

Initiative assists former offenders to become entrepreneurs

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
THE CHRONICLE

Those individuals who have been formerly incarcerated are often a forgotten demographic in our country, which is unfortunate. Realizing there was a void that needed to be filled, Brian Hamilton founded Inmates to Entrepreneurs (ITE).

Winston Starts, which is a startup incubator dedicated to nurturing entrepreneurs, is offering a free eight-week program that is designed for individuals with a criminal background who are interested in learning how to start or grow a business. Classes are offered every Wednesday for eight weeks, from 6-7:30 p.m. on the fourth floor of the 500 W. Fifth Street Tower.

According to Hamilton, the idea for ITE came to him while visiting a prison in Orange County, N.C., with a friend. During the visit, he engaged in a conversation with an inmate pertaining to what the inmate was going to do once he was released.

"I clearly remember thinking to myself, that would be really hard to do with a record," said Hamilton about the conversation. "I thought, instead of trying to get a job, what if people with criminal records go and create one. ... That was the inception of Inmates to Entrepreneurs.

"When people with criminal records get that real second chance at freedom, we all win. Employ-



Lawrence Carpenter, chairman of Inmates to Entrepreneurs, enjoys sharing his story to inspire others.

ment goes up, crime goes down and prisons become less crowded. Tax dollars get used for other purposes and at the end of the day, our country makes good on its promise of equal opportunity."

Lawrence Carpenter, chairman of ITE, connected with Hamilton in 2009. As a former incarcerated individual turned entrepreneur, he is a shining example to those in the program of what a success story looks like. He says the program breaks down the basics of entrepreneurship to give the participants the best plan moving forward for their business.

"It is an eight-week program and you will learn everything," said Carpenter. "It's like Business 101 and we go from how

to start your business all the way down to taxes and marketing. We cover every point of business.

"We just try to break it down to its simplest form, because for me business is simple; it's just certain things you have to do pertaining to business to put yourself in a position to be successful."

While incarcerated, Carpenter knew that he wanted to start his own business upon his release. He knew that working for someone else was not what he wanted to do. He said he realized he made a mistake, but that should not define who he was for the rest of his life.

"I came home and started a very successful business and I realized that the reason why these

things happened for me was I had to change certain things in my life," he said. "I had to change the way I talk, I had to change the way I presented myself, which are things that some of these young men are not willing to do.

"The first thing I always try to do is get them to understand to work on yourself first, because the first thing you have to deal with is yourself."

Carpenter says he loves sharing his story with others, because it serves as

inspiration for others to do the same. He feels his job is not only to provide and support his family, but also use his platform as a ministry to show others there is a right way if you follow God's plan and not your own.

"I serve hope and that's where it comes from, hope," he said. "It is a blessing for me to see these guys transform from being street guys to businessmen. My passion is seeing others being successful. I understood that God put me in a position to help people that other people wouldn't."

Over the years, Carpenter said he has enjoyed all of the success stories that have come through ITE. One of the best rewards for him is hearing that participants in the program have gone on to

become successful entrepreneurs themselves. Carpenter wanted to emphasize that everyone in prison or that has been to prison is not a bad person. He says there are plenty of people walking around that have done things that would have landed them in prison, but just have not been caught.

"Everyone wants grace and mercy when it's for them, but when it's for me to extend grace and mercy, everyone doesn't want to do that," he said. "That is the problem that I have with society, we are a society of judgmental people."

For more information about the initiative, please visit www.inmatestoentrepreneurs.org/program/national2020, or email hannah.huskey@winstonstarts.com, or allit@inmatestoentrepreneurs.org.

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Adams holds public forum on police budget

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

At a place in time where citizens across the country are asking elected officials to take a closer look at how they fund law enforcement, earlier this week Mayor Pro Tempore Denise "DD" Adams held a virtual forum to discuss the police department's budget for fiscal year 2020-21.

Adams, who represents the North Ward, said the purpose of the event was to educate the public and find ways to cultivate the relationship between the community and law enforcement.

"We know that it's not perfect. We know there are a lot of things that could be better, but we are here willing to learn and make this process better," Adams continued, "so our citizens can be more informed than what has happened in the past. In the past we presented the budget and had listening sessions all over town, but as I explained to staff and the council, we need to start communicating in a way that everybody can understand."

To begin the forum, Patrice Toney, the city's budget and evaluation director, gave a presentation on the police department budget, detailing how the department plans to use



DD Adams

the \$78.7 million outlined in the budget.

After the presentation, Toney opened the floor for questions and comments from the public. While several speakers called for the city to bump up the police presence, most of the speakers called for more training on de-escalation. Karen Dorr suggested the city use funding allocated for the Field Services division to offset the cost for the training and create a de-escalation response team.

The Field Services Bureau, which includes the Patrol and Special Operations divisions, makes up 54% of the total budget. "I really think it could come out of the Field Services part of the budget," Dorr said.

"I think it would really behoove this body to

push for what I'm calling a de-escalation response team which would consist of a social worker, psychologist, a police officer and a community member who are all trained specifically in de-escalation techniques."

Pastor Tembila Covington, president of the Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity (MCWSV), echoed Dorr's sentiments when she spoke during the forum. She said that we need to put more effort into training officers in de-escalation, counseling and prevention, as well as more social programs for the community.

"I believe that as we have detailed a budget, perhaps developing a strategic plan that would reallocate some funds towards educational and training programs would be helpful," Covington said.

Before wrapping up the forum, Toney said she would be taking suggestions made during the forum back to the police department to explore some of the changes that need to be made.

A link to the budget presentation including a breakdown of the budget will be posted on the city's website by the end of the week. The forum can be viewed by visiting the city's YouTube page.

Free

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one else was the assailant, not Mr. Long," Lau continued. "A suspect hair was collected from the scene, fingerprints were collected from the scene, matches were collected from the scene. They were all tested and none of them were similar to Long. There were 43 fingerprints collected that didn't match

Long or the victim, pointing to someone else."

Lau, the Duke Law Wrongful Convictions Clinic, and other supporters of the "Free Ronnie Long" movement, received word from the U.S. Court of Appeals and the state on Monday, Aug. 27 and on Thursday Long walked out of the Albarle Correctional Institution a free man.

As he greeted family

members and other loved ones outside the prison, Long, who is now 64, told reporters, "It's been a long road but it's over with now."

Although he is a free man, to receive compensation for his wrongful conviction, Governor Roy Cooper will have to grant Long a pardon of innocence.

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