



Steve Townsend mentors Jayden

Mentoring children of prisoners

By Justin Lana

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recently awarded Chatham County Together! one of 80 new awards; a three-year grant to continue CCT!'s already successful mentoring programs. The Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) grant, as the name suggests, will focus on youth in Chatham County, ages 4-17, who currently have a parent or parental figure incarcerated in a state or federal institution. Over the next three years, CCT! seeks to match 175 youth with a caring, adult mentor.

Although there are no statistics on the exact number of children living in Chatham County with a parent in prison, according to State and Federal statistics, 106 Federal and 147 State inmates list Chatham County as their home residence. CCT! Executive Director Kim Caraganis, believes the new grant will greatly benefit the communities in Chatham County and reach youth with a unique set of needs.

"Between 2003 and 2009 we had a similar grant and we served 75 children of prisoners, so we know there is a need and this allows us to focus on those young people," she said.

Just how young are these children? According to The Sentencing Project, a national research and prisoner advocacy organization, of the 1.7 million children of prisoners currently in the United States, over half are under 10 years old. Studies show these youth, despite their young age, have a 70 percent greater chance of going to prison later in their life if no positive intervention takes place.

Due to a recent partnership with Prison Fellowship/Angel Tree®, a national faith based organization, CCT! has recently acquired the names of 58 youth currently living in Chatham County who are seeking a mentor. Combined with referrals from school counselors, family members of prisoners, the Department of Social Services, etc., CCT! has nearly 75 youth throughout Chatham County waiting to be matched with a supportive adult.

In order to recruit youth and mentors and to track the new matches, CCT! has added two new staff members: myself, Justin Lana, MCP Volunteer Coordinator and Travis Patterson, MCP Program Assistant. I have three years of experience with mentoring programs in Nebraska and Colorado. Patterson, was raised in Chatham County and has worked with youth and families in a variety of settings.

We know that our biggest challenge in recruiting volunteers will be

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dispelling the myths that people have about being a mentor.

Mentors do not need to have some fancy job title, counseling experience, or tons of free time. Studies show that a caring, supporting adult with a consistent presence in the life of a child greatly enhances the child's ability to be successful. We are asking volunteers for an average of one hour a week for twelve months. Giving a child fifty-two hours of your time throughout the year will make a huge difference.

MCP Program Director, Shirille Lee has confidence about reaching the program's goals. "We have set the bar high by accepting the new grant. But with the new staff and an already supportive community, we're confident CCT! will succeed once again."

If interested in mentoring or finding a mentor for a child in your life, contact Justin Lana at justin@chathamcountytogether.org or 919.663.0116. Or, visit the CCT! website at www.chatham-countytogether.org.

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Diversifying to survive the recession

By Judy Harrelson

My husband, Mike, and I own the Glass & Window Warehouse in Siler City. We began the business to expand our existing construction company and it seemed like a nice fit. However, we chose to open a new business at the very beginning of the downturn in the economy.

By November 2007, things still seemed pretty good and, indeed, adding the ability to do storefronts to our commercial construction business, and windows and showers to our residential construction, worked well. As ENERGY STAR® partners, we could help business and residential customers build more energy-efficient and green buildings, thus saving money on their future energy costs. Something we are very passionate about.

Then came 2008 and people began to postpone building their new homes. The trend continued in 2009, so we shifted gears and focused more seriously on home renovations. Thankfully, this coincided nicely with the federal stimulus tax credits for energy-efficient construction, particularly replacement windows. We held on as the economy started down its slippery slope, and we were grateful to even be able to hire additional help for these projects.

We analyzed our expenses and cut back where we could, and renegotiated pricing with our vendors so we could continue to offer low prices to our customers, many of whom were facing hard times with job cut-backs and dwindling savings accounts.

We added two more retail lines to our existing business model. The first is UPS. Thanks to everyone for a very successful community campaign, we secured the Authorized Shipping Outlet (ASO) for Chatham County. The second retail line is prebuilt storage buildings. They are made locally, so that keeps our citizens employed! They are well built and pre-painted and can be customized for specific needs. Plus, they are less expensive than the big box stores and keep Chatham County working.

The fifth and final business we have is in the eco-friendly market. We are passionate about going green for our health and the environment, and we now host Going Green Workshops to educate people on the effects of toxic chemicals in our homes that cause so many of our health issues, from asthma to cancer. People are now getting healthier, feeling better and enjoying life more. We had a great year in 2010.

We are passionate about our work; we love what we do; and we enjoy helping others in our community improve their lives too.

So in a downturn economy, we chose diversification, and are very grateful for the results.

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