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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SWFAS DEDICATES NEW \$9 MILLION CENTER

Officials call the grand opening “historically significant”;
Thousands to receive treatment

Officials dedicated the first new detoxification center to be built in Lee County in more than 50 years February 26, when Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) officially opened the doors of its new 40-bed Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center.

More than 200 people attended the ribbon-cutting at 3763 Evans Avenue on a four-acre parcel donated by the City of Fort Myers under a long-term land lease.

Participating dignitaries included State Rep. Gary Aubuchon, Lee County Commissioner Bob Janes, Philip Mangano of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Lee Memorial Health System President Jim Nathan, Southwest Florida Community Foundation President Julia East as well as The Kleist Family Foundation and Jim and Donna Sublett.

Each of the participants made large financial contributions to build the new center, which replaces 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,” said SWFAS CEO Kevin B. Lewis. “During the current downturn in the economy, we continue to have individuals on our wait list for detoxification – and when we can’t admit them, they often have no other options. Families need a place to turn in times of crisis.”

Lewis emphasized that opening of the new Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center will help alleviate the crisis in substance abuse services, but it won’t help everyone in need.

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“As a chronic disease, addiction impacts between 6 and 7 percent of the adult population in the area, and with current economic conditions expected to diminish public funding, we expect to face continuing challenges to meet the demand for services. Our area will continue to need increased treatment resources, even with the addition of this facility,” he 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 complete the project while fund-raising continues.

Officials say the new center responds 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.”

While many other businesses have experienced less demand for their services, that hasn’t been the case for substance abuse treatment services provided by SWFAS. 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.

The new 44,000 square foot facility also includes room for outpatient counseling and prevention services now located on McGregor Boulevard, and SWFAS administration offices now located on Winkler Avenue. The McGregor Boulevard and Winkler Avenue offices will close within a few weeks.

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 five locations in Lee County. Fees for many services are charged on a sliding scale, based on family income, as SWFAS receives funding support from the State of Florida and Lee County. In many cases, private insurance is accepted. SWFAS is a United Way agency.

For more information about the new Detoxification and Outpatient Treatment Center or to make a gift to SWFAS, call Lewis at 278-7595, ext. 700.