

Healing Place: seeing and believing

It's just fantastic, and that's all there is to it. Everyone in Wake County should visit The Healing Place, a nonprofit recovery and rehabilitation program for homeless men who are addicted to alcohol and other drugs. The visit would inspire; it would prompt some troubling thought; it would hurt — these stories of men who lost their jobs, their families, and nearly their lives; it would make you ache for the wives and children left behind, for the parents who watched their children self-destruct. It would give you pause that anyone, be he doctor or lawyer or another professional, or a hard-working family man who was on a manufacturing line, can disappear in a daze of alcohol and drugs. Anyone.

Mostly, though, it would give you an inspiring sense of hope. For these men are on the road back. Seventy percent of them will be sober a year after they make it through a multitude of recovery steps at The Healing Place, which is off Lake Wheeler Road in Raleigh. That's a good number. To get to that point, they'll incorporate the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. They'll work. They will participate in meetings where they enforce discipline on each other. They will walk 700 or 800 miles in the course of their recovery, going to classes at Wake County's South Wilmington Street Shelter and to 700 or 800 meetings.

As long as they maintain their resolve, achieving the level of recovery that marks them as "silver chippers," The Healing Place — modeled from a program in Louisville, Ky., and opened in 2001 — will forever protect and support them in all their endeavors. The campus is a group of dormitory-style buildings, but with a design that's part of the mission. As residents move through the phases of recovery, they gain more room and more freedom, to the point where they can leave the premises,

for example. A terrific sculpture by noted local artist Thomas Sayre follows that theme of progress.

In the course of a visit earlier this week, I met a fellow who was facing multiple drunk-driving convictions. He was estranged from his children. His wife had died in an accident while he was in prison. He was



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brought to The Healing Place at the point where he had hit rock bottom. I met a man who was 41, and had been drinking or smoking marijuana since he was 8. I met a 37-year-old who had lost his business and his family. When he begged his mother for another chance, she brought him to The Healing Place.

How did all this happen? A nurse from Wake County found The Healing Place in Louisville, Ky., "quite by accident," said Dennis Parnell, now executive director of The Healing Place of Wake County. Prominent leaders made a couple of trips to Louisville. After the second trip, Wake's human services director, Maria Spaulding, Barbara Goodmon — a community leader and activist on the human services board — and Fred Barber, a high-ranking executive with Capitol Broadcasting, started having lunches with corporate leaders. Jim Goodmon, Barbara Goodmon's husband and the head of the broadcasting company, offered to hire an interim director.

"At that time, people wanted to arrest homeless people; they'd become non-people in terms of what was available to help them," said Barbara Goodmon, who's vice president of The Healing Place board. "I was on the Salvation Army board for 22 years and I'd learned a lot about poverty and people with needs. There was a need here, and we saw something that worked. It

was kind of like a lightning bolt hitting at the right time in the right place with the right people."

Parnell, who was Wake Med's substance abuse specialist when he joined The Healing Place, says one of the big differences in the program is time. Many other programs last 30 days or even fewer, and the success rate is 30 to 50 percent. Those men at The Healing Place who are moving through the various phases of recovery might take 8 months, 9 months or a year. As they move toward "silver chip" status, their accommodations on the campus become a little more private, their privileges expand. The campus itself carries the men through checking in to the detox center — many arrive drunk — all the way to that point where they have stayed sober and successfully completed the program.

This program works. The men I talked to were keeping the faith. They were upbeat, appreciative, humbled by their past failures but not wallowing in desperation. Hope is the difference.

Goodmon and the other key people in establishing The Healing Place next week will hold a press conference to boost a \$10 million fund-raising effort. Part of that money is to go toward establishing a Healing Place for women.

"There's nothing for women," Barbara Goodmon said. "They're living in crime; they're living in very serious situations. We know this works. And the women, many of them, have a motivation to get their children back, whereas many of the men feel they have no reason to live at all. But we need something for women."

They have hope this community will support the idea. And they ought to know — hope is the business The Healing Place is in.

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