



Keith Scobie stands with Monica Medina-Murphy outside of Auto Supply Company.

Second chance program excelling

New legislation may help more ex-felons

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Keith Scobie gets choked up when he hears Monica Medina-Murphy talk about his stellar job performance.

"I'm just overwhelmed with gratitude," he said, brushing tears from his eyes. "...to have people that are willing to give you a chance, willing to overlook mistakes that you've made in the past."

Scobie is one of more than 1,300 convicted felons who have come through an innovative program known as Project Reentry. He found employment at Auto Supply Company, Inc. — where Medina-Murphy serves as VP of Human Relations — within weeks of his release from prison. He had served a four-year term for robbery with a dangerous weapon.

"I love my job; I can't say it any other way," he gushed. "It's Monday and I'm looking forward to going back to work."

Founded in 2003, Project Reentry works with inmates prior to their release from prison to prepare them for their impending return to mainstream society. It is an initiative of Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments in conjunction with the Winston-Salem Police Department and the North Carolina Department of Corrections and has more than 30 local partners.

The project is currently available to inmates in six facilities statewide, and will expand to include two additional sites this summer.

"It's not just about second chances," commented Robin Howell, director of the Criminal Justice Department at NWPCCOG. "It's about the community working together as a whole."

Through the 12-week program, inmates gain education and support.



Rebecca Sauter, from left, with Robin Howell Michael Thomas.

They hear motivational speakers and forge relationships with Project Reentry staff members that will extend to the outside world. Within 24 hours of release or on the next business day, the ex-offenders meet with Project Reentry staff to plan for their transition back into society. It is the only pre-to-post program in existence in North Carolina, Sauter says.

"They're coming home to someplace and someone they trust," said Program Director Rebecca Sauter.

Project Reentry doesn't place its participants in jobs. Instead, it empowers them to make their own way, Howell says.

"It's reinforcing what they have done for themselves," she said. "They realize that their success is going to depend on their own efforts."

The program helps the inmates adopt a more positive attitude about their futures, which is imperative to their success, says Project Reentry Coordinator Michael Thomas.

"Once you change your attitude, you will get different results," he pointed out. "You're not hiring that ex-offender; you're hiring the person I am

today."

The project has seen considerable success since its inception, according to Sauter.

"We have an exceptional employment rate," she stated. "Employers are realizing this is an untapped labor pool."

Participation in the program, which is completely voluntary, spiked 400 percent in the first two years, she added.

For Medina-Murphy, hiring Scobie was both a practical and a moral decision.

"I think about if I were in the same position, how desperate I would probably feel," she remarked. "If we don't give them an opportunity to reestablish their lives, then we are contributing to their recidivism."

President Bush signed the Second Chance Act into law in early April. The new legislation will provide for the creation of similar services to help ex-offenders reintegrate and become productive members of society. Additional legislation is still needed to bolster programs like Project Reentry, Sauter says.

"There needs to be permanent, statewide legislative funding for this," she asserted. "To invest something in that infrastructure — it is so needed."

ly, or would like to have a family in the future. These men may want to talk about storing frozen sperm cells before treatment (sperm banking). When a testicle is removed, that side of the scrotum looks and feels empty; artificial testicles (prosthesis placed in the scrotum) are potential options following surgery to give a more natural look. You should talk about these and any other concerns you have with your doctor when making treatment choices.

— Contribution by Sarah Langdon

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Martin Luther King...we are waiting on a messiah," said Cotton. "We are the ones we've been waiting for," she continued.

"If things are going to change, we ourselves have to change them."

Cotton said African-American youth in today's society "easily forget and have become complacent." But that the elders who attended the conference wanted to aid the redefinition of the movement, and make it applicable to young people.



Rev. Walker

King Maker

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said Fauntroy, pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, who has pastored for more than 50 years.

"Politics is the process of deciding who gets how much," he said as the panelists voiced their approvals.

The panels agreed that what took place decades ago set the foundation for today's youth and adults to take action.

