

Religion

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North Forsyth Gospel Ensemble sings strictly to please the Lord

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Community News Editor

A group of North Forsyth students is saying "no" to teen-age vices and "yes" to a lifestyle of Christian values.

The members of the North Forsyth Gospel Ensemble sing at churches and other events around the city. But, they insist, they are more than just a group of kids who sing Christian songs.

"This gives us a chance to minister to people everywhere and tell them how we feel about God," said Toni Hines. "We love the Lord and we want to tell everybody about that. We especially want other young people to see how we feel and how happy it makes us."

"We're setting our lives toward God and Godly things instead of sitting around on the corner," said Cynthia Coleman. "Most young people have not accepted Christ in their lives. I think we're setting a

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good example."

The ensemble was formed in December when Tomorris Horne decided to pursue his dream of bringing young people together to sing about God. Mr. Horne said that he knew that there were other young people who shared both his passion for singing and for using their talents to serve God.

"This was a dream for me," said Mr. Horne, the ensemble's pianist. "Some people had asked me to do this, and I just hadn't gotten to it before. I knew that there were some talented people in this school, so I decided to start a group."

Since December, the ensemble has been invited to appear throughout the city and in some out-of-town areas. They quickly are gaining a word-of-mouth reputation and demand for their appearances is increasing. But group members said that they are slightly disappointed that they have not had more of an opportunity to share their songs with their peer group. The group has appeared on the program at two of the school's assemblies. They wish they had more opportunities.

"Some of the kids who have heard us before have asked if we could be on the program at some assemblies, but so far we have only been on two," said Ms. Hines. "I don't know what it is, but hopefully they'll let us be at more assemblies."

Dwight Linville, president of the ensemble and one of the group's tenors, said that the group practices three times each week. Anyone is invited to audition for membership, with the major prerequisite being the ability to sing. He said that group members put in a lot of hours practicing and perfecting the songs that they sing, but despite the opinions of some of their peers, they are not "squares" or social misfits who are out of touch with the things that teen-agers enjoy.

"Don't get me wrong. We like to go to movies and do things like other kids," he said. "We're not weird or anything. We just enjoy singing gospel music. We're full of energy. Mostly, everybody is in the church. We get out and do things. It's just that now most of our time is dedicated to the Lord."

"We joke around a lot, but when it's time to practice, we practice," said Ms. Coleman. "We're serious about what we do, but we do have fun, too. Sometimes we argue but we're sort of like a family. We argue and we have fun, just like in any other family."

Because they are a talented group of musicians, the students could have chosen to become involved with any number of musical pursuits. But they stress that singing gospel music is a conscious decision for them to spread their message among young people.

"This is a good way to inspire people in this school to get into church," said Terry Johnson, the drummer for the ensemble. "It's better to be in church than in the world. We sing gospel music because we can get more into it than rap music. Rap is everywhere but gospel is inspirational. It makes you feel like going on to better things in life. We're all drug-free and we're singing about how we feel about the Lord."

Many members of the group are "PKs," or preachers' kids, but the members said that does not exempt them from some of the usual teen-age rebellion about church. The group said, too, that being in the ensemble has changed some of their attitudes about church and God and had major effects on their lives.

"Before I went out on Saturdays, my mother always would tell me that no matter how late I came in, I still had to get up and go to church on Sunday morning," said Ms. Lockhart. "When I got into this group, it helped me understand why I was going to church. At



photo by Sam Greenwood

The North Forsyth Gospel Ensemble was formed last December and members say that they enjoy spending time just sharing their love of Christ with their peers and the community.

first, I wasn't really getting anything out of it. Now I am."

Another group member agreed. "A lot of us are 'PKs.' I'm a 'PK.' I've always gone to church. It used to be because someone said I had to or because it was what was expected of me," said Jacinta Turner, an alto. "Since, I've been in this group I feel that I understand better why I'm going to church and what things mean. Now I get up on my own and I get ready to go. I'm anxious. This has inspired a whole new spiritual outlook for me."

Loretta Salter said that being in the group "gave me a better outlook on life and encouraged me to stay on the right track."

The ensemble is a sorted lot. Some of the members are children of ministers, others are not. Some of them are "saved" and some are not. There have been around the church their entire lives and are just discovering life within the church. Some of them socialize frequently and others are more introverted. But they are bound by their mutual interest in making Christ first in their lives and by their desire to illustrate that in their music.

"We sing to the glory of God," said Tina Hauser, an

alto with the ensemble. "If we only touch one person with our songs, then that person can touch somebody else. But even if no one else responds to us, we can feel good because we know that we're doing good. This also tells the public how different denominations can work together and be successful. We're from all different denominations and we all work together."

The students are serious about what they do and are quick to point out the distinction between performing and singing in concert.

"We don't perform," said Ms. Hauser. "We sing. We don't consider what we do performing. We don't try to fake anything in public. If we want to shout, we shout. If we want to cry, we cry. But it's the same in rehearsal. It's something that we feel, and it's not like the feelings are just something we do to make the audience react. Even if they don't respond at all, we know how we feel about what we are doing."

