

Mental Illness Awareness Week to begin Sunday

Meagan Hurley | Opelika-Auburn News | Twitter | Posted: Friday, October 2, 2015 8:20 pm

As part of a national campaign designed to educate the public about the importance of mental health resources, Oct. 4-11 has been designated by city and county officials as Mental Illness Awareness Week in Lee County.

“Basically, there’s a nationwide effort and every year (officials) do a mental health awareness week. We usually do it the first week of October. This year it’s the fourth through the tenth,” said Jimmie Dickey, director of clinic operations and business support at East Alabama Mental Health Center.

Each year, Dickey said, the week celebrates mental illness recovery and provides an avenue for fellowship and inspiration among those who have previously struggled or are still struggling with mental illness. This year, the East Alabama Mental Health Center will sponsor a community candlelight service at Auburn United Methodist Church at 6 p.m. Tuesday evening, in which mental health patients and advocates from the area can come and share their stories of recovery.

“It’s a very heavily consumer-run event. The consumers that we serve, they are the presenters of the event. They run kind of the whole thing. There’s a choir that performs that’s from our day program. It’s a pretty cool thing to see what they do and how they put it together. We just kind of support them from an administrative standpoint, making sure their vision is enacted,” he said. “The theme is basically taking a stigma-free pledge this year. It’s about building a movement through the new stigma-free initiative, which obviously means learning and educating others about mental illness, focusing on connecting with people to see others as individuals and not a diagnosis, and most importantly taking action on mental health issues and taking the stigma-free pledge.”

Tuesday’s event will mark the 22nd annual candlelight service, Dickey said, and organizers are expecting a full house.

“It varies, but we usually have a pretty great turnout from people with mental illness in the community, and other community advocates and stakeholders,” he said. “It’s a pretty cool thing to see. I mean, in the



Mental Illness Awareness Week

City and county leaders have declared Oct. 4-10 as Mental Illness Awareness Week in Opelika, Auburn and Lee County. Pictured at the proclamation signing are Auburn Mayor Bill Ham, Lee County Probate Judge Bill English, Opelika City Council President Eddie Smith, East Alabama Mental Health Center's Nancy Clark, Alabama Career Center's Brian Scannell, NAMI East Alabama's Alan Garrison, EAMHC Executive Director Anne Penney and Vocational Rehab Services' David Patterson.

past we've done different guest speakers that have been brought in by NAMI, and the last couple years we've kind of decided – the consumers have decided – they're going to get up and tell their own stories of recovery. It's just a really cool thing to see.”

The event is open to the public, and Dickey encourages community members to pay a visit.

“This is a good, positive event to show folks, you know. This is what we're all about. This is what's possible with the right services and the right support systems. It doesn't have to be all the doom and gloom stuff that you see, but it does require the right services and support systems.”

For more information on Mental Illness Awareness Week, call 334-298-2405.