

Program offers inmates rare quality time with their kids

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

Before Saturday, Stanley Reaves had not laid eyes on his nine year-old son Josiah since being incarcerated more than four years ago.

When the boy stepped into the gymnasium at Maple Springs United Methodist Church, Reaves, an inmate at Forsyth Correctional Center on Craft Drive, said he was at a loss for words.

"It was exhilarating," he later confessed. "I was at a standstill for a moment."

Missing so much of his son's childhood because of his own mistakes has been difficult, said Reaves, who is serving a seven-year sentence on habitual felon charges.



Key

The two were brought together through Forsyth Jail and Prison Ministries' Fun with the Father program. The half-day event included a slate of activities for inmates and their children, everything from games and arts and craft projects, to Josiah's personal favorite: making paper airplanes.

The day offered the men a rare opportunity to spend time with their children off the prison grounds. The inmates earned the privilege by completing Courageous, a five-week program centered around their roles as Christian husbands, fathers and men. They also had to remain infraction free within the facility for the duration of the program. At the end of the last Courageous session last week, the inmates took a pledge to be Courageous men and uphold the values they'd honed during the program.

"(The program) changed my thinking. For a long time, my thinking was distorted and it made me miss what's most important in my life, which is him and Sierra," Reaves said, referring to Josiah and his 21 year-old daughter. "...That's part of my rehabilitation. That's part of restoring me to sanity. That's what the Ministry does. It keeps clarity upstairs."

Tim Key, a self employed lawn care and handy man and longtime FJPM volunteer, facilitated the weekly Courageous



Photos by Skip Archer

Bruce Dunlap poses with his daughter, Mykia, and Stanley Reaves poses with son, Josiah.

sessions at the minimum security correctional facility. Seeing the men reap the rewards of all their hard work during Fun with the Father was rewarding for him, said Key, who also leads the nine month-long Disciple Bible Study program at the prison.

"It's kind of like the pot of gold (at the end of a rainbow)," he remarked. "After investing that time in the guys, I get to see the end result."

Thomasville native Bruce Dunlap said his 10 year-old daughter Mykia comes to the prison almost every week to visit him. But visits within the facility have time limits and prohibit the inmates from hugging or holding their children except at the beginning and end of visits. Saturday's event had no such restrictions. Dunlap took full advantage of the unrestricted quality time.

"This is real special. I am really enjoying it so far," commented Dunlap, who is serving a five and a half year sentence for drug trafficking. "When we have our weekly visits, it's only two hours, but this is a little longer and we get to bond a little more."

Mykia, a self-described "daddy's girl," said she had looked forward to the day for some time. The best part?

"I get to spend time with my daddy and play games," she said with a wide smile.

Forsyth Correctional Center Superintendent Benita Witherspoon said she found it refreshing to see the men outside the confines of prison.

"They probably have to be very manly

in the facility, but here, you see the softer side," she said. "I see them lifting weights, but here, they're lifting children up. It's pretty good to see them taking on that role."

The Ministry launched Fun with the Father three years ago as a means of maintaining the fragile bonds of parenthood for the men who are serving time, explained Chaplain Tejado Hanchell, pastor of Mount Calvary Holy Church.

"I think the main thing is connecting the fathers and their kids. Incarceration does something to the individual, but in many respects, the entire family's doing the time," said the father of two. "... Eighty-five percent of men in prison came from a fatherless home. We want to break the cycle, and we believe one of the ways to break that cycle is to focus on fathers."

Strengthening the familial bonds and support networks on the outside means the men who take part in the program are less likely to reoffend, explained the Nassau, Bahamas native.

For Reaves, an alumnus of Glenn High School, the event presented a long overdue opportunity to turn the page of his checkered history and look to the future with unprecedented clarity.

"It's a fresh start," declared the 41 year-old. "That's what it means to me."

For more information about Forsyth Jail & Prison Ministries initiatives or to contribute to the organization, visit www.forsythjpm.org or call (336) 759-0063.

WFU

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Harris, the oldest of three children, launched his college career by learning about his future alma mater's history and traditions at the school's Deacon Camp, which was held prior to freshmen Move-In Day on Aug. 23.

The group toured the school's original campus in Wake Forest, N.C., visited important local landmarks such as BB&T Field and even met President Nathan Hatch, who accepted Harris' offer to follow him on Twitter.

"It's just cool to have the president on the social networking sites to follow me back," he said.

Incoming freshman Mankapr Conteh hopes to become a journalist or investigator for an international news outlet such as CNN.

"I care a lot about international issues because my family is from Sierra Leone," explained the Wisconsin native. "...I am always aware of the disparities between my life and the life of a Sierra Leonean child, and that's what I want my career to help change."

Conteh, an actress, singer and dancer who has graced many stages in her hometown of Bear, Del., said she hopes to start her own nonprofit organization someday. Her father returned to the West African nation after being laid off from his job as a research chemist two years ago and, because Conteh, an only child, landed a Presidential Scholarship to cover the cost of her education, her mother will soon be able to join her father in Sierra Leone.

A strong proponent of community service, incoming freshman Devin Williams took advantage of the school's

SPARC (Students Promoting Action and Responsibility in the Community) pre-orientation program, a four-day blitz that introduces incoming students to the city through a variety of community service initiatives.

"SPARC was amazing," said Williams. "It let me kind of feel and touch the different kinds of community service opportunities that are out there."

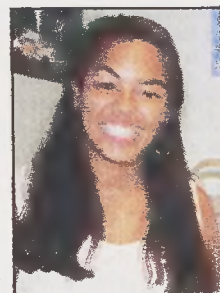
On the school's official Move-In Day, 100 jersey-clad student athletes were deployed to help haul boxes, furniture, televisions and anything else the incoming class needed in preparation for the first day of classes on Aug. 29. The incoming class is 25 percent minority. Of that figure, seven percent are black.

By the time their classmates converged on campus amid a flurry of activity Friday, Williams said she and many of the hundreds of other students who took part in pre-orientation programs were already beginning to settle in.

"It looks like such an overwhelming scene but I just feel so content and relaxed because I already see familiar faces," the Ashburn, Va. native said.

Williams, the oldest of three children, says she became acquainted with Wake Forest through Dr. Maya Angelou, a famed poet, WFU professor and close family friend. Williams, who dreams of becoming a television writer or producer, said the school's strong athletic program was an added bonus for her.

"Wake Forest gives you the best of both worlds. You have the small class sizes but the big ACC sports," she remarked. "...It was really exciting for me to be able to come to the school, and if I ever need a home cooked meal, I can call Auntie Maya."



Devin Williams

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Women in Leadership Night

Wednesday, September 5th
Noon Day Jamboree
Celebration With Choirs and Dance!
Evening Worship
6:00 pm Dr. Robert Scott - Teaching
7:00 pm Dr. Charles Booth - Preaching
Men in Leadership Night

Thursday, September 6th
Noon Day
Hear Rev. J. R. Samuels' One Last Time On The Large Screen!
Evening Worship
6:00 pm Dr. Robert Scott - Teaching
7:00 pm Dr. Charles Booth - Preaching
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