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Public Defender Joins Panel at UNF to Examine Jacksonville Violent Crime



Three of the Panelists (L-R): Alton Yates, Kevin Gay, Matt Shirk

Jacksonville, FL (November 30, 2011): The three keys to reducing violent crime in Jacksonville according to Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk are enhancing rehabilitation efforts systematically in criminal justice, funding and expanding prisoner re-entry programs and supporting a community-wide approach to reaching at-risk children. Mr. Shirk added that by his estimation, violent crime the majority of the time is directly related to illegal drugs. These were some of the ideas he presented as a panelist at the University of North Florida on November 29th during ‘The 904 Project: A Town Hall Event.’

“The Criminology students here at UNF and the organizers of this discussion should be commended for initiating this important conversation,” said the Public Defender. “Ninety-nine percent of the time, our office is representing the individuals that make up the statistics presented at the Town Hall. We join with the different sectors of the community represented here in the desire to continue working toward solutions and conversations like this will keep ideas flowing.”

The event was the culmination of a research project done by UNF’s graduate criminology students who were inspired by the award-winning documentary film *The 904*. The students presented new data on crime rates in Jacksonville and a provocative media audit of local coverage of crime issues. The student research team (pictured, right) consisted of Laura Davie, Kevin Larose-Renner, Sigrid Wellhausen and Robert Farley.



‘The 904 Project’ featured an introduction by UNF President John Delaney and a Town Hall Panel moderated by UNF Criminology & Criminal Justice Department Chair, Dr. Michael Hallett and WJCT’s Melissa Ross. Panelists who attended in addition to Shirk were: Dolly Dillin from Jacksonville Children’s Commission, Frank Denton the Senior Editor of the Florida Times-Union/jacksonville.com, Alton Yates, Civil Rights Icon and Kevin Gay the President & CEO, Operation New Hope.
