

# Ministry fund-raiser will feature prayer, music

Organization works to show inmates a different path

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

It was the best and worst of times for Alvin Hayes when he was in prison.

His stint behind bars was bitter because it meant a more than two-year separation from his wife, Melody, and the couple's four children. It was sweet



Stilwell

because Hayes says he found and accepted Jesus Christ and made connections he feels will last a lifetime through the Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries.

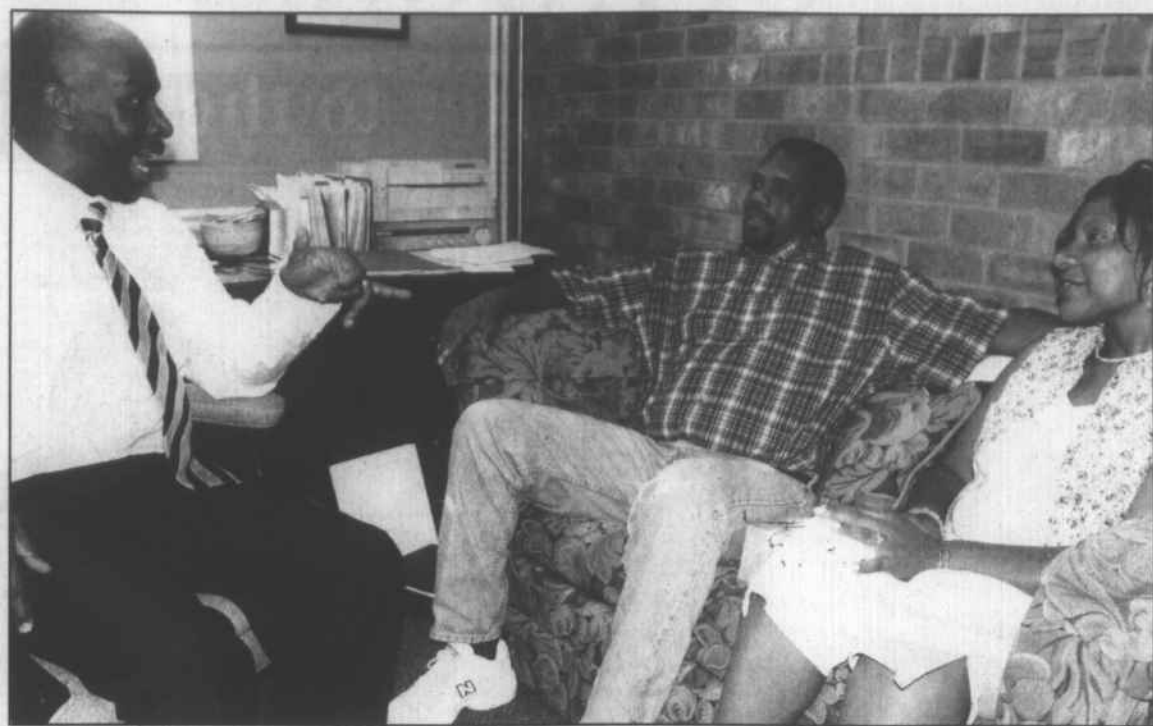
"There were so many blessings that I received," said Hayes, who left the minimal security prison off of Cherry Street two years ago and now lives with his family in Elkin.

For years, the Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries has worked inside of the Cherry Street prison, the Forsyth County Detention Center and the county's youth lockup to light a path for inmates who choose to follow it.

"We try to be visible and let them come to us," said Rodney Stilwell, the ministries' senior chaplain.

For Hayes, the myriad services the ministries offer provided him with a positive, spiritual outlet. He was active in a program run by the ministries that prepares inmates to make the transition to freedom and a regular at Bible studies and religious services, often sitting side by side with non-inmates from churches throughout the county. He even sang in the prison, even though, he admits, his vocals aren't stellar. Thinking back to some of those times, brings tears to Hayes' eyes.

"There were little old ladies telling a country boy like me that, 'Son, God loves you,'" said



Alvin and Melody Hayes talk to Chaplain Martin Pickett Sunday at the Cherry Street prison chapel.

Photo by Kevin Walker

Hayes, whose demon was drugs for many years. Hayes was especially touched when a chaplain and volunteer went to visit his dying father on his behalf (Hayes was unable to get clearance at the time to leave the prison).

Fittingly, Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries has titled its annual fund-raiser Hope on the Inside. Beginning Friday, the ministries will host a series of events aimed at not only raising much-needed money, but also increasing public awareness of the ministries' work and showing those behind bars that there is another way. The centerpiece of the slate of events will be a concert Sunday at Wait Chapel by five-time Grammy winner Larnelle Harris. The gospel star will give a separate concert on Saturday for the inmates at the Cherry Street prison.

Tomorrow, a multiracial group of ex-offenders, church volunteers and others plan to surround the Forsyth County Detention Center for a massive prayer circle. One of the facets of the

ministries that Stilwell is most proud of is the fact that it brings together volunteers from black, white and Hispanic congregations throughout the county. Christians who would not normally interact, come together for the ministries' cause, the chaplain said.

The Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries is not overtly political, but some issues can't be avoided when it comes to the criminal justice system, Stilwell said. Race is one of those issues. The vast majority of those behind bars at all of the facilities in which the ministries work are African-American. It is a reality that the organization wants to change.

"We need more Bibles and less bars," Stilwell said. "Our goal in the Christian community is to put that jail out of business and turn it into a library."

Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries has faith that is possible if inmates embrace the power of Christ as Hayes did.

"When God's love changes someone's heart, we don't have to worry about putting handcuffs on



Larnelle Harris

someone's hands," Stilwell said.

But the ministries' programs and services can't sustain themselves on faith alone. The organization receives no public money. Donations from churches, foundations, and individuals are the organization's lifeblood. The goal is to raise \$50,000, which will cover just a part of the organization's operating costs.

Hayes has shared his experiences at past concert fund-raisers

held by Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries. Hayes says he is a changed man thanks in large part to the work of the ministries.

"I just have to keep putting God first," Hayes said.

But for every Alvin Hayes, there are 10 others behind bars who avoid the prison chapel like a dentist's office. But the hard work of the ministries is never in vain, said Chaplain Martin Pickett, who works primarily at the Forsyth County Detention Center.

"If we just reach one person, it is worth it," Pickett said, "because we have to break this cycle. It is vicious."

The public is welcome to join the jail prayer circle on Friday, starting at around 6:15 p.m. The Larnelle Harris concert will be Sunday at Wait Chapel on the campus of Wake Forest University at 4 p.m. Admission is free and an offering will be received to benefit the Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries. For further information, call 759-0063, ext. 35.

# \$600,000 HUD grant announced for WSSU

Federal money will be used for school's Atkins CDC

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Sen. Richard Burr announced last week a \$600,000 federal grant for Winston-Salem State University (WSSU). The grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Historically Black Colleges and Universities grant program, will assist WSSU in revitalizing



Burr

its surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

"Our historically black colleges and universities are institutions of which we can all be proud," Burr said. "These funds will help Winston-Salem State University continue its efforts to enrich the community and assist local businesses and businesses."

WSSU will use funds to expand the community development activities of the Simon Green Atkins Community Development Corp. (SGACDC), an outreach arm of the university established in 1998. The SGACDC works with local businesses and civic organizations to bring affordable housing, business opportunity and credit counseling to Winston-Salem.

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