



# THE PRODIGAL SUN

The Newsletter of Prodigals Community

Spring 2008

## Prodigals to Welcome Back Jeff Coppage as Executive Director/Pastor



We are excited to report that the Board of Directors recently announced that Jeff Coppage has agreed to return to Prodigals Community and serve as the community's Executive Director and Pastor.

Jeff's long history of involvement in Prodigals Community's recovery

ministries dates back to its beginnings as a project of the Forsyth Prison Chaplaincy Board. Jeff was one of the founding members of Prodigals Community in 1986. In 1992, when Prodigals Community became an official nonprofit corporation, Jeff agreed to serve as its Executive Director. Through his leadership Prodigals Community developed our current New Salem program that provides hope and opportunities to those most in need.

The vision of a structured program for chronic substance abusers that Jeff helped form is still the foundation for Prodigals Community's recovery ministry today. Throughout the years, Jeff has been an invaluable resource to the community and has knowledge and experience in many different roles: as Pastor / Director, Board Chair, volunteer, Monday Night worship speaker, and more. Jeff has a special ability to share the unconditional love of Christ with others, and he knows well the practices and challenges of living within Christian community. His heart for sharing God's love to those most in need makes him an excellent choice to lead Prodigals Community forward. He brings an intimate knowledge of Prodigals' history

and mission, a strong commitment and dedication to its recovery ministry, and valuable experience with the program and its philosophy.

*"What a blessing of Grace it is to return to Prodigals Community as Executive Director/Pastor. Prodigals is part of my extended family and in recent years I've missed the daily contact that I will enjoy again. I have incredible respect for the men and women in early recovery who are living out such courageous commitment to mutual support and accountability in the context of Christian community. The alumni, staff, board and volunteers have built a network of relationships that is at once life-giving, inspirational, and challenging.*

*I have much to learn and re-learn. However, I am confident that the most important lessons - those of faith, hope, and love - are God-given. Thus, they are right in our midst if I have the eyes to see them. I look forward to discovering anew the wonderful gifts bestowed within such a courageous group of people!"*

## LEARNING ABOUT THE NATURE OF ADDICTION

*Seeing drastic changes in a loved one's behavior due to substance abuse can be scary and confusing. However, knowing the science of addiction can help us understand what happens to our loved ones, giving us helpful ideas about the best way to treat this disease.*

*Eric Lange, Prodigals Intern*

People begin to take drugs for a variety of reasons. Some people try to feel better by using drugs to ease stress or anxiety. Some believe that drugs will increase energy and the ability to perform certain tasks better. Others simply try them out of curiosity or for the pleasurable feelings drugs provide. There are also predetermined risk factors that make certain people more likely to become drug users. Family history, genetics, and drug abuse among friends or family all affect whether a person might or might not try drugs. Even the internal chemistry of the brain affects how vulnerable to addiction someone might be.

The brain uses a procedure called *conditioning* to reward and promote behavior necessary for survival. When a person does something that encour-

ages healthy living, the brain rewards that behavior by releasing chemicals that create feelings of pleasure. Even if we don't realize it, these chemicals teach us that our behavior was good and we repeat those actions. This process is essential for survival because it makes us want to do the things that keep us healthy.

Drugs, however, alter brain chemistry and throw this conditioning system out of balance. They alter the brain's flow of dopamine, a chemical that creates strong feelings of pleasure. Drugs can increase the level of dopamine 2 to 10 times higher than normal levels, causing the person to feel an intense and unnatural high. The brain's method of reinforcing healthy behaviors is co-opted, and these intense feelings of pleasure begin to encourage and reward using drugs.

Over time the brain shields itself from the higher levels of dopamine by developing a tolerance to the chemical. When dopamine is less effective, it becomes difficult to enjoy normal, everyday behaviors. Actions like eating or

sleeping are no longer pleasurable and a person may constantly feel flat, lifeless or depressed. To feel normal again, the user must take even more drugs, which creates a cycle of drug abuse that often leads to addiction.

This pattern can be broken, but it can be a long and difficult process. For many people, the desire to obtain and use drugs can replace the joys and desires of regular life. It becomes an overwhelming obsession that replaces concern for work, family and friends with thoughts of only that next high. Since addiction has damaged each of these important relationships, treating addiction must address all of the aspects of life that have been damaged through drug abuse.

Addiction is a chronic disease that shares many similarities with diabetes, hypertension and asthma. People with these

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## A Place of Miracles

Neil Maxey,  
Interim Executive Director

“Two years...  
thirteen years...  
nine years...  
sixteen years...”

