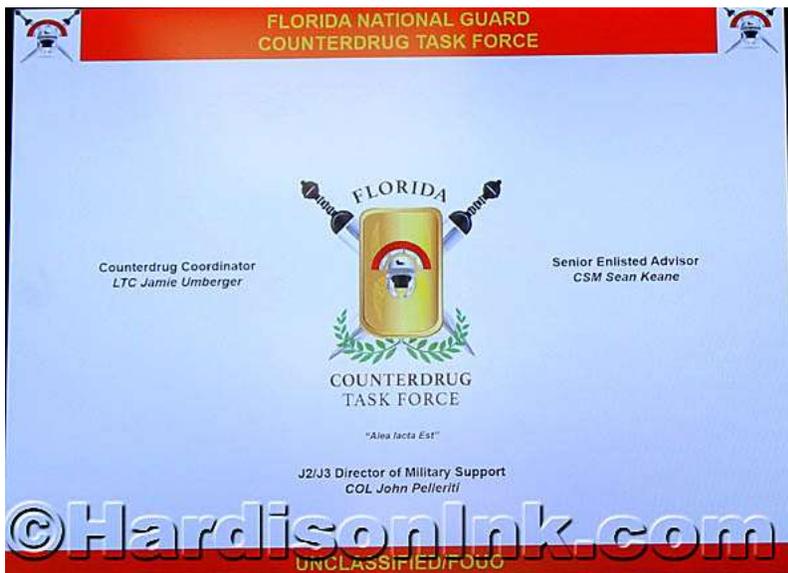


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**Dixie County leads Florida in per-capita fatal overdoses;
*Education saves lives***



Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam is seen in the foreground before the start of the meeting. In the background (from left) are DCADC Administration Coordinator Cale McCall, DCAC Program Coordinator Debby Sweem and Dixie County Extension Director Holly Houghton of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.



**Story and Photos
By Jeff M, Hardison ©
June 21, 2018 at 8:28
p.m.**

**CROSS CITY -
- Knowledge is power.**

**The logo for United
States National Guard -
Florida - Counterdrug
Task Force is seen here.
It was part of a
PowerPoint presentation.**

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The Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition (DCADC) hosted an extensive Lunch and Learn Program at the Cross City branch of the Dixie County Public Library Thursday afternoon (June 21), treating everyone to a free and delicious lunch, and providing a plethora of valuable information.

The DCADC Board provided the meal, which included barbecue pork, homemade pasta salad, homemade coleslaw, homemade baked beans, an assortment of delicious desserts, and iced tea or water.

Capt. Mike Coy of the United States National Guard - Florida spoke about the Counterdrug Task Force that became reactivated by Gov. Rick Scott to help combat the opioid epidemic in Florida.

Brother Davy Cannon of the Overcomers ministry shared insight about this organization.

Leslie Nestic, a recruiter with the Third Judicial Circuit Guardian Ad Litem Program, explained about the critical need for more volunteers in that program.

Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition (DCADC) Event Coordinator Rebecca Fusco shared an unenviable status Dixie County has for leading the state as the county with the most fatal drug overdoses.

DCADC Executive Director Katrina VanAernam led the meeting with her inimitable grace and style.

VanAernam shared with the audience that the DCADC was founded by 38 community leaders with the first meeting in May of 2011, with 17 of those leaders present for the first meeting.

Seven years later, the DCADC continues to thrive and succeed in its mission to save lives and preserve families.

DCADC Administration Coordinator Cale McCall was present. He started with the DCADC when he was in the ninth grade at Dixie County High School, VanAernam said, adding that on Monday (June 18), he went to the University of Florida, College of Journalism and Communications for orientation.

DCAC Program Coordinator Debby Sweem, DCADC Events Coordinator Fusco and one of the two DCHS interns were present at the meeting as well. The high school interns have volunteered for six weeks this summer to help the DCADC have a more youthful presence on social media sites.

