

PROJECT ON ABUSE GROWING, COMMUNITY SURVEY TO HELP FORM PLANS

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- Author/Byline: DAN HUNTLEY, Staff Writer
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A dozen Gaston County organizations, ranging from the Gastonia City Recreation Department to the Cornerstone Christian Ministry, last year formed the Coalition On Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse.

The member organizations differed significantly in their purposes and methods, but agreed on one thing - they wanted to help rid the community of illicit drugs and the accompanying Pandora's box of misery.

Coalition members at a 2:15 p.m. press conference today will introduce their plans to combat the problem. Special guests at the event, to be held at the Schiele Museum of Natural History, include Dottie Martin, wife of N.C. Gov. Jim Martin, and Louise Broyhill, wife of U.S. Rep. Jim Broyhill, R-NC.

``We have a unique opportunity here in our county to bring together representatives of a number of organizations to help solve this problem that affects all of us in one way or the other,`` said Gaston County United Way planning director Max Erwin, whose agency is cosponsoring the project with the Look Up Gaston Foundation. ``I think one of the main benefits so far has been that we've had this many representatives together in one place to talk and share information.``

Erwin said the purpose of today's conference is to introduce a ``new community-based concept`` of dealing with the problem of chemical substance abuse in Gaston County.

``We (The United Way of Gaston County) became involved in the project simply because we are interested in community problem solving and we thought we could help serve as a facilitator in bringing these various organizations together to help solve this problem.``

Although some of the project's details haven't been ironed out, officials offered this thumbnail sketch:

+A 4 1/2-page questionnaire about alcohol and other drug abuse is being prepared by the coalition with the Look Up Gaston Community Forum. The questionnaires will be distributed by the forum to about 1700 county residents by early February. Results are expected to be tabulated by the middle of April.

+The coalition will establish a long-range strategy based on the survey's results. Member organizations then will implement programs to combat drug abuse.

The other coalition organizations are: Family Counseling Services, Gaston County Schools, Gaston County Police Department, Gaston Families in Action for Drug Free Youth, Gaston/Lincoln Area Mental Health Program, Alcohol & Drug Substance Abuse, Gastonia City Police, Gastonia City Recreation, **Gastonia Rotary Clubs/Adolescent Treatment Center Joint Committee**, Horizon Youth Services, Juvenile Court Counselor Services and Shepherd's Way.

``I don't have any hard data to confirm it, but based on conversations with some of our principals, I think there are less drugs on our campuses today than there were 12 months ago,`` said Terry Ratchford, chairman of the Gaston County Board of Education. Ratchford attributed the improved conditions to a stricter and more uniform drug enforcement policy implemented by the schools last year.

``This has been effective in removing some of the drugs from the campus,

but to really impact the problem, we are going to have to have the total commitment from many different organizations. And that is what I hope this program will be able to help bring about," he said.

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12 GASTON AGENCIES JOIN IN SUBSTANCE-ABUSE FIGHT

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- Author/Byline: TISH STOKER, Gastonia Bureau
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Twelve Gaston County public and private agencies formed a coalition and declared war on alcohol and drug abuse at a Wednesday ceremony at the Schiele Museum in Gastonia.

Their strategy will combine the efforts of schools, courts, law enforcement, public drug and alcohol prevention and treatment agencies and private groups in a master plan with no overlaps or gaps in services to combat substance-abuse problems.

So far the county has allotted \$16,000 this year toward the coalition's aims, and Gastonia's three Rotary Clubs have committed \$350,000 to find, start and open an adolescent drug treatment center.

"I'm very happy at the start of a systematic, community-based process for attacking the alcohol- and drug-abuse problem, and the Gastonia City Council endorses it as a potentially far-reaching coalition to attack drug problems," Gastonia Mayor Harry Connor said.

On hand to launch the plan, which begins later this month with a questionnaire seeking citizens' opinions, were N.C. Gov. Jim Martin, his wife, Dottie, who has long been active in statewide drug abuse programs, and Louise Broyhill, wife of U.S. Rep. Jim Broyhill, R-N.C.

The three were in Gastonia for communitywide festivities during "Broyhill Appreciation Day," which included a Chamber of Commerce luncheon at the Gaston Country Club, a conference with local textile officials about the recent presidential veto of the textile imports bill and a supper reception at Ashbrook High School.

"Who says you can't get high without using a chemical?" Dottie Martin asked, complimenting the spirit and commitment of about 75 drug treatment professionals and other citizens at the gathering. "One million N.C. families are affected by drug and alcohol abuse, lives are destroyed, crimes committed and productivity damaged."

Substance abuse costs North Carolinians an estimated \$1 billion annually, she said, and the combined efforts of law enforcement, educators and treatment are necessary.

Richard Bisanar, Gaston County United Way president, said that agency in the early 1980s noted that efforts to combat problems such as drug abuse had stalled because of a lack or overlap of services. Coalitions of existing services were recommended to make full use of shrinking funds.