"It seems people are waiting for the resurrection of

Law Enforcement Week events

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem Police Department, the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office, the Kernersville Police Department and the North Carolina Highway Patrol in Forsyth County are joining forces to commemorate National Law Enforcement Week, being observed May 12-17. The week honors those

officers who have been killed or injured in the line of duty.

An opening ceremony will be held at 1 p.m. on Monday, May 12, in Hanes Auditorium in the Salem Fine Arts Center at Salem College. WXII News' Cameron Kent will serve as Master of Ceremonies. Mayor Allen Joines will read a proclamation and a roll of officers killed in the line of duty will

be read. The winners of the law enforcement poster contest in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools will also be recognized.

A memorial service to remember fallen officers in Forsyth County is scheduled for 11 a.m. Thursday, May 15, at Pinedale Christian Church, 3395 Peters Creek Parkway.

Atkinson

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The school honored her in 2005, with the new Wilveria Bass Atkinson Science Building.

Atkinson's brother thanked the university for all it has done to honor his sister.

"It was a very pleasant event that the university has taken to honor her and to explain who she was and what she did for this school and for family and friends," commented Marshall Bass, a well-known city resident and philanthropist who has gifted nearly \$400,000 to WSSU. "She was indeed a strong student and a strong leader."

Atkinson is also survived by her son, George Bradley Atkinson, a resident of Morehead City. Provost Pedro Martinez said all of Atkinson's many accomplishments — which included starting partnerships between WSSU and universities in Japan, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark — pale in comparison to the lives she influenced.

"None of that can compare to the countless lives she touched. (Hers was) a life and spirit that lives on in many lives... a legacy that challenges us to work always to create a better community," he said.

Michelle Cook, executive director of the WSSU Foundation, read passages from the 1 Corinthians 13, also known as the Love Chapter. She said the words accurately described Atkinson's demeanor.

"(Love) really governed everything that she did."

The love that she had lives on on this campus and we thank you so much for sharing her," Cook told Atkinson's family members.

Several of Atkinson's colleagues also shared their memories. The words "committed" "tough" and "caring" surfaced again and again in their remarks.

"The thing I noticed immediately about Dr. Atkinson was the love that she had for her students," related Professor Bodiford Stackhouse. "One of her goals for the university was for it to be known worldwide and she had the drive and the fight to get it done."

Dr. Azeez Aileru, also a professor, described the afternoon when Atkinson called and offered him a position at WSSU as "the turning point of



WSSU Photo by Garrett Garmes

Geneva Brown talks about her friend.

my life."

"I just don't know what I can say in a minute or two about a woman who had such a great impact on my professional career," he said.

He spoke about the importance of heroism in everyday life, a feat he feels Atkinson mastered artfully.

"This quiet, humble heroism that I found in Dr. Atkinson is the greatest heroism of all," Aileru said.

School Board Member and retired educator Geneva Brown had been friends with Atkinson since their days at Dillard High School in Goldsboro. The two were cheerleaders and confidants. She regaled the audience with tales of a mischievous Atkinson, whom she affectionately called "Willie," in her youth.

"Much of what has been said about Willie has been about her academic work," Brown stated. "I come from a different way."

Brown spoke about Atkinson's big heart and dedication to family and friends.

"In words and deed, she showed everybody just how dear they were (to her)," she told the group. "There was never a question about her love; it was unselfish and generous."



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Tues., May 13, 11:30 a.m.

Golden Corral
1507 Cotton Grove Rd.
Lexington (Hwy I-85
to Hwy 8N, Exit 91)

Wed., May 14, 11:30 a.m.

Golden Corral
180 Hanes Mall Circle
Winston Salem (I-40 to
Stratford Rd. to Hanes Mall)

Thurs., May 22, 11:30 a.m.

Town and Country Restaurant
627 S. Main St.
King
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H3449_4003, 3/17/08, H3404_4003, 3/17/08

U4225, 3/08