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CONTACT: Kevin B. Lewis, CEO
SWFAS
(239) 278-7595, ext. 700
k_lewis@swfas.org

Susan Bennett, APR, CPRC
Susan Bennett Marketing & Media
(239) 277-5255
sbennett@susanbennett.biz

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SWFAS TO BREAK GROUND FOR NEW DETOX CENTER; DONATIONS STILL NEEDED

Construction of the first new detoxification center to be built in Lee County in more than 50 years will begin Thurs., Feb. 28, when Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) officially breaks ground for a new 40-bed Detoxification Center and Outpatient Treatment Center.

The groundbreaking is set for 10 a.m. at the four-acre site on Evans Avenue adjacent to Southwest Florida Regional Medical Center that was donated by the City of Fort Myers under a long-term land lease.

Among those expected to participate in the ground-breaking are Lee County Commission Chairman Ray Judah, Fort Myers Mayor Jim Humphrey, Lee Memorial Health System President Jim Nathan, and Southwest Florida Community Foundation Chairman Donna Kaye as well as The Kleist Family Foundation and Jim and Donna Sublett.

Each of the participants made large financial contributions to the capital campaign to build the new center, which will replace the existing smaller Detoxification Center on Cleveland Avenue that is housed in a converted motel built in the 1950s.

“We are very grateful to the many supporters who have demonstrated again and again their commitment to helping us help others. Now we need to redouble our efforts to raise funds to reduce our long term debt,” Lewis said.

About \$6 million has been raised for the \$9.5 million project, with room-naming opportunities still available. Lewis said interim financing has been arranged to enable SWFAS to move forward with construction while fund-raising continues.

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“There would be nothing better than to reduce or eliminate our long-term debt for this facility so that we have more money available to help individuals in need,” Lewis said.

Officials say the new center, when completed in about one year, will respond to “a crisis in substance abuse services in Southwest Florida.”

“There isn’t a day that passes that we aren’t forced to turn away people in need of immediate detoxification because there are no beds available,” Lewis said. “It is a quiet tragedy that occurs every day.”

Lewis said the current Detoxification Center is now turning away two people for every one who can be admitted, due to lack of bed space. While the population at risk has nearly tripled in the past 20 years, Lewis said the number of detox beds has decreased from 28 beds in 1984 to 25 beds in 2008, due to funding not keeping pace with area growth.

“Families need a place to turn in times of crisis,” Lewis said. “Addiction is a disease that is treatable. People do recover.”

The new 44,000 square foot facility also will include room for outpatient counseling offices now located on McGregor Boulevard and SWFAS administration offices now located on Winkler Avenue.

SWFAS is the most comprehensive substance abuse treatment and prevention program in Southwest Florida, serving 6,000 people per year from ages 9 to 90. SWFAS offers outpatient and residential programs for both adults and youngsters from seven locations in Lee County. Fees are charged on a sliding scale, based on family income. In many cases, private insurance is accepted. SWFAS is a United Way agency.

For more information about the capital campaign or to make a gift to SWFAS, call Lewis at 278-7595, ext. 700.