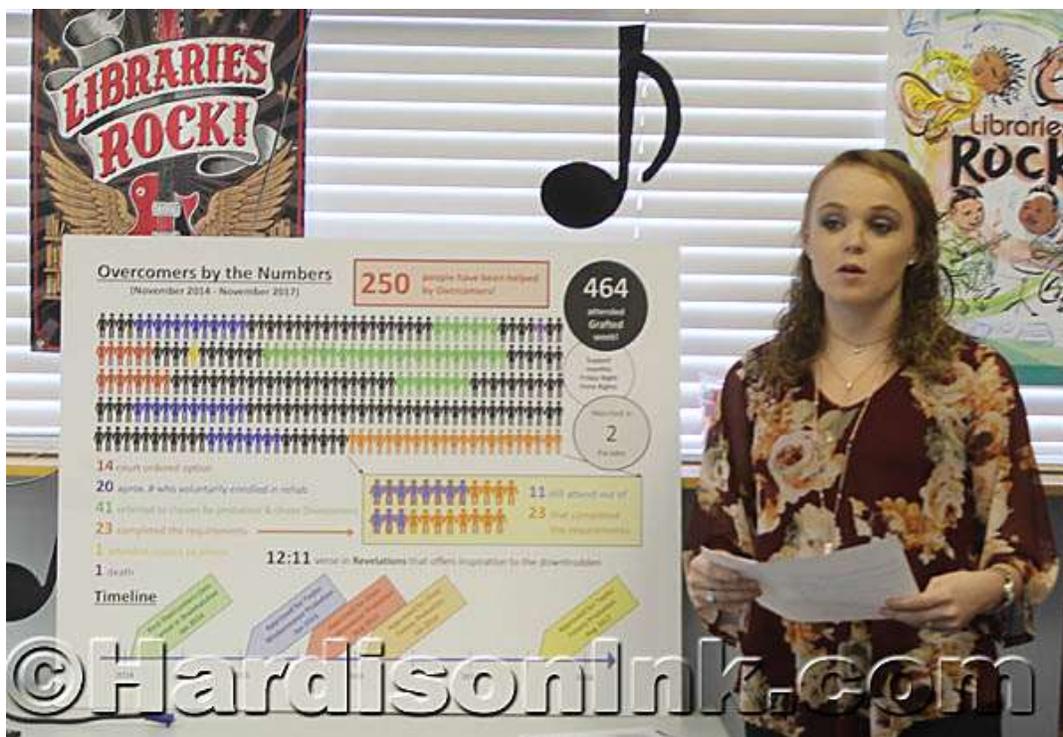
OVERCOMERS

Brother Cannon is the lead pastor of Overcomers, which serves people from Dixie, Taylor, Gilchrist or any other county who wants to come for help with overcoming their addictions, VanAernam said.

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Brother Davy Cannon, lead pastor of the Overcomers ministry, speaks about the program. Overcomers meet Mondays at 6 p.m. in Old Town at Chavous Road New Life Church. For all of the AA meetings in the Tri-County Area click [HERE](#).



Overcomers Administrative Assistant Breanna Hage speaks about the success of this ministry to help people overcome addictions.

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Steinhatchee Church of God Associate Pastor Cannon said in 2014 he was led by God to start Overcomers, first as a Bible study group.

He was invited to Cross City and Old Town to start a class. On Monday nights, between 20 and 40 people attend the classes in Old Town, he said,

Judges in Taylor and Dixie counties have provided Overcomers with the authorization to sign-off on some probationary needs such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous – as a faith-based alternative to incarceration.

Brother Cannon noted his appreciation for his wife tolerating him becoming a preacher, and to Sister Sweem for her assistance in the Overcomers ministerial program.

Three weeks ago, Overcomers reached a point where it could add a paid staff member. Administrative Assistant Breanna Hage has been a blessing, Brother Cannon said.

Hage presented “Overcomers by The Numbers” where she showed the approximate number of people helped over time.

As of November 2017, the ministry had helped 250 people. By June of 2018 that number was 600 people. In November of 2017, there had been 23 people who completed requirements to show they had overcome an addiction. By June of 2018, that number was 46.

Over the entire course of its existence, only one person died before they overcame their addiction.

Brother Cannon said the group intends to open two houses in Dixie County for men and women on seven acres, to help people more. The structures and property have been donated to Overcomers, he said.

