

Recovery becomes art form

Ten graduates of a new Water Street Rescue Mission program describe what inspired them in works now on display at downtown cafe.

Lancaster New Era

Published: Dec 23, 2008

10:17 EST

Lancaster

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Artist George Reidel joins Water Street Rescue Mission's Carrie Keagy in front of Reidel's artwork at the Prince Street Cafe. Richard Hertzler / New Era

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George Riedel says "you can try to 'change' all you want — but if you don't change from the inside, it's not going to happen.

"You have to be at peace," he adds, "and I feel like I am right now."

He looks toward one of the walls inside downtown Lancaster's stylish Prince Street Cafe, where that peace of his is on display in a newly-created painting.

Riedel is one of 10 men, new graduates of Water Street Rescue Mission's long-term recovery program, whose artwork is expressing a new beginning in life.

The 58-year-old Lancaster native, who has tried to find peace in alcohol and other means, says he's found it in accepting Christ into his heart.

And, through a new acrylic painting and also a written piece, Riedel has expressed how "I have hope," as he says with a big smile.

"I've had money, but that wasn't the answer. I've had decent employment, but that wasn't the answer, either ..."

It wasn't until he took a leap of faith that he found that answer, he says.

Riedel and the others are featured in the "Voices from Water Street Rescue Mission" exhibit, which began early this month and runs through Jan. 1.

The cafe is across Prince Street from the Fulton Opera House.

All 10 men participated in the first-time art project to create one written piece and one visual piece.

Water Street officials asked the men to describe something that's been inspiring to them during their time at the mission ... a quote or a Bible verse, for example.

Then, they got together to paint in an upstairs storage area at the mission, 210 S. Prince St., followed by a time of sharing their emotions and what had brought them to that point in their lives.

"I got teary-eyed ... what these guys were saying was so powerful and so inspiring," says Water Street design specialist Carrie Keagy.

Water Street spokeswoman Maria Schaszberger adds that "after more than 12 months of intensive classes and counseling, the men are full of deep thoughts about life, their purpose and how they can impact the world.

"Translating these reflections into art was a natural step in their healing process."

Riedel says that, unlike before he made his commitment of faith, he now likes "to help people in little ways. People come up to me and say, 'You're always smiling,' and I go, 'That's a good thing.'"

He would have graduated from McCaskey High School in 1968, but was asked to leave in 11th grade, he says, but subsequently earned his diploma in night school.

He has worked several jobs over the years, but entered the mission in 2007 after "the last few years were terrible," due to drinking and other struggles, he says.

But now he is "a new creation," Riedel says, quoting the Bible.

In his written piece, which he titled "To be Made New," Riedel wrote, "I don't know how and I don't ask, but my entire outlook on everything has changed dramatically.

"I no longer expect all doom and gloom. I now look forward to my tomorrows with the hope and the confidence that The Lord has instilled within me."

More than 20 men and women graduated in 2008 from Water Street's long-term recovery program, and nearly 100 clients are now enrolled, spokeswoman Schaszberger says.

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