

Public forum to discuss fentanyl, opioid use

Ted Hall

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With deaths from fentanyl and other opioids rising rapidly in Gaston County and across the country, five local Rotary clubs have joined forces to host an opioid forum on Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, at 7 p.m. at Belmont Abbey College.

The forum is open to the public, and there's no admission charge.

Featuring speakers active in the fight to save lives here, the forum will be in The Haid at Belmont Abbey. The address is 100 Belmont-Mount Holly Road. Coffee and soft drinks will be available after the program.

"We are holding the forum on the Belmont Abbey campus because college and high school students and their parents are among those we most urgently must inform about the imminent

See FORUM, Page 2A

Forum

Continued from Page 1A

danger posed by opioids,” said Whitney Norton, immediate past president of the Belmont Rotary Club, who has led in planning for the forum.

“The more educated we become about these substances, methods to combat them and how to help victims, the more lives we can save,” Norton said.

Sponsoring the forum are the Rotary clubs of Belmont, Gastonia, Mount Holly, Gastonia East and Gastonia Evening.

Norton thanked the Gaston Con-

trolled Substance Coalition and Belmont Abbey College for supporting the forum.

Speakers participating in the forum are:

- Diana M. Elliott, PhD, chair of Human Services & Sociology and Associate Professor of Psychology, Belmont Abbey College.

- Michelle Mathis, chair of the Gaston Controlled Substance Coalition and director of Olive Branch Ministries, providing an overview of the opioid epidemic.

- Delton Russell, recovery specialist, Partners Health Management, speaking on mental health issues.

- Maceo Mayo, RHA Health Services, on substance use prevention.

- Andy Leonard, chief of police, Belmont Abbey College.

Former Senior Resident Superior Court Judge Jesse B. Caldwell, III, will serve as master of ceremonies, and Whitney Norton will make opening remarks.

The forum is free and open to everyone interested in learning about preventing deaths from fentanyl and other opioids.

For more information on these and other forms of substance abuse, visit the Gaston Controlled Substance Coalition website at www.gcscotogether.org.