GUARDIAN AD LITEM

Recruiter Nestic said there is a need for 25 volunteers in this program for Dixie County.



**Third
Judicial
Circuit
Guardian Ad
Litem
Recruiter
Leslie Nestic
explains
about the
program and
the critical
need for
volunteers.**

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Dixie County Court Judge Jennifer J. Johnson shares insight from her perspective, which shows how the Guardian Ad Litem program can help families come back together after legal issues are resolved through counseling and the judicial process.



Guardian Ad Litem is an organization in each of the 20 judicial circuits in Florida.

This program especially focuses on children in the foster care system. It is powered by highly respected advocates who represent on behalf of the children.

These advocates are the voice in court cases where there are allegations of children who are abused, abandoned or neglected. In many instances, this abuse or neglect is a result of drug problems by the parents.

The Third Judicial Circuit is Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor counties.

The Eighth Judicial Circuit is Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union counties

The Fifth Judicial Circuit is Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion and Sumter counties.

Volunteers are needed in these and other circuits for the Guardian Ad Litem Program.

To volunteer in the Third Judicial Circuit, contact Leslie Nestic at leslie.nestic@gal.fl.gov or call 386-688-0589.

Not everybody can become a volunteer, she said, although "... it is a pretty cool group to be a part of."

There is 30-hour training program for volunteers who pass the background checks. Training is provided around people's schedules. The first part of training is done online, Nestic said.

The average amount of time a volunteer needs to dedicate after the training is eight to 12 hours a month, Nestic said.

Dixie County Court Judge Jennifer J. Johnson provided more insight about the Guardian Ad Litem Program.

When a child is removed from a home as the result the court seeing the child as being in eminent danger of abuse, neglect or abandonment, Judge Johnson said, they come to court for a shelter hearing.

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“At the shelter hearing,” Judge Johnson continued, “typically the Guardian Ad Litem Program is there. You’ve got the state looking out for the best interest of the child to protect them. And then I’ve got to balance, as the judge, the rights of the parents to parent their children.”

And, the judge continued, she needs to assess what services these parents need. The goal is to provide the parents with what they need to be able to care for their children properly in their home.

The Guardian Ad Litem has the ear of the court at all times, the judge said, because they are the advocate for the child. If the child wants to talk to the court, they tell the Guardian – who tells the judge.

“The kids can always come in,” she said.

The Guardians in Dixie County love the kids and want to help them, Judge Johnson said. These children learn to trust their Guardian, and it is an extremely valuable service to the court and to the community.

The judge said the court needs Guardians. Cases last six months to a year. A Guardian can have one family, she said.

“We need volunteers,” Judge Johnson said. “Tell your churches, if you want to show Christ’s love, to show the love of community, that way you can get in and impact that family and that child.”

DIXIE COUNTY LEADS IN OVERDOSES

Fusco used data from 2010 to 2016 as she conducted a study of deaths in Florida counties as the result of overdoses.



Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition (DCADC) Event Coordinator Rebecca Fusco found the per-capita overdose death rate for Dixie County makes it the top county in Florida for the years 2010 through 2016. Of those 38 fatal overdoses, the

overwhelming majority were in people older than 30 years old, and at least half of them were from mixing two kinds of prescription drugs that slow down breathing. Fusco said, too, that about 33 percent of the people taking opioid drugs do not know they are taking that form of narcotic.

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The problem in Dixie County, Fusco said, where data shows this county has the most per-capita drug overdose deaths of any Florida county, is not one from street drugs.

It is not crack cocaine, she said. It is not methamphetamine. It is not heroin that caused the most deaths, she said.

The highest number of deaths are from “double-downing” – which is the use of two drugs that both slow the rate of breathing. Anti-anxiety medicine, sleeping medicine, when mixed with anti-pain prescriptions can kill the patient, because they stop breathing, Fusco said.

It is not the young people who died from overdoses, she said.

Almost 95 percent (36 of the 38 recorded deaths) from overdoses in Dixie County from 2010 through 2016 are people who are older than 30 years old.

