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Free legal seminar explains the basics

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Lawyer Brigitta Hawkins hears her share of misinformation through her work in Social Security disability law.

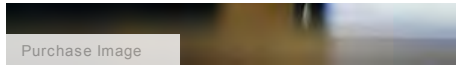
While Hawkins can't educate everyone, she knows there are plenty of people who'd welcome a chance to hear from those with a solid understanding of the legal system. So in 2009, the Titusville resident founded Space Coast Community Law School, twice-annual, free seminars for those who "have a need, interest or just want to learn more about the law."

The popular series, a project of the Brevard County Bar Foundation taught by local lawyers and judges, offers an overview of general legal concepts with no tests or quizzes.

Topics include firearms, identity theft and how to choose an attorney. This year's fall sessions begin Thursday and run weekly in the evening through Nov. 1 at the Moore Justice Center in Viera.

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Samuels Trial 6/9/10-- Jury selection was ongoing when this photo was taken during the Christopher Samuels trial in Judge Charles Holcomb's courtroom at the Moore Justice Center. Judge Holcomb. Photo by Rik Jesse, FLORIDA TODAY / Rik Jesse, FLORIDA TODAY

Written by Britt Kennerly FLORIDA TODAY

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"I wanted to get this education out there, because in my law practice, I saw a lot of people not understanding how the system works," said Hawkins, a native of Austria who moved to Brevard County in the 1990s and has been practicing law since 2006.

"The bare-bones understanding of how our government works is often not there," Hawkins said.

Recently, bankruptcy and foreclosure sessions have been popular, and gun-related sessions always draw interest, Hawkins said.

Such education is "a great thing for everybody," said Laura Moody of



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the State Attorney General's Office in Brevard.

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- When: 6 to 8 p.m. Thursdays through Nov. 1
- Where: Moore Justice Center jury assembly room, 2825 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera
- Register: sccls.com or 321-269-6833

She often meets people who are "absolutely shocked about what is not criminal and what is, what can and can't be pursued in civil court cases," she said.

"Generally speaking, people who've never been involved in the court system and may go their entire life without coming in contact with it, only know what they've learned from TV or reading," she said.

Hawkins, who moderates and is assisted by Jamie Batson, said she and other lawyers strive to focus on "what every household ought to know."

"When you talk about the Constitution, I will show you what it actually says, though you can interpret it any which way you want," she said. "There are so many people who want to know more but don't know where to go."

The program is funded through sponsor donations to the Brevard County Law Foundation.

The free admission is important, since "even a \$2 fee would keep some people out," Hawkins said.

Contact Kennerly at 321-242-3692, bkennery@floridatoday.com or at facebook/bybrittkennerly.

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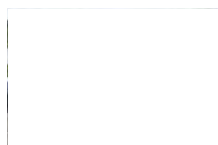
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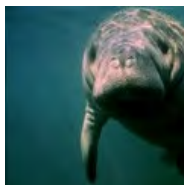
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