The drug- and alcohol-abuse questionnaire will get citizens' ideas on which services - law enforcement, treatment, education or prevention - need changes, what those changes are and how all agencies can work together.

Once an outside data analyst compiles the results, they'll go to members of the coalition for action. On the coalition are Cornerstone Christian Ministry, Family Counseling Service of Gaston County, Gaston County Schools, Gaston County Police and Gaston Families in Action for Drug Free Youth.

Also, Gaston/Lincoln Area Mental Health Program, Gastonia Police, Gastonia City Recreation Department, Gastonia Rotary Clubs Adolescent Treatment Center Committee, Horizon Youth Services, Juvenile Court Counselor Services and Shepherd's Way.

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CONCERT SERIES TO DEBUT ON WDAV

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``Carolina Arts,`` a 13-week series of concerts recorded by WDAV (FM 89.9) during the 1984-85 season, debuts at 8 p.m. Thursday on the classical music station.

Pianist Nina Svetlanova, playing music of Beethoven, Chopin, Metner and Rachmaninov during a Queens College concert in February 1985, opens the series.

``Weekend Edition,`` a Saturday morning news magazine from National Public Radio, will bring news coverage and analysis with interviews and features to WFAE (FM 90.7), starting at 8 a.m. Saturday.

Scott Simon, former head of NPR's Chicago bureau, will host the weekly show and serve as chief correspondent.

Joining him will be veteran journalist Daniel Schorr, reporting on major news events and national affairs; ``CBS Morning News`` reporter Robert Krulwich, commenting on our lives and times; Los Angeles Herald-Examiner reporter Elvis Mitchell, reviewing movies and television and radio programs, and Philadelphia Daily News reporter John Schulian, covering sports. Ira Flatow will present science and health features.

WFAE's Walt Edwards will be local host, reporting N.C. news and weather and announcing events from WFAE's community calendar.

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The special ``Reports of Education Problems Today`` with Phyllis Schlafly will air at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Saturday on WAME (AM 1480).

Schlafly, president of a conservative movement called Eagle Forum, ``talks about the things she sees as problems in American education today,`` said WAME general manager John Hamilton.

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Economic and political observer Bob Snyder will guest on ``Let's Talk`` from 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday on WHVN (AM 1240).

Publisher of the nationally circulated ``Bob Snyder Newsletter,`` the radio and TV commentator will be interviewed via phone during the live show.

Listeners are invited to call 570-1240.

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An interview with violinist Shlomo Mintz will air at 8:30 a.m. and 12:30, and 5:30 p.m. today on WDAV (FM 89.9). Mintz will perform with The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra at 8:15 p.m. Saturday in Dana Auditorium at Queens College. +

A new public information program, ``Chemical Dependency: A Community Illness,`` begins Monday on WSGE (FM 92).

The show will air at 7:15 p.m. Mondays and repeat at 7:15 p.m. Fridays. Counselors from the Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center in Gastonia, a center soon to serve an area with a 60 to 70 mile radius, will serve as the show's moderator and panel members.

- Memo: Deborah Hales: Airwaves

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HELP WANTED AD LEADS TO SHEPHERD`S WAY

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- Author/Byline: CHIP WILSON, Staff Writer
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An advertisement in The Observer`s classifieds caught Tom Stoner`s eye and confirmed his own inklings about a career choice.

It was a Help Wanted entry for a director to lead Shepherd`s Way, a Gastonia-based ministry for teenagers and young adults struggling with drug and alcohol abuse. It was a position that would tap his faith, his academic background and his experience as project director for an Alaska agency dealing with alcohol and drug abuse.

``It jumped out at me,`` he said. ``This had been going through my mind for some time. Prior to my coming to the Carolinas I felt I was being called to this kind of ministry.``

Stoner, 40, got the job. On March 3, he took over the position being vacated by Frank Edwards, the ministry`s founder who resigned to become director of the Rotary Adolescent Drug Treatment Center.

Shepherd`s Way has 30 young people and families enrolled in its program of counseling and education. Many are referred to the nonprofit agency, which draws support for its \$55,000 annual budget from private donations and the United Way, through the courts, law enforcement agencies and churches.

Stoner, who is the organization`s only full-time employee, said he attempts to apply the standards of the Bible in his efforts to counsel those caught in the grip of alcohol or drug addiction. Sometimes the counselees include parents and other family members, who share in the damage inflicted by addiction, he said.

``We perceive that families are under assault,`` he said.

As a result of other problems that relate to drug and alcohol abuse, Stoner has plans to add more services to Shepherd`s Way. They include:

*Holding workshops for teachers using materials from a comprehensive health education program called ``Here`s Looking at You - 2,000.``

*Starting an outreach to ex-offenders being released from prison.

``I have been involved in CRT (community readiness training),`` he said.