Almost all of the overdoses involved prescription medicine, Fusco said, adding that half of the Dixie County deaths are from patients who combined benzodiazepines and opioids. Both of these types of drugs slow the breathing, she said, and combining them slows hearts until they stop.

Examples of benzodiazepines are Xanax (alprazolam), Valium (diazepam), Ativan (lorazepam), Restoril (temazepam) and Halcion (triazolam).

A few examples of the many opioids are codeine, Demerol (meperidine), methadone, fentanyl, Lorcet, Vicodin (hydrocodone), OxyContin (oxycodone) and Percocet.

Combining alcohol with either benzodiazepines or opioids can be deadly as well, Fusco said.

ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Capt. Coy, stationed at the United States Army National Guard Florida Headquarters in Saint Augustine, drove two and a half hours to share insight with the DCADC.



Capt. Michael Coy has duties that include drug prevention, community outreach, public awareness campaigns, creating a statewide drug prevention effort and sharing information to help the public become better informed about drug abuse.

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Capt. Coy has been active in the Army National Guard for 12-plus years, with his first three years in North Carolina and the past nine in Florida.

He has been in the Counterdrug Task Force since 2017, where he serves as one of the three Civil Operations Specialists for Florida. The other two cover the Central region of the state and the Southern region.

The National Guard plans to increase this aspect of that program by 100 percent with the addition of three more of this type of specialist. There are “tons” of other guardsmen and guardswomen, though, who are active in reconnaissance from air and land, training, surveillance, analysis, communication and other aspects of the program, he said.

Capt. Coy, in Civil Operations, works with people in the community at coalitions by assisting them with some resources as well as providing information.

When the Florida National Guard participates with a local law enforcement agency in a drug seizure mission, and there are assets also taken, he said the National Guard shares in the take from forfeitures.

The National Guard puts that money back into the community. For instance, one coalition was funded for 500 tee-shirts, Capt. Coy said.

A program known as “OD Mapping” includes participation by the National Guard, he said. This provides a real-time app that can show agencies in Florida how overdoses from opioids are traveling in a direction in the state.

This allows for agencies to prepare for the oncoming event, similar to the manner in which the National Weather Service provides mapping for oncoming storms.

This program was created in the Baltimore-Washington High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area sectors, he said, to help first-responders add via “one-tap” on their phone or on an agency-issued phone to note where the overdose happened, Capt. Coy said.

“Is the patient alive or dead and how much Narcan was given to them?” he said the app prompts the first responder.

This data is almost instantaneous – almost real-time.

When a spike is seen in Miami and the overdoses move through the state, it can prepare EMS and first-responders to increase their Narcan supplies.

As noted on the Narcan website “NARCAN (naloxone HCl) Nasal Spray is a prescription medicine used for the treatment of an opioid emergency such as an overdose or a possible opioid overdose with signs of breathing problems and severe sleepiness or not being able to respond. NARCAN Nasal Spray is to be given right away and does not take the place of emergency medical care. Get emergency medical help right away after giving the first dose of NARCAN Nasal Spray, even if the person wakes up.”

Another program that Capt. Coy endorses is the United States Drug Enforcement Administration’s national prescription drug takeback day.

The next DEA Drug Takeback Day is Oct. 27, he said. If Dixie County wants to participate, then it just takes one law enforcement officer for each takeback location, he said. Some counties have several drop-off points. Some counties have one.

The reason to get rid of old prescriptions helps reduce opportunities for drug addicts to find them and steal them.

Dixie County Extension Director Holly Houghton of the University of Florida’s

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Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences mentioned a hazard from flushing drugs.

By flushing large amounts of narcotics into septic systems, Houghton said, remnants go into rivers and causes hazards to marine life. The improper disposal of opiates, she said, then can even affect the food supply that comes from some fish that are too drugged to spawn.

During the discussion, he mentioned this is not a time to return “sharps” or hypodermic syringes with needles.

The Florida Department of Health has a program for disposal of needles by people who use them to treat diabetes and other chronic illnesses that require ongoing needle usage.

The DCADC Lunch and Learn Program on Thursday provided a great lunch and a wealth of information.



Dixie County Anti-Drug Coalition Executive Director Katrina VanAernam and Capt. Michael Coy wrap up the event.