Other group members are Camille Sprinkle, Janet Clyburn, Tracey Commodore, Amanda Harris, DeShaunda Hampton, Yvette McCloud, Donsuella Dykes, Von Clark, Nelson Little, Maurice LeGrant, David LeGrant and Tonya Turner.

NFL football player, former Happy Hill Gardens resident pushes drug abuse prevention

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Community News Editor

Like many young boys in Happy Hill Gardens, Chris Barber had to sidestep obstacles during his childhood to avoid getting into serious trouble. He found a way out through athletics and now is a member of the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals. But he says he hasn't been gone so long that he can't remember how tough it is for kids to avoid drugs and handle peer pressure.

Mr. Barber returned to his old neighborhood last Friday to talk with youngsters about staying free of drugs and developing their minds as well as their bodies. He appeared as a guest of the STEP ONE Outreach's Happy Hill Gardens community program, coordinated by Geraldine Winfield. Admitting that a lecture was the last thing kids wanted to hear, Mr. Barber said he hoped simply to talk with them about common sense.

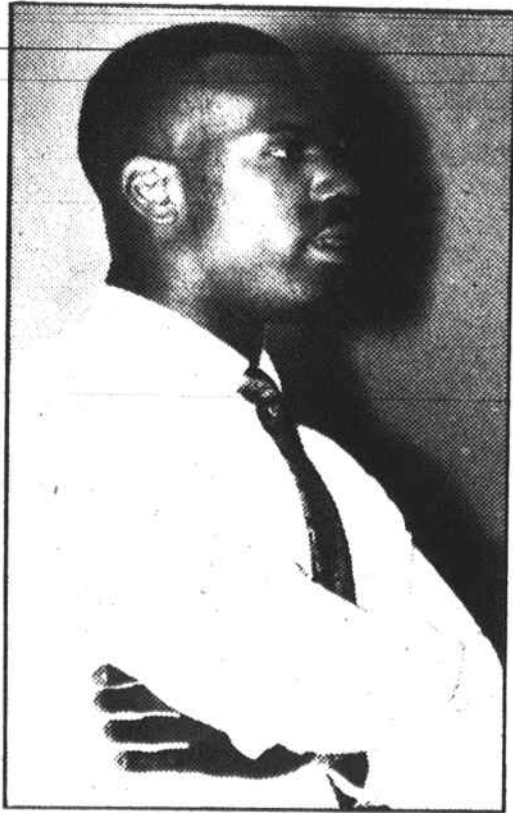
"This is not a time for me to come up here and preach. We all know what we need to do," said the Parkland High School graduate.

"Professional football was something that I wanted to do, but I didn't know if I'd be able to or not. I had to ask myself some important questions, like was I willing to work harder and was I satisfied with myself."

Mr. Barber said he realized that the answer to both questions was "no" and that he needed to work harder both on school and his athletics in order to achieve. His determination, he said, was boosted by the fact that he saw many of his friends' lives destroyed by drugs.

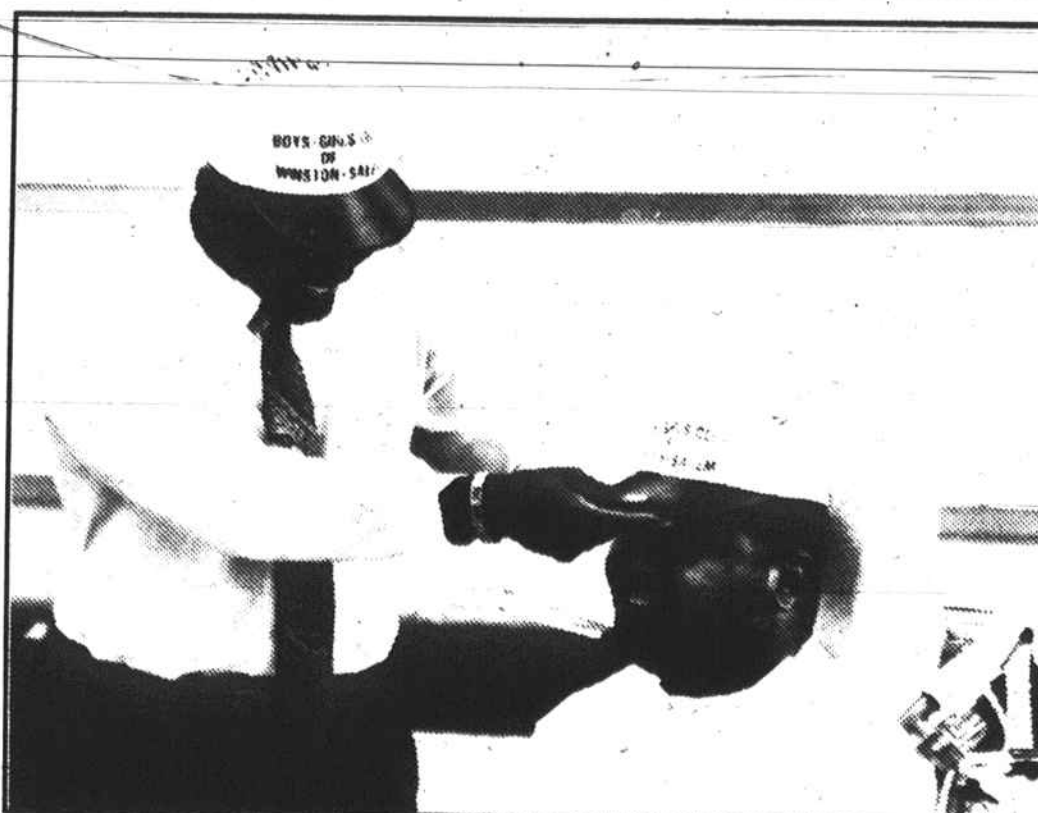
"I saw a lot of my friends get involved with drugs. It wasn't as big a problem as it is now, but it was problem enough to steer guys who were great athletes the wrong way."