As several alumni of Prodigals Community shared their “clean” time at a Monday night worship service led by our Alumni group back in January, I couldn’t help but be reminded that Prodigals Community has truly been a place of miracles. And the good news is... **the miracles continue!**

Despite the uncertainty of the past year, the important work of Prodigals Community continued as we served 71 men and women in our

New Salem Program in 2007. Thanks to the overwhelming generosity of folks such as you, Prodigals Community began 2008 on a firmer financial footing. Both individual and church giving exceeded our expectations for last year and we were able to receive the full \$25,000 matching funds grant from the Winston-Salem Foundation! Through Prodigals Property Services, our job-training businesses, our residents contributed 42% of the program costs in 2007. Our committed staff has gone the extra mile to keep the program running despite staff vacancies and illnesses. Our board and volunteers continue to diligently work with a sense of enthusiasm and optimism for the future of Prodigals Community. Due to the stability of our current situation, our board was able to look for an Executive Director. The return of Jeff Coppage as Executive

Director/Pastor is further evidence of the grace of God.

In the book *Community and Growth*, Jean Vanier says, “Times of trial will only unite a community if there is a strong enough trust in it to assume them.” **On behalf of Prodigals Community, I would like to thank each of you, whether a donor, volunteer, church partner, alumnus, staff member, or resident, for this remarkable show of unity and trust in the mission of Prodigals Community.** This sense of solidarity with the work of Prodigals has encouraged and strengthened us and is in itself a miracle. God is good!

## Staff News

### Celebrating Valerie von Isenburg’s 10 Years of Service

Throughout the years of Prodigals Community’s service to those struggling with addiction, one of the community’s greatest strengths has been the consistent leadership of our staff. Since our community reaches out to residents who move in, graduate and leave the program, Prodigals staff has been instrumental in creating a nurturing and welcoming environment for those in recovery. We are thankful for the many staff members who have served for many years and the unique ways they have equipped and encouraged the members of Prodigals Community. Specifically, we commemorate and celebrate **Valerie von Isenburg’s** commitment to Prodigals while serving as Church and Community Relations Director for over ten years. Valerie retired from Prodigals Community in December.



After joining Prodigals in 1997, Valerie worked hard to create and develop relationships between Prodigals Community and area churches, individuals and foundations. She helped guide Prodigals through program expansions, financial difficulties and lasting growth. She directed volunteer activities, scheduled church events, and strengthened ties with our Church Partners. She also served as an Interim Co-Director at two different times, providing New Salem experienced and knowledgeable leadership through periods of transition. We celebrate and commend her willingness to perform the duties necessary to keep Prodigals going, happily assuming new responsibilities for the benefit of the community.

Without her consistent service, Prodigals would not be as dynamic, healthy, and successful as it is today. We wish her the best of luck on her recent retirement from this work and that she enjoys whatever God has in store for her next!

### Other Staff News

After seven years of service and dedication to New Salem, **Deborah Martin** stepped down as Program Assistant in November. The community welcomed **Chuck Malone**, a program graduate and former staff member, as the new Program Assistant. **Claudia Shivers** has joined the Prodigals’ staff as our bookkeeper. We also welcome past graduate and staff member **Jeff Watkins** back and are grateful for his contribution to the community as Janitorial Crew Chief. Wake Forest student intern **Eric Lange** has also been helpful as a Intern/Volunteer and as Church Relations Assistant since August. Eric will graduate May 18 with a BA in Religion and Spanish. Eric’s many skills and helpful spirit have added much to the community. Congratulations Eric!

*Prodigals Community is seeking applications for a new position, the **Associate Director for Administration**. Anyone with strong supervisory, administrative, and/or financial experience is encouraged to apply. Visit [www.prodigals.org](http://www.prodigals.org) or call us at 785-0770 for more information.*

## Volunteer Spotlight

■ This past July **Calvary Baptist** worked hard to improve our campus during their annual **Love Winston-Salem** program. For an entire week Prodigals was blessed to have several groups working throughout our property. They painted, built picnic tables, and planned a special worship service to celebrate our partnership. We are looking forward to having them join us again this July!



■ We are also grateful to the youth from **First Christian Church**, and their leader, Tripp Fuller, for holding a dinner and lock-in with the youth from **St. Timothy's Episcopal Church**, **Piney Grove Baptist Church**, and **Highland Presbyterian Church**, with receipts going to Prodigals Community. Two of our residents shared their stories with the group and taught them important lessons about the nature of addiction.

■ Thanks to the contributions of several choirs, Prodigals Music Fest '07 was a major success! **The New Philadelphia Moravian Brass Band**, **the Salem-towne Singers**, **Diana Tuffin**, and the **Agape Faith Church Choir** joined our **Prodigals Gospel Choir** for an evening of wonderful music. We were able to raise \$1,000 to help cover our residents' medical expenses.



