

# BRIDGES of AMERICA

*A Life Changing Therapeutic Community*

## Voices of Smart Justice

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

We consider the preservation of our Bradenton and Broward facilities nothing short of a miracle. The staff, participants, and families of the Bridges program are amazingly grateful that we were able to keep these successful programs open.



I want to thank Governor Scott and his staff; Secretary Ken Tucker and the Department of Corrections; concerned lawmakers including Representative Eisnagle, Senator Ellyn Bogdanoff and other legislators whose efforts helped turn the tide in our discussion; and vocal local elected officials and community supporters - including private-sector employers - for the efforts that made this agreement possible.

The compromise agreement serves the public interest in Florida far better than a complete shutdown of our valuable programs. Several hundred program participants will continue receiving services and will not be forced back into general prison populations. In the end, both Bridges of America and the Department of Corrections agreed that it is not just about what these programs cost - it is about the lives they save.

This agreement would not have been possible without the overwhelming support of community leaders who recognize the value of Bridges programs. The people of Manatee and Broward counties understand that Bridges graduates are strongly committed to living within the community and within the law. Their enthusiastic support for our programs was instrumental in making the Department aware of the

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Easter Family Days



**Saturday, April 7th:**  
 Bradenton Bridge  
 Jacksonville Bridge  
 Orlando Bridge NS  
 Orlando Bridge TC/WR  
 Turning Point Bridge

**Sunday, April 8th:**  
 Auburndale Bridge  
 Broward County Bridge

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### NEW PARTNERSHIP

The Orlando Bridge Transition Center/Work Release is pleased to announce a new partnership with the ITT Technical Institute Criminal Justice

need for these programs to continue.

Our program gives participants the necessary skills to succeed in society. We were adamant that these individuals should not return to prison, and, in the end, the Department agreed. For that, we are most grateful.

Thank you for believing that a person can change.

*Liz Costantino Brown*

President and CEO

## SPOTLIGHT

### Volunteer and Employer "Lucky Charms"



Steve Walters, co-owner of American Photonics, employs three of our ladies. Eli the dog is on staff, too.

Under the leadership of Employment Specialist Sharon Clark and Chaplain Sharon Burke, the Bradenton Bridge ladies hosted a very special Appreciation Dinner for employers and volunteers on March 15. The facility was adorned with beautiful handmade decorations declaring, "You Are Our Lucky Charms".

Department. We will provide externships for the Criminal Justice students and ITT will teach a "Portfolio Class" to help Orlando Bridge program participants improve their employability skills.



Pictured from L to R: Mr. Bamberg, Employment Specialist; Kendra Brown, recent ITT graduate; Ms. Stinebring, Vocational/Educational Instructor; Melody Thompson, ITT extern; Mr. Banasco, Facility Director.

The event was well-attended by 90 guests - employers, volunteers, and community members - who enjoyed talking to the program participants about their experience in the Therapeutic Community. Each aspect of "Bridge life" was represented through a beautiful Open House display.

Chef Brule and his Culinary Arts students prepared a delicious Irish meal of corned beef and cabbage, potatoes, carrots, baby beets, and Irish soda bread that was enjoyed by all.

Each employer and volunteer was recognized with a Certificate of Appreciation. Manatee County Commissioner Robin DiSabatino was presented with a special award for her active role in preventing the closure of the facility. The Honorary Volunteer of the Year was Alison Chambers, sister of a Bradenton Bridge participant, who organized an online petition and gathered over 1,500 signatures in support of our programs.

Sharon Clark noted, "These appreciation events are more important now than ever. It really had a huge impact on our community as a whole to have employers, volunteers, and concerned citizens rally so diligently for us during our time of crisis. We believe these people are our lucky charms and help make our programs so successful."

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## Mentoring Task Force Kickoff

On Saturday, March 17th, the Broward County Bridge kicked off their **Mentoring Task Force** with a 3x3 Basketball Tournament. The mentors rolled up their sleeves and jumped right in as coaches, referees, and time/scorekeepers. New relationships were born through teamwork.

Several men shared their testimonies of how being a mentor/mentee has changed their life. The day concluded with a fabulous BBQ feast.



Father Ginery Twichell is pictured with all of the mentors and program participants who enjoyed the kickoff.

The mission of the Task Force is to increase our program participants' successful transitions to independence through supportive and accountable relationships with trained mentors.

The Broward County Bridge has over 50 active volunteers. If you are interested in joining the Mentoring Task Force, please [email](#) Chaplain Ginery Twichell.

## Dianna Love makes front page of Bradenton Herald

[Bridge is a lifeline: transition facility gives inmate a new start after prison](#)

[www.bridgesofamerica.com](http://www.bridgesofamerica.com)

Bridges of America is a nonprofit organization founded in 1972 with the mission of changing criminal behavior through a practical, comprehensive approach that includes intensive substance-abuse counseling, parenting classes and work-release programs. Bridges' core value is a belief that people can change.

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