

Graduates of recovery program see sunny days ahead

BY LAYLA GARMES
THE CHRONICLE

For many, Monday, Nov. 5 was just another Monday. For Tim LaClaire II, it was the best day of his life so far.

The 25-year-old celebrated his completion of the Prodigals Community chronic substance abuse program, his acceptance to Forsyth Technical Community College and his full-time employment at Prodigals.

"Today was my first day, actually," said LaClaire, who will study at Forsyth Tech to earn his EMS certification. "It was fantastic. I've never had a better day in my life."

It is a far cry from where the Trenton, N.J. native was just 14 months ago.

"My life had become so 'unmanageable,' he recalled. "I decided one day I was going to take my life. I felt like I had no other options."

And so, on the evening of Sept. 21, 2011, LaClaire attempted to commit suicide by overdosing on heroin, his drug of choice. When he awakened from a stupor to find he was still alive, LaClaire reached out for help. After receiving medical treatment at several facilities, LaClaire landed at Prodigals, and it is there that he says the real healing began.

Prodigals Community employs a unique method to break clients from their addictions. For 12 to 15 months, clients live at the Prodigals house on Waightown Street and submit to a program that fuses the traditional 12-step model with principles of Christianity. Prodigals' success rate is high.

LaClaire was one of five men who graduated Monday during the Prodigals' Fall Step Up Service, which celebrates the achievements of those who have completed the program, which also teaches job readiness.

"The Prodigals program may be the most difficult thing you've ever accomplished, and your successful completion of this program is likely to be the most rewarding accomplishment of your life. Remember that there is more to come," remarked Chaplain Chip Bristol, who is also a recovering addict.

Executive Director Sally Harper said the organization has "stepped-up" eight men this year, more than in any other year in the organization's two-decade long history.

Steven Draughn's journey began when he entered Prodigals on Aug. 24, 2011.

"I was in bad shape, really. I felt like there was a void in my soul," con-



Steven Draughn (center) worships alongside his son Brandon Draughn (left) and fellow graduate Thomas Smallwood.



Robbie Williams

the sour attitude Williams exhibited in his early days at Prodigals.

"I came here kicking and screaming. I was so broken," Williams admitted. "I've lost a lot, and I hurt the people I love the most, and I just didn't have no one. What I got here is something that I've never felt. This place showed me a way that is unlike anything I could have known I could ever be."

Honorees were each given a photo book depicting their journeys to sobriety, a certificate of completion and a handmade quilt, courtesy of Northwest Baptist Church.

For more information about Prodigals Community, visit <http://prodigals.org> or call (336) 785-0770.



Willie Little prepares to receive his certificate.



Tim LaClaire II



Victor Todd

fessed the 32-year-old, who is a roofer by trade. "I was lost. I couldn't manage my own life. My life was unmanageable."

Prior to coming to Prodigals, Draughn, who struggled with addictions to crack-cocaine and alcohol, was living in a camper. Since completing the program roughly two months ago, he has managed to get out on his own

and land a full time job with Tip Top Roofers.

"I'm paying my own bills, I have my own place," said Draughn, whose 12-year-old son Brandon accompanied him at the ceremony. "It's like a whole new life."

The Step Up celebration was held as part of the agency's weekly Monday evening worship service. Current and former Prodigals residents gathered together with family members and friends to celebrate the occasion. Each honoree was introduced by a fellow Prodigal, many of whom offered inspiring testimonies of their own.

"Prodigals didn't open the gates of heaven to let me in," Prodigal Jessie Fountain said in his introduction of Willie Little. "It opened the gates of hell to let me out."

Little said Prodigals had been the right remedy for him, too.

"I've been in and out of treatments, but this was the tough one, and this was the one that I needed. Tomorrow, I'm gonna have 24 months clean," Little related to boisterous applause.

Victor Todd, a 2010 Step Up graduate who currently serves as an administrative assistant for the organization, said honoree Thomas Smallwood stood out from the moment he walked into the agency

because he was not downtrodden like many others, but grinning from ear to ear.

"You've got this smile that don't quit, and you've got this spirit; it's like a purity in your spirit and it just radiates," Todd told Smallwood. "It don't get no better than that."

Smallwood, who lived out of his storage unit for two weeks prior to entering the program, says he smiles because he knows how far he has come.

"It was so bad for me that I couldn't even live in a homeless shelter because I wouldn't listen to anybody. Addiction took over my life. It made me someone different. It

tortured me, and I allowed it to," related Smallwood, who has battled the disease for over a quarter century. "The reason why the smile won't quit is because of the pain that got me here. I truly believe that I had to go through that pain."

Prodigal Kelly Summerlin introduced his friend and comrade Robbie Williams with a little playful ribbing about

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