*Prodigals Music Fest 2007*

■ **Home Moravian Church's** annual Pancake Breakfast was a major success! Our residents were grateful for the opportunity to attend the breakfast and enjoy some wonderful pancakes. Through their generous support and efforts, Home Church was able to raise nearly \$1,400 for Prodigals Community!

■ Prodigals volunteer and board member **Donese Stultz** was recently recognized as the *Wachovia Piedmont Triad Volunteer of the Year!* This award celebrates Donese's contribution to many different organizations in our community for many years. She has served Prodigals Community as a church liaison, Church Relations Committee Chair, education tutor, office/PPS assistant, Monday Night church host and more! Wachovia is donating \$1500 to Prodigals Community in her honor. She does all this with a positive attitude, enthusiasm and grace. Congratulations, Donese!



### Be an angel!

Can you help with the following needed items?

- Used cars for graduates and for car sales
- Used pick-up truck for PPS
- Unbreakable drinking glasses/cups
- Window unit air conditioner (8000+ BTU)
- Set of chairs for dining hall
- Shampoo and conditioner for Caucasians and African-Americans
- Toiletries - body lotion, bar soap, baby oil, toothpaste



Donese Stultz  
*Wachovia Piedmont Triad  
Volunteer of the Year*

### *Prodigals Community Board of Directors*

William Steele, Jr., *Chair*  
Betsy Brown, *Vice Chair*  
Jennifer Hill, *Treasurer*  
Shirley Abdullah  
Rev. Dr. Jonathan Freeman  
James Gore  
The Hon. Denise Hartsfield  
Donald Hayes  
Patti Hoffman  
Rev. Henry J. Keating  
Katharine Martin  
Judy Owen  
Harriet Rhodes  
Donese Stultz  
Leigh Thompson

### LEARNING ABOUT ADDICTION

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disorders must constantly monitor their behavior to prevent a relapse into ill health. Like a diabetic who must always be careful about what he/she eats, an addicted person is never fully "cured." He/she is constantly undergoing treatment and is always "in recovery." Relapse is common in all of these disorders. It is important to remember that an addicted person's relapse does not simply mean that treatment has failed; it instead shows that the *methods* of treatment must be adjusted to better suit an individual's particular needs.

Prodigals Community provides a unique opportunity for those who have tried to stay clean through other methods but have not been successful. New Salem is more than a simple treatment center. Addiction goes beyond adjusting brain chemistry; it affects the basic behaviors and actions of everyday life. In many ways, someone

in recovery must learn to live again, creating a new outlook on life and the possibilities life holds. Our approach attempts to change the attitudes and behaviors that make an addicted person likely to continue using drugs by teaching life skills and habits to help a person handle those circumstances that previously would have led him/her to using drugs. It involves teaching people to avoid those places, people, and behaviors that make relapse more likely, coping with stress in constructive ways, and developing a healthy self-image that equips a person with the necessary tools of recovery.

## ALUMNI/AE NEWS

On January 28, the **Prodigals Community Alumni Association** made a special presentation during our Monday Night worship service. The alumni told the story of an addicted person finding help and beginning the path to recovery through Prodigals Community. Their performance showed the hurt and loneliness of a user on the streets and the process of self-discovery and love found in the New Salem program. They sang several songs and, at the end, each alumnus explained how he/she has been able to stay clean thanks to the lessons learned at Prodigals. To all alumni, thank you for sharing your encouraging and hopeful stories with us and the residents!

The Alumni held a **Plate Sale** to raise funds for the Alumni Association on Saturday, April 19th. Prodigals Alumni spent the day working the grills and fryers near the East Winston Shopping Center on Martin Luther King Drive. They served hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken, and fish and raised

funds to support the Alumni Association and its mission of helping and supporting New Salem graduates with their transition into society.

In other Alumni news, **Donald B.** celebrated 3 years clean in February, and also recently renewed his wedding vows with his wife. **John S.** celebrated 12 years of sobriety in March, and **Chuck M.** recently celebrated 18 months clean. **Latasha** and **Kenneth** recently had a baby girl. Congratulations! **Donald M.** is recovering from hip surgery, and **Dennis W.** celebrates having a new job.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Monday, May 26th**

- Memorial Day  
No Worship Service

**July 14-18th**

- Love Winston Salem Work  
Projects with Calvary Baptist  
Church

### Join the Prodigals E-Mail List!



We would like to keep you more informed about everything going on at Prodigals Community, so we are creating an email newsletter! We will send out monthly updates about:

- Special Events
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Community News and Updates
- Addictions and Recovery Info

Send an email to [newsletter@prodigals.org](mailto:newsletter@prodigals.org) with 'Subscribe' in the Subject line to sign up!

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PRODIGALS COMMUNITY