``I want to develop working relationships with prisoners. We perceive that ex-offenders are going to have needs once they get out of prison because of their high vulnerability, particularly if they were drug abusers.``

*Forming an alliance with other agencies involved in outreach to street people. Stoner said he already has talked with members of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Gastonia, which has started working in that area.

*Beginning a study group to training men in time and money management.

``Most families are dealing with some kind of stress,`` he said. ``Some stress has to do with families and the management of time. A lot of kids would translate love in the form of time.``

*Starting a library of books and cassette tapes on problems relating to alcohol and drug abuse, as a resource to families and counselors.

Stoner is a graduate of Westminster College in Salt Lake City, where he majored in behavioral science. He also attended the University of Utah, where he studied computer science engineering.

He was the director of a statewide technical assistance project for the Alaska Native Commission on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, a state agency. That job kept him traveling throughout the state, sometimes under difficult conditions.

“I lived out of a backpack and the back seat of a Cessna 180,” he said. “Some nights I would sleep in a tent, with temperatures at 40 and 50 degrees below zero.”

Stoner stayed at the Alaska commission from October 1975 to October 1980, when he resigned to do private consulting work. He moved to North Carolina a year ago for family reasons, but didn’t get back into the field of substance abuse counseling.

“I did not come back to this field simply to further my career in the field of substance abuse counseling,” he said. “I was down here trying to work with a career in financial planning.” In the meantime, he was a salesman for Folger Buick in Charlotte.

“I came to regard this as a calling,” he added, referring to his decision to return to the field.

Stone said the plans are to increase Shepherd’s Way’s budget to \$65,000, with the requested United Way share rising to \$20,000. He praised the efforts of Gaston County residents who regularly give money to the program.

“It lends a lot of credibility to our work to find that there are so many people in Gastonia who support Shepherd’s Way,” he said.

The agency also has an advisory board made up of men and women of varied professions, he said. “We look upon them as a great source of wisdom. All of them are parents of adolescents. They have a very sincere commitment.”

Stoner still lives in Charlotte with his wife, Nancy, and their son and daughter, but he plans to move to Gaston County.

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CRACK MAKING APPEARANCE IN GASTON DRUG CULTURE

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- Author/Byline: JOHN YORK, Staff Writer
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Crack, the newest and perhaps the deadliest drug in terms of addiction, has come to Gaston County - but not in great quantities.

“It’s in Gaston County. There’s no doubt about it,” says Charles Odell, a primary counselor at the new Rotary Adolescent Treatment Center in Belmont.

Two of the seven young people being treated at the adolescent drug center are cocaine users and one of the two has tried crack, Odell says.

“Although crack is here, it is not as prevalent as people would probably imagine,” Odell says. “We’re hearing that in New York and California it’s on every street corner, and indeed it is. But we’re not seeing that here yet.

This part of the country is not riding the crest as far as new trends. Something on the national level will usually hit here about a year later.”

Odell’s speculation was verified by interviews last week with Gaston County police authorities. Some local narcotics officers haven’t encountered any yet. County police Sgt. Norman Price of the rural police narcotics squad says none has surfaced in any of the squad’s arrests.

“But I feel sure we will see it sooner or later,” Price says. “We have seen some of what they call rock, but it is not crack and it is not processed the same way.”

“We’ve got some information that there’s some in the city, but we haven’t seen any yet,” says Sgt. S.L. Lynch of the Gastonia Police Department’s vice squad. “I understand there have been some arrests in Charlotte, so it’s just a matter of time.”

Crack is made from cocaine. It is a combination of cocaine and common household ingredients including baking soda. It comes in the form of small crystals.

Cocaine, a powder, cannot be smoked because it melts under applied heat. But crack can be smoked, and that lures some new users into the mistaken belief that something that is smoked is not as addictive as something that is injected.

Some drug users try to avoid the stigma associated with using needles to inject drugs into the blood stream by smoking crack. “They reason that they smoke marijuana and it doesn’t do any great harm, so crack is probably the same,” Odell says.

They are very wrong, he says. “Cocaine is the most addictive drug known to man,” Odell says. “Crack is probably the most addictive way to use it.”

Meanwhile, cocaine use is “definitely” on the increase here, Odell says. “We’re seeing more and more cocaine being used in this part of the country,” he says.

The price of cocaine has begun to drop as the drug gluts the market. Even the youngest addicts can often afford a \$10 bag, he said. It used to be sold in ounce, half-ounce and quarter-ounce bags and “Eight Balls” - slang for an eighth of a gram.

“A dime bag (a \$10 bag) makes it more affordable to young people,” he said.

Odell rates cocaine first in national popularity among drug users, marijuana second and crack third.

Odell says most of the adolescents he sees have probably ``experienced`` cocaine and ``a lot`` are involved in full-blown addiction. ``I would think the average crack user here is between 18 and 30 and most are relatively secure so far as finances are concerned,`` Odell says. ``Most users here are basically middle class. Most kids don`t have that much money and they`d just as soon buy a little marijuana or some alcohol.``

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