

NORTH PORT WEST VILLAGES

WEEKLY



Teen Program new location will serve South County families

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SEEKING HELP?

Substance abuse education classes will be held at the Teen Center, West Villages location, beginning in August. The cost to attend is \$100 for six sessions and scholarships are available. For more information or inquiries, call 941-861-8460 or go to www.sarasotateencourt.org.

WEST VILLAGES — Sometimes local at-risk teens get in trouble simply because they cannot make the trek to Sarasota to get the help they need. Now thanks to a new location, South County families will have access to available resources.

Teen Court will have a new space in August at West Villages Office Park, formerly the South County Resource Center, near State College of Florida.

“We saw a need in South County for a location that was convenient for families. Marty Black (general manager of West Villages) heard our concern and stepped up and offered his space for after-hour classes,” said Teen Court Executive Director Heather Todd.

Teen Court is a nonprofit program that offers first-time youth offenders, ages 14 to 18 — and sometimes younger, a second chance or fresh start outside the justice system — through referrals from law enforcement agencies and schools. A student who has been in trouble for a minor incident appears in Teen Court before a jury of his peers. Sentences may range from community service hours, jury duty for Teen Court or attendance at Camp X-RAYD (Examine Reality About Your Decisions). The camp is an intensive training program that teaches teens to be responsible for their actions and how to overcome their behaviors. The camp combines physical training with tours of the Sarasota County Jail, Sarasota Memorial Hospital Emergency Room and Sarasota County Medical Examiner’s Office, and nine hours of education classes. These are the classes that will be offered at the new

location.

Black knew about Teen Court and its components and was happy to lend a hand.

“Reaching out to Teen Court seemed like a natural fit. We have space after-hours and they have a program we can accommodate,” said Black. “I am impressed with the great work that Teen Court does in improving the futures for young people and their families.”

In addition to the classes ordered through Teen Court, other classes will be available at the new location for families in crisis. If a teen is struggling with drug or alcohol abuse, or is stealing or families are having trouble communicating, they can attend the classes at West Villages.

“Coming to these sessions gives an outsider an opportunity to work with the family,” said Todd, who has been with the organization for 16 years. “It allows the kids to know they are not alone.”

Todd said it is also a place where parents can vent and know that they are not alone too.

The evening classes will be facilitated by Steve Rinder, former intervention coordinator at Manatee County. Issues such as anger management, peer influences and decision-making, family communication, the impact and the strategies and the belief systems. The cost is \$100 for six sessions. Scholarships are available upon request.

“The important thing is having these services available in our backyard,” said Todd, “and having the location



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Steve Rinder facilitates a class at Sarasota Teen Court. Rinder will soon be facilitating classes at the new Teen Court location at West Villages Office Park in West Villages.



Sarasota Teen Court staff are, from left, Shaun Slapp, case manager; Heather Todd, executive director; Emily Harris, coordinator of services.

at West Villages will help reach out to more families in need.”

Teen Court has had positive influences in changing the behavior in teens, lowering the reoffense rate. Statistics show 7.7 percent of teens reoffend within the first year. And

12.4 percent of teens reoffend within five years, Todd said.

Todd attributes the teen court programs to its success rate.

“If they have meaningful consequences, they are less likely to reoffend,” said Todd about the programs.

Todd hopes the new location will help lower those numbers even more.

Last year, more than 130 South County families utilized Teen Court in Sarasota. The main challenge, said Todd, is getting the word out and letting people in

the area know that this program exists and that programs are available.

“We are a fantastic resource for families in need,” said Todd about Teen Court and its programs, “and if we can’t help them, we can tell them where they need to go to get help.”

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