

p confirms Wilmington

able on website

required on Trump's website. You may register for up to two tickets per mobile number.

All tickets are subject to first-come, first-serve basis. Trask Coliseum, home to the UNCW Seahawks basketball team, typically holds 5,200.

It last hosted a presidential candidate when Barack Obama visited in April 2008.

U.S. Rep. David Rouzer, R-N.C., has confirmed that he will speak Tuesday. Ricky Diaz, spokesman for the

re is



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaking in March. AP FILE PHOTO

SEE VISIT, A4

Residents 1

By Makenzie Holland
StarNews Staff

WILMINGTON — Ken Andrews, a self-proclaimed "Trumper," intends to be at Trask Coliseum on Tuesday when Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump makes a stop to rally his supporters.

The Wilmingtonian said he agrees with Trump's ideas or "taking our country back." "I've been telling people that forever," Andrews

HEALTH

Syringe exchange launches



James Jones, an early intervention specialist with Coastal Horizons, gives an HIV and hepatitis C test to a man Wednesday at a hotel along Market St. in Wilmington. Workers with Coastal Horizons and North Carolina Harm Reduction have been offering free testing and safe kits with clean needles and naloxone to people at risk in Wilmington. MATT BORN/STARNEWS

Program helps users learn about treatment options

By Adam Wagner
StarNews Staff

WILMINGTON — Crouched on the edge of Market Street, Mike Page is paying no attention to the cars zooming past over his left shoulder.

His eyes are locked on the face of the too-skinny woman in the camisole slumped against a telephone pole. She has a grocery bag filled with candy bars at her feet, which Page takes as a sign that she's using drugs.

After a few minutes, Page returns to a mini-van waiting nearby. The woman doesn't want overdose antidote naloxone or syringes, but she will take the condoms the group is offering.

The woman is just one of several people the joint Coastal Horizons and N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition team meets while visiting high-risk areas, including Market Street hotels and homeless camps, on Aug. 3. While the Harm Reduction Coalition is operating the city's first formal syringe exchange, the Coastal Horizons early intervention specialists are conducting



James Jones, left, and Melissa Middlebrook, right, both early intervention specialists with Coastal Horizons, walk through a homeless camp with Mike Page, a peer support specialist with North Carolina Harm Reduction, off Market Street in Wilmington last week.

Hepatitis C and HIV testing. "People think this means we're OKing getting high," said Page, a Harm Reduction Coalition peer support specialist. "That's not what this is about, they're going to do it either way. This is about meeting them where they are and keeping them safe."

N.C. Gov. Pat McCrory signed a bill legalizing syringe exchanges in early July. While needle exchanges are legal, they do not receive any taxpayer funding.

Since July 11, workers for the coalition's Wilmington exchange have met with 51 people. They've handed

out 6,145 syringes and collected 5,725 while hitting the streets around Market Street each Wednesday night.

The coalition also plans to hold an exchange each Friday from 1 to 5 p.m. in their offices at 3951 Market St. and more hours could be offered in the fall.

Coastal's free testing gives users who haven't been tested in a long time a chance to learn whether they are carrying one of the diseases. Outreach workers also help users learn of treatment options they may not otherwise know about.

SEE SYRINGE, A4

Where is it available?

The N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition is offering the city's first syringe exchange program, which is meant to help curb the secondary illnesses that come along with the repeated use of syringes. Proponents of syringe exchange programs also say they help users reach treatment faster.

What: N.C. Harm Reduction Syringe Exchange Program, which offers clean syringes, naloxone, condoms and harm reduction education. Coastal Horizons will also be joining in many instances to offer rapid Hepatitis C and HIV testing

Where: 3951 Market St., Building B, in the Bridges; along Market Street

When: 1 to 5 p.m. each Friday; 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. each Wednesday

Cost: Free
How to reach the Harm Reduction Coalition: Call Mike Page at 910-795-7984

SYRINGE

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“All of this stuff just plays together so perfectly,” said Melissa Middlebrook, a Coastal Horizons early intervention specialist. “Especially with the opiate epidemic and the increase in opiate drug use, you’re looking at HIV, you’re looking at Hep C.”

Earlier Wednesday, during a trip to a Market Street hotel, Middlebrook and Page met a middle-aged man sitting in a roller chair outside his hotel room.

The veins on the man’s arm were popping out and his pupils were pinpricks in a sea of milky gray. After

a few minutes, Page and Middlebrook motioned to Jones, who was waiting nearby. The man wanted to receive a rapid test for Hepatitis C and HIV.

As Jones worked, swabbing the man’s middle finger with alcohol before pricking it, the man had two questions.

“How bad is HIV these days?” he asked, carefully looking away from his now-bleeding finger.

“Not too bad with medication,” Jones said.

“How about Hep C?”

“It’s pretty bad,” Jones said, “because people keep sharing their needles.”

Fifteen minutes later, the results came back: The man tested negative for both diseases.

His reaction was much



The Stay Safe Kit handed out by North Carolina Harm Reduction includes clean needles, naloxone, condoms and information on area resources for people at risk in Wilmington. MATT BORN/STARNEWS

less subdued than the man who bunny hopped for joy later in the night after

learning he’d also come up negative on both tests.

Page, who has been

sober for 15 months, contracted Hepatitis C while he was using. The disease has since gone into remission, but his experience allows him to grasp what he sees around Wilmington.

He draws on that experience when he notices a bottle of bleach in a Market Street homeless camp and immediately thinks of how users sometimes keep it around because they think rinsing syringes in bleach will clean them out.

“If I can prevent one case or one spread, that’s dear to me,” Page said. “I try to disclose to people that I’ve been an IV drug user, that I’m sober, that I’ve contracted Hep C and I’m in remission. They know that I’m coming

from a place of love and understanding rather than a place of judgment.”

So far, the coalition and Coastal Horizons teams are encouraged by how people are reacting to them. Last Wednesday, even people who shook off their offerings immediately said the work is necessary in the area.

“It’s not like anybody gets super-offended or anything like that because we’ve done a pretty good job of being in a lot of areas we need to be in,” Middlebrook said. “It’s not like we’re approaching a man in a business suit.”

—Reporter Adam Wagner can be reached at 910-343-2389 or Adam.Wagner@StarNewsOnline.com.