Shawnee’s Crystal Darkness panel is pictured during a discussion Tuesday night following the showing of the Crystal Darkness documentary. The panel of experts answered a variety of questions from the crowd, which numbered more than 220 people. Ed Blochowiak Staff photographer

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SHAWNEE, Okla. —
More than 220 people gathered at the Ritz Theater in Shawnee Tuesday night to view the documentary “Crystal Darkness: Meth’s Deadly Assault on our Community.”
The 28-minute documentary showing methamphetamine’s devastating attack on its users also aired on Oklahoma TV stations, providing insight into all areas of the drug and how it wipes the soul out of a person. Shawnee’s watch party was themed “Death to Meth.”

Following the documentary, a panel of those who deal with the methamphetamine epidemic here, from law enforcement officers to counselors, legislators and judges, along with several recovering addicts, answered questions.

Shawnee Police Chief Russell Frantz, whose always taken a tough stance on fighting narcotics here, served an emcee. He said fighting the meth epidemic takes community involvement.

“Every town has this problem — we have to work together,” he said.

The panel included Perry, a recovered addict for 18 years; Sen. Charlie Laster, Pottawatomie County Sheriff Mike Booth, Pottawatomie County District Attorney Richard Smothermon; Mitch Smith with Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics; Cliff Sanders, a substance abuse counselor with the Kickapoo tribe; Rep. Kris Steele; Cindy Satterfield, program director at Gateway to Prevention and Recovery; Michelle Mayberry from Youth and Family Resource Center; Melissa, who is currently in Drug Court; District Judge Douglas Combs and Jared, a recovering user.

One of the first questions asked if the Drug Court program is helping. Frantz said he believes it works and said they’ve seen positive results here.

Judge Combs, who has overseen the program since 1998, said, “I believe we’ve been successful,” adding they have about a 75 percent success rate.

“Meth is a significant problem” Combs said, adding that 29 percent of those in Pottawatomie County Drug Court list meth as their primary drug of choice and 60 percent list it as their second.

Judge Combs said the drug court program has five phases and each time a participant moves through the program, they have to read a petition. He introduced Melissa, also on the panel, who read her petition from Phase 4 to Phase 5. Melissa is now a student a Seminole State College and recently earned a 4.0 grade point average, the judge said.

She spoke about being lost, confused and angry before rehab began her road to healing.

“This is one example of what Drug Court is doing,” Combs said.

Another question asked the panel why users of meth get skinny and have rotten teeth. Perry answered that people using meth don’t want to eat.

“I gained weight when I cleaned up,” he said. As far as rotten teeth, he said meth use keeps a person from producing saliva and addicts typically drink a lot of soda and eat a lot of candy.
Funding for law enforcement to fight meth also was discussed. Rep. Kris Steele said there’s not enough funding. While there’s more work to do, Steele said everyone has to “strengthen resources and maximize potential,” to fight meth.

Sen. Charlie Laster said funding is a problem because of cuts from the federal level, so the state is trying to fill the gap. Smothermon said his drug task force was funded at $240,000 per year to fight the war on drugs. Last year, that funding was slashed by $170,000.

“I got $55,000 last year — that doesn’t cover one man,” Smothermon said. Since then, agencies in this area have stepped up, hoping funding would return. It probably won’t, Smothermon said, but thanks to thinking creatively and visiting with Frantz and new sheriff Mike Booth, Smothermon said he sees a commitment to keep up the drug enforcement here as they all work together.

According to Gateway to Prevention and Recovery in Shawnee, 94 people have sought help there for methamphetamine addiction since July. Cindy Satterfield from Gateway said an assessment is done the same day someone seeks help.

“From the moment of contact, it’s all confidential,” she said. For meth addiction, Gateway often recommends intensive outpatient treatment, including three hours of group time per day and a 12-step program. There’s also many other resources and help through Gateway.

Discussion about Oklahoma’s pseudoephedrine law came up, revealing the law has stopped a lot of domestic production in small, local labs, but its also created an open-ended market of drug trafficking from Mexico. The crowd asked the panel what the average person can do to help law enforcement in the meth fight.

“Eyes and ears are what we need out there,” Sheriff Mike Booth said, encouraging tips along with the formation of neighborhood watch groups.

Perry said those seeking help for addiction can visit a Narcotic Anonymous meeting. The group meets 7 p.m. every night at 122 N. Broadway in Shawnee, he said, and everyone is welcome.

“If you want a different way to live, get with Gateway or Narcotics Anonymous,” he said.

Tuesday night’s showing of Crystal Darkness in Shawnee was sponsored by Gateway, the Shawnee Police Department and the Shawnee Asset Building Alliance. Several door prizes were handed out and those in attendance got to see a demonstration involving a Shawnee Police Department drug dog.

Fore more information about Crystal Darkness can go to www.crystaldarknessoklahoma.org or call 211. Anyone wanting to seek help at Gateway can call 273-1170.

To report suspicious drug activity, call the District Attorney’s Anonymous Tip Line at 878-5520 or the Shawnee Police Department, 273-2121.

Quotes about meth:

“It’s everywhere. If you have a town with three families in it, at least one of them has been affected.”

- Shawnee Police Chief Russell Frantz on the widespread use of methamphetamine in Oklahoma.

“We don’t have enough people on the streets at any law enforcement agency...eyes and ears are what we need out there.”

- Pottawatomie County Sheriff Mike Booth on the importance of community involvement and its role in the fight against meth.

“We used to seize quite a bit of money from drug houses but not anymore. Methamphetamine take your last dollar.”

- District Attorney Richard Smothermon when asked where seized drug money ends up.

“I’ve seen addicts fill a [baby’s] bottle with alcohol so it won’t bother them when they shoot up.”

Shawnee Police Chief Russell Frantz on the lengths addicts will go to in order to fix themselves.