

Thomasville to ramp up meth battle

By Teresa Williams
teresa.williams@gafnews.com

THOMASVILLE — A large-scale prevention program is aiming to keep individuals from trying an addictive drug, “not even once.”

The Georgia Meth Project will bring its awareness campaign to Thomasville this week with a public lunch and information program Wednesday at The Plaza.

“Our campaign is focused on preventing meth use by teenagers and young adults, age groups 12-17 and 18-25,” Jim Langford, founder and executive director, said in a phone interview. “It is a dangerous, dangerous drug — four to five times more powerful than crack cocaine.”

Methamphetamine is “a powerfully addictive stimulant that affects many areas of the central nervous system and causes dramatic changes in the brain,” according to the project’s Web site www.georgiamethproject.org.

“The Meth Project” was conceived and founded by businessman Thomas M. Siebel and was first launched in Montana as the Montana Meth Project, a prevention program.

“Meth use started in rural areas and gradually moved into cities,” Langford said. “This is the opposite of crack cocaine, which began in big cities and moved to cover rural areas.”

Georgia is the first eastern state to have the program.

Superior Court Judge Jim Hardy said meth is a problem in Thomas County.

“It is a very addictive, terrible drug and is hard to get off once a person tries it,” he said. “It is destructive to health — including the aging process and teeth — and livelihood.

“Some people can spend a year going through drug rehab and then get right back on it. It is a real problem in our community and the whole southwest Georgia and north Florida area.”

Kevin Lee, commander of the Thomas County/Thomasville Narcotics/Vice Division, said the meth problem was “down significantly” for months, but there has been a recent resurgence.

“We’ve seen an increase in information on meth, meth labs, and seizure of labs,” he said.

“People have gone to a new method. The street names are ‘shake and bake’ and ‘cap dope.’

“They are extracting ammonia nitrate out of cold compresses or buying it from different stores. This bypasses the need for anhydrous ammonia, which is hard for them to get.”

Lee said there has been an increase in this type of meth locally because it is “cheaper and easier to make,” but stressed it is extremely dangerous because violent chemical reactions can cause explosions.

“We’ve really been working it hard to get as many cooks off the streets as we can,” he said.

The Georgia Meth Project is a prevention program almost entirely funded through private finances, Langford said.

Its research-based campaign includes graphic advertising on radio, television, billboards and the Internet. It also covers community programs to localize the campaign’s message, “Not Even Once.”

The campaign’s goal is: to explain the project and its importance, and the statistics it has uncovered regarding the attitudes of those in its targeted age groups.

Approximately 3,000 teens and young adults were recently polled for the first “Georgia Meth



Use & Attitudes Survey.”

“We learned 35 percent of teens and young adults believe there is little or no risk in trying meth,” Langford said. “Twenty-three percent actually believed there was some benefit to using meth and 58 percent of teens surveyed said their parents had never had a conversation with them about meth.”

Another program facet is to target parents “in order to promote conversation between parents and teens about meth use,” he said.

A Thomasville tie to the project is local resident Richard Mooney III. Langford said Mooney signed on as an early supporter and is a member of the project’s advisory council.

Archbold Northside is the local event sponsor.

“This program gives people an opportunity to really hear about meth’s addictiveness and strategies to address such a high-need problem,” administrator Jim Terry said. “Meth is one of those things that passes all socioeconomic barriers and just devastates people’s worlds.”

Hardy said an event like the upcoming program in Thomasville is a good educational idea.

“People need to be aware of all the opportunities to educate youths and adults about the dangers of meth and to stay away from this drug,” he said.

Langford stressed this is not “a scare campaign,” but a way to “tell people the reality of meth use” so they can prevent others from ever trying it.

A recent study indicated meth cost Georgia \$1.3 billion a year from things such as incarceration costs to foster care, he said.

“That is a huge cost to the state, but there is also a just as important human cost,” Langford said.

“Families are being destroyed. There is a huge cost personally, communally and state-wide. We are trying to make people thoroughly aware of that.”

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Georgia Meth Project campaign program

WHEN: Lunch starts 12:30 p.m., program expected to begin at 1 p.m.

WHERE: The Plaza

ADMISSION: Program is free

INFO: www.georgiamethproject.org