

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

**ST. LUCIE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH COURT CELEBRATING GRADUATION ON
MARCH 13, 2017**

The St. Lucie County Mental Health Court will hold graduation on Monday, **March 13, 2017 at 2:15 p.m.** in Courtroom 1A of the St. Lucie County Courthouse in downtown Fort Pierce with 29 mental health court graduates. *The public is invited to attend.*

Established in 2006, St. Lucie County's Mental Health Court is a community-based program that provides court supervision and services to those offenders with a mental illness, through the cooperation of State Attorney, Public Defender, County and local non-profit agencies. Mental Health Court provides mentally ill defendants with the opportunity to receive community-based treatment and services through local providers while under the supervision of the Court. Mental Health Court is both a diversionary and supervisory program (as a condition of probation) that provides court supervision and social services through collaboration of state, county, and local non-profit agencies. It is designed to improve public safety by reducing criminal recidivism; improve the quality of life of people with mental illnesses and increase their participation in effective treatment; and reduce court and corrections related costs through administrative efficiencies and often by providing an alternative to incarceration. Monitoring and treating offenders with mental illness in a mental health court is a more effective, efficient, and less expensive option than the remedies available through traditional justice system approaches. Mental Health Courts boast low recidivism and relatively inexpensive operating costs. Incarceration of mental health offenders costs approximately \$120,000 per person per year while a comprehensive mental health system typically spends \$11,500 annually for each offender.

Participants who have met the minimum requirements of the program, engaged in treatment and services, abstained from alcohol and other drugs, are self-sufficient and have displayed an improved quality of life, will be eligible for graduation. To date, St. Lucie County's Mental Health Court has had over 1,340 clients.

The St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners have supported and funded this program, along with Life Builders of the Treasure Coast, Inc. Due to the large amount of referrals, Mental Health Court is held every Monday at the St. Lucie County Courthouse, 218 South Second Street, Fort Pierce, Florida 34950. For more information about Mental Health Court or the graduation, contact the mental health court director, Jennifer Baird at (772) 337-5682.