Mr. Barber's brother, Sterling, was a standout high school athlete, and those who knew him predicted a virtually guaranteed professional athletic career. But a 1985 accident rendered Sterling a quadriplegic; his athletic career was ended. Introducing his brother, Sterling asked his young audience to consider what they would do if they suddenly



Chris Barber discusses the dangers of drug abuse with Happy Hill Gardens youngsters and lends a helping hand to his brother, Sterling.

ly were unable to compete in sports. "When I was a kid, I had a dream to play professional football, but that ended up not being possible," said Sterling. "I thought I



photos by Sam Greenwood

could play in the pros, but I'm the reality of what can happen to plans."

Mr. Barber said that his brother's accident motivated him because

he saw how Sterling adjusted and was able to set goals and use his mind to accomplish those goals.

"My brother really influenced me. He was gifted as an athlete," he

said. "His accident set him back -- as far as football. It may have stopped him as far as his future in football, but that's all. If you want to be doctors, lawyers or teachers, you can do it. But you have to prepare yourselves now and you can't do that if you're involved with drugs."

Mr. Barber said also that young residents of Happy Hill Gardens, or any other housing project, should not be discouraged by the stigmas other people place on them because of where they live. "We all grew up in Happy Hill Gardens, and we didn't let that stop us," said Mr. Barber, who attended A&T State University. "A lot of people from this community are making something of themselves and you all can do the same thing."

Mr. Barber said that sometimes he finds himself getting all caught up in the glitz and glamour that can come with professional athletics. His visit last week, he said, was one of the those occasions which he sets aside to give back to the community that raised him.

CHURCH CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JUNE 3

• White Rock Baptist Church will hold a yard, plate and sandwich sale at 9 a.m. The Rev. J.S. Mickens is pastor.

• Registration for 10 weeks Shilohian-St. Peter's Summer Enrichment Camp will be held June 3 and June 10 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Shilohian-St. Peter's Day Care Center in the old Brown Elementary School Building, 1125 N.E. Highland Ave. Camp will begin June 12. The program is for ages 5 and a half to 12. Special activities and field trips have been organized. The program offers foreign language, sign language and music/band as a special attraction. Registration will be on a first come, first served basis. For more information call 724-5013 or 724-5035.

• Bethlehem AME Zion Church's Trustee Board will hold a barbecue plate dinner sale from noon to 7 p.m. Deep-fried fish dinners also will

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International Gospel Fellowship to gather at Ambassadors Cathedral

The summer workshop session of the Interdenominational Gospel Fellowship will convene June 5 to 11 at Ambassadors Cathedral, 1500 Harriet Tubman Drive.

The minister of music for the week will be A. Jeffrey LaValley of Flint, Mich.

Guest activities and speakers

for the workshop will include, Elder Robert Taylor of Philadelphia, Monday, June 5; Evangelist Shirley Caesar-Williams, Tuesday, June 6; Pastor Barbara Amos of Chesapeake, Va.; Wednesday, June 7; the Rev. Richard "Mr. Clean" White of Atlanta, Thursday, June 8, Friday, June 9, and Saturday, June 10.

A mass choir rehearsal session will be held Monday through Thursday at 6:30 p.m. and on Friday at 7:30 p.m. Evening services will be held Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m. A "midnight special" program is scheduled for 11 p.m. Friday and a "Saturday Night Live" event is planned for Saturday at 8 p.m.

Other guests will include the Rev. Charles Lyles, Peggy Britt, Leo "Bubba" Taylor, the Rev. Freddie Washington, Rudy Brown, James McKay, Ezekiel Williams, Andrew Jones, John Kee and Daryl Coley.

Registration is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12.

Senior Services organization plans special session, 'Our Elders -- Ourselves,' to assist area adults learning to care for family members

"Our Elders -- Ourselves," a one-day workshop for adults learning about caring for aging parents, will be held Thursday, June 15, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at Senior Services Inc.

A panel of eight geriatric specialists will address such topics as medical aspects of aging, Alzheimer's disease, feelings and family issues and communication.

The group also will discuss community resources,

alternate living options and psychological, physical and social changes in aging.

The registration fee, which includes a box lunch, is \$20.

The workshop will be held

at the Senior Services main office conference center, located on the third floor of the Tobacco Square building, 838 Oak St.

For more information, call Val Forcier at 724-2155.