



Peer Health Educators front row, from left: Fredrick Moore, Juanita Leecost-Seat and Reginald Clinton. Back row, from left: Harold Hollins, Antonio Keaton, Tracey Gainey and James Donaldson III.

Telling it Like it Is

Program turns to ex-offenders to reach high-risk populations

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

City native Juanita Leecost-Seat will be the first to admit she hasn't always set the best example for younger women.

But since she was released from jail on Jan. 4, Leecost-Seat, a former prostitute and drug addict who is celebrating 45 days of sobriety, has made it her mission in life to help others get on a better path.

"In me getting clean, it was time for me to make some better choices," said the grandmother of two. "I wanted to change the image that I portrayed to people by doing something positive."

Fortunately for Leecost-Seat, opportunity came knocking. The Forsyth County Department of Public Health's POSSE (Prevent the Ongoing Spread of STIs Everywhere) program recently partnered with the Forsyth County Detention Center and the Urban League of Winston-Salem to create the "Straight Talk ... Keeping it Real" peer health education program.

Supported by a grant from the N.C. Department of Public Health, Straight Talk trains ex-offenders — a population considered to be at high-risk for contracting HIV or other STIs (sexually transmitted infections) — to offer safe sex education and outreach to their peers.

"It's really just expanding our ability to reach out into the community," said POSSE Supervisor Jennifer Nall. "They're really gatekeepers for us, to give us that access."

In exchange for their efforts, the ex-offenders receive a stipend, as well as weekly training and support to help them land employment by utilizing the Urban League's proven methods.

"I can guarantee if you follow our methods, you will get a job," Director of Development Alvin Borders told the group. "...We help people with criminal records get jobs all the time."

Patricia Donaldson, who conducts HIV screenings at the jail, helped recruit peer health educators for the program. She said she was excited about the opportunities it will afford the ex-offenders.

"Sometimes, when ex-offenders get out of jail, they face a brick wall and it's hard for them to find employment. This way, we can pick them up, give them a little stipend to have some income," she said. "It's giving them a sense of pride, a sense of belonging, and I'm just so happy about it."

The new program is funded with the same grant that has allowed the Health Department to offer HIV/AIDS testing to everyone admitted to the Forsyth County Detention Center for the better part of the last two years. The grant ends in



Alvin Borders addresses the group.



The Health Department's Patricia Donaldson (left) and Jennifer Nall.

May, but Nall is confident it will be renewed.

"We're fully confident that this is going to be a project that continues," she said. "Like the jail testing program, we're expecting this to be a model program throughout the state, because we're the first ones to use Expanded Testing funds in this way."

Seven ex-offenders are currently enrolled in the program, which celebrated its official kickoff at the Urban League Tuesday afternoon. Among them is 24 year-old Antonio Keaton, an ex-offender who has volunteered with POSSE for the last five years.

"I'm excited. I think my main reason why I'm so excited is the fact that I get to help other people get in touch with themselves and help them get peace of mind," said Keaton, a busi-

ness management and social work major at Winston-Salem State University. "I'm a MSM (man who has sex with men) so I like to preach to my boys about the fact that we all need to stay healthy and get tested. Knowing as many people as I know, it should be easy."

Leecost-Seat is also eager to make her mark through Straight Talk.

"God fixed it so this would be my next step after jail and I'm grateful for it," she declared. "If I can change one young woman's mind or one girl's mind about having unprotected sex, I did my job."

Three peer health educator slots are still available for ex-offenders who meet the program's qualifications.

For more information, contact POSSE at 703-3212 or 703-3213.

NEWS CLIPS

Compiled from staff, wire and submitted reports

Smith Reynolds Airport gets funds for improvements

As part of the N.C. Department of Transportation's ongoing commitment to improving aviation in North Carolina, the N.C. Division of Aviation awarded \$1.85 million in Federal Block Grant funds to Smith Reynolds Airport in Winston-Salem for a taxiway improvement project.

This project will replace the primary pavement leading to the current hangars in the corporate aviation area. The work will consist of grading, patching and overlaying the current pavement. This project will extend the infrastructure health of the airport for many years and will provide for safe entrance and exit in the area.

These funds came from a \$22,758,301 Federal Aviation Administration block grant that the Division of Aviation received at the end of September 2011. The DOA will be programming this grant out into multiple sub grants to general aviation airports across the state for a variety of capital improvement projects.

Smith Reynolds Airport is a general aviation facility that has an approximate \$137 million a year cumulative total impact on North Carolina and supports more than 1,100 jobs, based on a 2006 statewide economic impact study.

WFU's tuition to increase

The Wake Forest University Board of Trustees approved raising undergraduate tuition by 3.9 percent for the 2012-2013 academic year during their winter meeting

on Feb. 3.

Undergraduate tuition will increase from the current \$41,100 to \$42,700 next year. The decision reflects a determined effort to keep tuition increases low. For the second year in a row, the University has kept the rate of cost increases below 4 percent.

"Wake Forest has a long tradition as a campus of opportunity," said President Nathan Hatch. "This tuition increase comes while carefully considering spending restraints. Additionally, we continue our efforts to offer financial aid, such as our new Wake Forest Scholars program, to offset the costs of maintaining Wake Forest's high standard of quality."

With changes in room, board and other fees, the overall cost of attendance is expected to increase 3.6 percent to \$58,260.

Neal to speak at WSSU tonight

Duke University Professor of Black Popular Culture Mark Anthony Neal will keynote Winston-Salem State University's Seventh Annual Black Male Symposium this evening (Thursday) Feb. 16 at 7 p.m. in Dillard Auditorium.

The day will also include a morning panel presentation at 10 a.m. in Dillard Auditorium. The panelists will include Dr. Trae Cotton, WSSU Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs; Dr. William Boone, WSSU associate professor of African American Culture, Chevara Orrin, WSSU director of Business Services and advisor to Black Men for Change; Dr. Kwame Z. Shabazz, associate professor of African American Studies; and Edward D. Gerald, a student member of Black Men for Change.

Sponsored by the Office

of Student Activities, executed by student leader Zuogwi Reeves and the student group Black Men for Change, the Black Male Symposium examines issues related to Black male upward mobility and progress to uplift black males, prepare them to be leaders, and see them through the graduation process.

Culinary Conference reception offers good food and more

An opening reception for the American Culinary Federation South East Conference will be held on Feb. 19 from 6-9 p.m. at The Millennium Center, 101 West 5th St.

More than 300 of some of the best chefs in America will be on hand for the Conference, which has as its theme, "Celebrating Diversity, Sustaining Our Future."

Children from four area programs currently participating in The Chef and Child cooking classes, including children from Family Services, Inc. Child Development, will prepare the nutritional segment of the evening's offerings. They will also be vying for culinary awards.

The reception will also offer regional culinary treats such as barbecue ribs and sizzling hot wings and live music by the Mediocre Bad Guys. Tickets are \$30. Admission also includes a raffle ticket for a brand new Gibson Flying V Guitar signed by rock celebrities. The event is a fundraiser for The Chef and Child Foundation and Second Harvest Food Bank Childhood Hunger Programs. Local sponsors are Texas Pete Hot Sauces, Uncle Ben's Rice, IFH/CHEFSMART, The Millennium Center, McCormick Spices and Lowes Foods. Tickets may be purchased by calling 336-692-8622 or by going online at www.thestockedpot.com and then clicking on the class calendar, then on Feb 19.



Neal

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