

STRAIGHT, Inc. Coming To Cobb To Help Free Teens From Drugs

By DONNA ESPY
Staff Writer

STRAIGHT Inc., a privately funded, non-profit drug rehabilitation program for adolescents, will open its first Georgia center Aug. 15 in Cobb County, and center officials say they hope the center will help ease the growing drug problem in Cobb and the metro area.

A vacant building formerly housing an A&P supermarket in the 2200 block of Austell Road in Marietta is being renovated for the center. Eventually it will house some 350 young people seeking freedom from drug dependency.

Improvements to be made on the 18,000-square-foot building include the addition of kitchen facilities, a dining area and office space, according to Jerry Rushing, a Cobb resident who is associate director of the new Atlanta area STRAIGHT program.

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work on finding a site for the program," Rushing said. "We are a very parent-oriented program — a lot of responsibility rests on the parents." Some \$150,000 in local contributions was raised to finance the new center.

STRAIGHT is a family-oriented drug rehabilitation program which currently has centers in St. Petersburg and Sarasota, Fla. Some 100 metro Atlanta young people will be transferred from St. Petersburg to the new facility in Cobb, and Rushing said

more than 50 percent of them, ranging in age from 13 to 21, are Cobb County residents.

"That's not because Cobb has a worse problem than the rest of metro Atlanta," Rushing said, "but parents here tend to see their kids change in the program and they tell their friends about it."

Rushing did acknowledge, however, that STRAIGHT officials are aware of the growing drug problem on Cobb school campuses.

"The parents are anxious to get (the program) here because they are required to go to meetings at least once a month, and that's quite a trip from Cobb to St. Petersburg," Rushing said, adding it will probably be at least a year before the center reaches a maximum of 350 participants because of the need for a solid

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foundation in development and staff training.

STRAIGHT uses the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous in the sense that drug users interact with staff members who have been through the program themselves and have experienced much of the same feelings and physical trauma, Rushing said.

The facility in Cobb will be used mostly as a place where clients and STRAIGHT staffers can gather and talk over lunch and dinner. Participants in the program are placed in the homes of parents of advance STRAIGHT clients overnight as part of a five-phase program which is the essence of STRAIGHT.

The first phase begins, Rushing said, with the client being taken away

from home for a "cooling off" period during which he works on himself and his feelings and parents attend several meetings on the problem at home.

In the first phase, a client is sent home with an advanced STRAIGHT participant to stay overnight and be in constant touch with someone.

The daily treatment at the center for phase one participants lasts 12 hours, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

In second phase of the program, clients are allowed to go home and try to "make amends" to family members, rebuild relationships and solve problems within the cluster, Rushing said.

Clients can start back to school or work during phase three of the program and can begin setting priorities for their life after becoming drug free.

In phase four, Rushing said, the client begins to get more leisure time and is away from the program up to three days a week, Rushing said at this stage the client is finally integrating his "STRAIGHT identity" with the world and developing new friendships.

Phase five is an important part of the total development program, Rushing said, because that is when a participant can begin to give back what he or she has learned and can aid newcomers to the program by sharing experiences and feelings through counseling sessions.

Rushing said clients from all over the Southeast will be welcome at the new STRAIGHT facility in Cobb, which deals with alcohol as well as drugs because "any mood altering chemical is a drug, and alcohol alters moods."

The drug most used by teenagers currently, he said, is marijuana, but a good amount of alcohol is usually mixed with it throughout the stages of drug dependency.

Officials have seen an increase in the use of LSD and heroin nationwide, and the average age of young people beginning drug use is 12.

STRAIGHT will soon be opening centers in Cincinnati, Orlando and Washington D.C. to continue to help in the rehabilitation of drug users.

"There has already been a lot of response in Atlanta to the opening of a center here," Rushing said. "Atlanta has a tremendous drug problem, whether or not people admit it."

Eastham

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tration a five-mill decrease in city taxes. He said the total of 26.25 mills paid in city and county property taxes by Marietta residents last year was the lowest tax rate in metropolitan Atlanta.

The mayor also cited his role in the beginning of revitalization of downtown Marietta, the completion of Marietta's new City Hall on Lawrence Street, improvements to the city park system and the development of Wildwood and Laurel parks, and the transformation of the former site of the Marietta Place housing project at Clay and Fairground streets into an industrial complex.

"We are looking ahead at a growing municipality," Eastham said in announcing his candidacy. "I want to continue to provide leadership, to continue to work hard and with integrity to make Marietta the best city it can possibly become."

Marietta attorney Robert Flournoy and Councilman Harold Brannen, vice president of Apex Supply Co., a Marietta heating and air conditioning sales firm, already have announced they will oppose Eastham in the mayoral race. Qualifying for city elections is scheduled to open Aug. 24 and close Aug. 26.